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The Role of Fit in the Decision Making Process for Head Principal Recruitment, Hiring, and Placement

Keith William Cottrell

University of Tennessee, Knoxville, kcottre1@vols.utk.edu

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Keith William Cottrell entitled "The Role of Fit in the Decision Making Process for Head Principal Recruitment, Hiring, and Placement." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Educational Administration.

Pamela S. Angelle, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Mary Lynne Derrington, J. Patrick Biddix, Michael Lane Morris

Accepted for the Council:

Dixie L. Thompson

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

The Role of Fit in the Decision Making Process for Head Principal Recruitment, Hiring, and Placement

A Dissertation Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Keith William Cottrell
May 2017

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to everyone who has supported, loved, and encouraged me, not just during this process but all along my educational journey. First, to my beautiful husband Larry Poore, who has been there in every moment of doubt and triumph during this process, always ready with a steady hand of encouragement. Nothing of this magnitude is accomplished without someone who believes in you when you don't believe in yourself. I try every day to be the person he lovingly sees, and this dissertation journey has been part of that. Beloved, all of me loves all of you. I also dedicate this to my parents, Keith and Marilyn Cottrell. It is because of them that I have been loved since the day I was born, growing up to believe that the only limits I have are the ones I place on myself. As an adult, I still look to them for guidance, love, and approval, and they have never faltered once. Whatever I become in life will be because of, and in honor of, them. Finally, I dedicate this to some of the exemplary school administrators I've had the great pleasure of working for and with since becoming an educator in 1997 – Bunny Creasman, Fred Nidiffer, Cindy Bosse, Susan Davis, Gina Byrd, Christy Dowell, and Jim McIntyre. Each of these colleagues and friends has taught me and shaped me, inspired me and supported me, and I'm eternally grateful for their example.

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the role that fit may play in recruiting, hiring, and placing head principals, both from the perspective of the principals and from the perspective of the hiring bodies. District personnel, particularly superintendents and human resource directors, have been surveyed in previous research to ascertain general traits they look for in a head principal candidate (Kwan, 2012; Kwan & Walker, 2009; Pijanowski, Hewitt, & Brady, 2009). Little research exists, however, gathering in-depth qualitative data on the role of fit in the principal placement process.

Data were collected from ten principals in the first 3 years of their current placement as head principal and 6 district personnel (superintendents and human resource directors) responsible for hiring and placing head principals. The data were analyzed, and three themes emerged: the applicant, the school, and the relationships. Data indicated that both principals and those responsible for hiring and placing them gave significant consideration to the fit, or match, between a candidate for a head principal position and the school environment itself. While these considerations affected the final decisions regarding principal placement for district personnel, principals indicated a trust in and support for decisions about placement made by district personnel, even when they did not perceive a positive fit.

The findings from this study will likely benefit candidates for head principal positions and district personnel who recruit, hire, and place them. The findings also add to the body of knowledge on fit and support the theoretical frame used to examine the data.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY	1
Statement of the Problem	5
Purpose of the Study	7
Research Questions	8
Significance of the Study	8
Definition of Terms	10
Delimitations	10
Limitations	11
Organization of the Study	11
CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE	13
The Search Process	14
The Principalship	15
The Role of the Principal in the School	15
Principal Candidates	17
Candidate Shortage	20
Principal Movement and Turnover	23
Fit	27
Definitions and Operationalizations	28
Effects of Positive and Negative Fit	30
The Hiring Process	34
Job Applicants and Fit in the Hiring Process	35
Hiring Bodies and Fit in the Hiring Process	39
Mechanisms for Assessing Fit	40
Hiring Process for Principals	43
Theoretical Framework	48
Studies Using Person-Environment Fit Theory	50
Conclusion	52
CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY	54
Research Design	55
Role of the Researcher	56
Positionality Statement	60
Sites and Participants	60
Data Collection	63
Data Analysis	65
Ethical Safeguards	68
Methods of Verification	70
Conclusion	73
CHAPTER 4 ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS	74
The Applicant	75
Principal Candidates' Experience	75
Traits and Leadership Style	79
Identifying Traits and Leadership Style	80

Succession.....	86
Transferability and Movement.....	89
The School.....	95
Familiarity with School.....	95
School Needs and Demands.....	99
School Size.....	101
The Relationships.....	104
Building Relationships.....	104
Community Experience	109
Community Input.....	112
Summary of Findings	113
Findings on Research Question 1	114
Findings on Research Question 2	116
Summary.....	118
CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS..	119
Discussion.....	119
Candidate traits and school environment.....	119
School type and school needs	123
Preparation programs	124
Succession.....	126
Person-Environment Fit Theory	127
Implications	129
Recommendations for Future Study	132
Concluding Thoughts.....	134
REFERENCES.....	135
APPENDICES	150
Appendix A.....	151
Appendix B	153
VITA.....	155

List of Tables

Table 1: Study Participants	64
Table 2: Interview Questions Type Analysis.....	66
Table 3: Research Questions Related to Interview Questions	67

List of Figures

Figure 1: Research Design	57
Figure 2: Final Iteration: Themes	69

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Every organization of significance, from schools to churches to businesses, both profit and non-profit, has a leader. A leader can influence many aspects of the organization, including its climate and culture (Kroth, Boverie, & Zondlo, 2007). An organization's leader can also have an impact, albeit indirect, on the output of the organization as a whole. As output pertains to schools, in particular, the head principal can have an indirect impact on student achievement, a measure of school output (Kythreotis, Pashiardis, & Kyriakides, 2010; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008). While the areas a head principal may affect are relatively consistent from one school to another, the unique characteristics that come together to make up a school, from the teachers and staff to the community the school serves, may vary significantly within a single school district. Every school has its own distinct culture, characteristics, needs, and demands (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Principals themselves can also vary in strengths, experiences, and leadership style. School leaders must understand their own strengths and characteristics as well as the unique needs associated with the school they intend to lead.

Because the school leader is ultimately responsible for the success of the school and student achievement, matching the right leader with the right school is imperative. Yet superintendents and other hiring bodies are challenged to find effective, viable candidates for open head principal positions (Whitaker, 2001). A head principal's role is multi-faceted, and the demands of the position can be disparate and challenging. The role is also ever changing, and the expectations for principals can look quite different than they did a generation ago. Historically, the head principal of a school was focused

mainly on the management of the building and its resources. Today, principals are expected to manage those areas while also focusing the energy of the staff and stakeholders on a vision, goals, and objectives for improvement and student success. In this way, school leaders are becoming more like leaders of businesses. Principals must be savvy to school data and be able to build a sense of urgency and emphasis on specific goals that will increase output. For a school, output includes a higher level of student achievement.

Because the role of principal is influential to a school's success, understanding the factors that motivate an individual to seek the role or not is relevant. While there are many reasons why qualified personnel do not seek the role of principal, one consistent reason relates to compensation. Principal salaries can make finding qualified candidates difficult. Most principals state that the compensation they receive is not commensurate with the increased responsibilities associated with their job (Whitaker, 2001).

Finding qualified leaders for schools with the highest academic and social needs can be specifically challenging for district leaders. In general, schools with the highest percentage of students from low socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to be led by new, relatively inexperienced principals (Loeb, Kalogrides, & Horng, 2010). While finding qualified candidates for the role of head principal can be challenging, retaining principals, especially in schools that serve large at-risk student populations, can be especially difficult. Principal turnover for these schools is significant (Baker, Punswick, & Belt, 2010; Gates, Ringel, Santibanez, Guarino, Ghosh-Dastidar, & Brown, 2006). Principal movement and turnover can have a negative impact on the culture and achievement of a school (Berrong, 2012; Beteille, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2012; Mascal &

Leithwood, 2010). Those responsible for recruiting, hiring, and placing head principals must make every effort to minimize the likelihood of principal turnover when possible. One way to minimize principal turnover is to consider the role of fit when placing a head principal.

Obtaining a good fit between leaders and the organization they lead can be essential for ensuring that the leader has a sustained impact on the success of the organization (Kristof, 1996). Hoffman and Woehr (2005) found that the fit between an organization's leader and the organization they lead can affect job performance, organizational citizenship behavior, and turnover. Person-organization fit may also affect job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). When job satisfaction increases, the likelihood that an individual will leave a school decreases (Tekleselassie & Villareal, 2011). The role fit plays in the recruitment and hiring process has been examined extensively from the point of view of potential job candidates, but this research has been conducted almost exclusively in a business context. Understanding what role fit plays in the hiring and placing of head principals from the point of view of the candidates themselves may also prove pertinent and useful.

The process for recruiting, hiring, and placing any organization's leader can be a complex one. The hiring process for head principals can be particularly elusive (Walker & Kwan, 2012). Superintendents and hiring bodies look for principal candidates who are strong managers and savvy communicators with extensive experience and many connections to outside organizations (Kwan, 2012). Individual preferences appear to play a part in placement as well. Candidates for head principal positions may exhibit

preferences for placement, but these preferences often do not influence where and when a candidate is placed (Loeb et al., 2010). This often leads to extensive movement after the initial placement. Candidates who are able usually move from schools with high needs to schools with fewer needs (Loeb et al., 2010). Those responsible for placing head principals must understand all factors that may influence a principal's desire to stay in a school or to move.

One factor that can influence whether a person leaves an organization is the fit between themselves and the organization as a whole (Carless, 2005; Hoffman & Woehr, 2005; Liu, Lin, & Hu, 2010). Extensive research has been conducted examining the role fit plays in the hiring process in the business world. Fit is regularly assessed in the recruitment and interview process, both by applicants (Cable & Judge, 1996; Carless, 2005; Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin, & Jones, 2005; Gardner, Reithel, Coglisier, Wolumbwa, & Foley, 2012; Gomes & Neves, 2011) and by hiring bodies (Bye, Horverak, Sandal, & Sam, 2014; Chen, Lee, & Yeh, 2008; Higgins & Judge, 2004). Business leaders are consistently focused on the output of the organization. Business researchers, therefore, are interested in examining phenomena that may affect the output of a business. Because fit can have a significant impact on employees' attitudes and behaviors, widespread research in the business world has been conducted.

Leadership from one discipline to another has commonalities. The role of a leader of a business or company has similarities to the role of a school leader (McCulloch & Turban, 2007). School leaders are increasingly expected to understand high volumes of complicated data and generate support for goals and objectives that increase student achievement. While much is known about the role of fit in hiring and placing business

personnel, little research has been done on the role fit may play in recruiting, hiring, and placing head principals.

Statement of the Problem

Schools have varying strengths and needs. A school that serves an urban population will be quite different from a school that serves a rural or suburban community. Schools can also vary by the grade levels the school serves yet, in some states such as Tennessee, school administrators receive the same leadership certification for schools that serve kindergarten through twelfth grade. This may be problematic because the responsibilities of a head principal of a suburban high school can be very different from the responsibilities of a head principal of an urban elementary school. Getting the right principal matched with the right school is important because the principal can affect many aspects of the school, from culture to student achievement (Kroth et al., 2007; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008). Matching a qualified candidate with the right school may also minimize the likelihood the principal will leave the school, which can have a negative impact on the school's culture and student achievement (Mascall & Leithwood, 2010). Understanding factors that influence principal retention is especially useful because finding qualified candidates for the job is challenging to district leaders. The increasing complexity of the job makes finding qualified candidates a challenge (Pounder & Crow, 2005). Hiring bodies struggle to find qualified candidates, particularly for high-needs schools (Whitaker, 2001). The fit between an individual and the organization they work for can affect the employee's attitudes and behaviors, including the likelihood they will remain with the organization (Hoffman & Woehr, 2005). Understanding what role fit plays in the recruitment and hiring process for schools, as

well as the role fit may play in candidates pursuing or accepting a head principal position, therefore, may be relevant and useful in retaining school leaders in a sparse market. The problem explored in this study is whether hiring bodies and principal candidates consider fit in the recruitment, hiring, and placement process for head principals. Understanding fit is relevant because fit can affect the effectiveness of the leader as well as potential turnover.

The role of person-organization fit has been studied as it pertains to business organizations (Arthur, Bell, Villado, & Doverspike, 2005; Kristof, 1996; Morley, 2007). While businesses and schools differ in many ways, the principal of a school and the CEO of a corporation may fill similar organizational needs (Carr, 2012). Ensuring a good fit between an organization's leader and the organization they lead can impact both the leader's attitudes and behaviors (Hoffman & Woehr, 2005; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Examining person-organization fit is increasingly being used when making placement decisions in business organizations (Abebe, Lindsey, Bonner, & Heck, 2010). School leaders are increasingly being called upon to act as CEOs, focusing their school resources on goals and strategies. If fit is an important construct when choosing leaders of businesses, and schools are increasingly becoming more business-like in their emphasis on goals, data, and strategies, then understanding the role fit plays in placing school principals also may be relevant. Fit must especially be assessed in the recruitment process for high-turnover jobs (McCulloch, 2007). This includes the role of principal, where turnover is common, especially for principals serving at-risk student populations (Baker et al., 2010). While fit is shown throughout the literature as not only important, but also a construct in hiring and placement, there is scant empirical evidence examining

whether fit is a relevant factor in head principal placement. An examination of the role of fit in placing principals, from the point of view of hiring bodies as well as the candidates for the role, would add to the body of literature and either confirm or disconfirm that the literature that holds true for businesses also holds true for education.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the role that fit may play in recruiting, hiring, and placing head principals, both from the perspective of the hiring bodies and from the perspective of the principals. Hiring bodies, particularly superintendents and human resource directors, have been surveyed in previous research to ascertain general traits they look for in a head principal candidate (Kwan, 2012; Kwan & Walker, 2009; Pijanowski, Hewitt, & Brady, 2009). Little research exists, however, gathering in-depth qualitative data on the role of fit from the perspective of hiring bodies or principals. Ensuring the right fit between a school leader and the school they lead may potentially benefit both the school and the individual leader. This study will fill a gap in the current literature in three significant ways. First, the majority of research examining the role of fit in the recruitment and hiring process has been done with business organizations rather than in the education world. Second, the majority of studies have used a quantitative methodology, yielding broad results rather than the deep, rich data this qualitative study aims to garner. Finally, the majority of the current literature on fit operationalizes the term to mean congruence of goals and values between a person and an organization. This study, examining fit through the lens of Person-Organization Fit Theory, will operationalize fit to mean the complementary match between the needs and provisions of a person and the organization they work in.

Research Questions

The study examined the role of fit from multiple perspectives. Data were collected from hiring bodies as well as principals. For the purpose of this study, hiring bodies may include superintendents, human resource directors, or other district-level officials who play a role in the recruitment, hiring, and placement of head principals. To guide the study, the following research questions were the focus of the study.

1. To what extent do principals consider fit when making decisions regarding which principal positions to pursue and/or accept?
2. To what extent is fit a consideration on the part of hiring bodies when making decisions regarding the recruitment, hiring, and placing of head principals?

Significance of the Study

The findings from this study may be useful to two main groups of professionals. First, hiring bodies and superintendents may find the results useful when considering how to recruit, hire, and place school principals. In the new age of accountability for schools and school leaders, superintendents and hiring bodies have a vested interest in getting the right person in the right leadership position. Gathering as much information on the candidate as possible will inevitably lead to a better and more informed decision. Interviewing candidates can be a valuable process for gathering information on a candidate's strengths, experience, values, and goals. However, traditional interviews collect information pertaining to a candidate's experience, education, and personal goals and may not examine the role of fit from the candidate's point of view. Examining fit may make successful placement of a head principal more likely. Maximizing the fit between a principal and a school may also help to minimize the likelihood the principal

will leave the school. Retaining principals, particularly in schools that serve at-risk populations, may prove beneficial. Yet little research exists to support the idea that hiring bodies and superintendents investigate a candidate's perceived fit with a potential school.

Additionally, results from this study may be useful for potential head principals. While person-organization fit is increasingly being used in business organizations when placing a leader (Arthur et al., 2005), many potential school leaders may not think of fit as a factor when pursuing or accepting a head principal placement, meaning they may not contemplate to what degree hiring bodies and superintendents consider fit when placing head principals. A positive fit between an individual and the organization they work with can increase job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Alniacik, Alniacik, Erat, & Akcin, 2013; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Liu et al., 2010). The role of fit in the recruitment of principals, however, has not been studied in depth. Understanding more about the role of fit in educational recruitment and placement may provide insight for potential principals when they begin to consider what positions to actively pursue, which positions to accept, and what positions may be more suited for another candidate. Examining the role of fit when placing head principals will likely benefit everyone involved – superintendents, hiring bodies, as well as principal candidates.

Finally, findings from this study will add to the current body of literature on the role of fit in the hiring process. While fit as a factor in the recruitment, hiring, and placement of business personnel has been studied at length, there has been little examination of the role fit may play in placing head principals. Understanding more about the concept of fit in the educational arena may be particularly useful as the

expectations for school leaders becomes more and more similar to the demands required of business leaders.

Definition of Terms

In order to provide clarity, the terminology used in the discussion of the study and its findings must be defined. For the purposes of this study, the following definitions were utilized.

1. *Principal*: For the purposes of this study, the term principal refers to the head administrator of a school. Other leadership positions within the school, such as assistant principals, administrative assistants, instructional coaches, or leadership teams are not included.
2. *Hiring Bodies*: This includes any individual or group that is responsible for recruiting, hiring, and placing head principals. This is likely to vary from district to district but will most often include superintendents and human resource directors.

Delimitations

The following delimitations created the boundaries for this study. First, the researcher decided to limit qualitative data gathering to human resource directors, superintendents, and head principals. Second, the researcher decided not to gather information from retired principals or from other educators who may decide to enter administration in the future. Finally, the researcher focused data gathering on the role of fit when placing head principals only, not other administrative positions such as assistant principals or administrative assistants. Findings from this study should not be generalized to administrative roles other than the head principal. These delimitations

may restrict data to current experiences with fit. Findings may not be generalizable to the role of head principal historically. A further delimitation is the geographical boundaries of data collection. Because the data were gathered from human resource directors, superintendents, and principals from schools and districts in the southeastern United States, the findings may not be generalizable to other schools and districts. Further, data were collected from school districts of similar size, further limiting the transferability of the results to districts of dissimilar sizes (larger or smaller).

Limitations

While qualitative data collection and analysis is the best process for measuring the potential role fit plays in recruiting, hiring, and placing head principals, the process is not without its limitations. First, honesty or forthrightness on the part of the participants can be expected but cannot be ensured by the researcher. Strategies such as triangulation help to maximize the validity of the findings. Another challenge of this process will be the amount of time involved in the collection and analysis of data. Interviewing participants fully and coding the data collected can be time consuming. The researcher must plan strategies to maximize the efficiency of the process without compromising the integrity of the process or the study.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 included an introduction to the study, the purpose of the study, and the research questions guiding the study. A discussion of the study's significance as well as the delimitations and limitations were included. Chapter 2 will review current literature related to the study and its topic. Chapter 3 will discuss the study's methodology as well as the data collection and analysis process. Chapter 4 will present the findings from the

data collection. Chapter 5 will be a discussion of the study's findings and their implications as well as suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Chapter 1 provided a discussion of the recruitment, hiring, and placement process for head principals and the need for appropriate fit in this process. Head principals are influential because they can impact many facets of a school from culture to achievement (Kroth et al., 2007; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Kythreotis et al., 2010). Because finding qualified candidates for the position can be challenging, and the process for identifying quality candidates is elusive (Walker & Kwan, 2012), understanding factors that influence the recruitment, hiring, and placing of head principals may be useful. There is significant movement with principals, particularly in the first years of service, and this turnover has a negative effect on a school's culture and student achievement (Miller, 2013; Mascall & Leithwood, 2010). While much empirical data exists discussing the importance of fit when recruiting and hiring employees for business organizations (Chen et al., 2008; Cable & DeRue, 2002; Garcia, Posthuma, Colella, 2008), little is known about the role fit plays when placing school principals. The purpose, therefore, of this study is to examine the role fit plays in head principal recruitment and placement, both from the point of view of hiring bodies and principals themselves. The following research questions guided this study.

1. To what extent do principal candidates consider fit when making decisions regarding which principal positions to pursue and/or accept?
2. To what extent is fit a consideration on the part of hiring bodies when making decisions regarding the recruitment, hiring, and placing of head principals?

This chapter will focus on a review of current literature that is foundational to this study. Following an overview of the search process, the initial discussion will examine the principalship – the role in general, responsibilities associated with the principal’s role, and the relevance of the role. Next, an examination of current literature on the concept of fit is discussed, focusing on definitions and operationalization of the term followed by the effects of good and bad fit for individuals and organizations. Following this will be a look at literature on the hiring process and fit, specifically how fit is assessed in the hiring process, the outcome of perceived fit by applicants and hiring bodies on the hiring process, and the role of fit in candidate interviews. This section will conclude with a review of literature on the hiring process and principals.

The Search Process

To examine current literature on the role and relevance of the principalship, the concept of fit, and the role fit may play in the hiring process, a variety of data sources were researched. Literature was gathered by searching for relevant studies using Google Scholar and downloading, reading, and categorizing findings from studies accessible on the online library at the University of Tennessee. Search terms included *principals*, *fit*, *hiring process*, *relevance of fit*, *hiring principal*, *principals and fit*, *turnover*, and *principal movement*. The search process included a consistent check of focus on literature related to this study. Literature on related topics such as the hiring process in general and types of fit other than person-organization fit (person-job fit, person-supervisor fit, etc.) were discarded. A significant amount of literature on the role of the assistant principal and principal succession was studied but discarded. Reviewing the abstracts of studies aided in focusing the review of literature on studies relevant to the

current study only. Further research was collected by accessing the University of Tennessee Library catalog to look for relevant journal articles and books on subjects related to principal placement and person-organization fit. The search for relevant and topical research in the areas of interest was expanded by looking at reference lists of journal articles found that were pertinent to the topic. The intention behind the review of literature was to gain a greater understanding of the current academic discussions regarding finding candidates for the principalship, the effects of principal movement, the definitions, operationalizations, and effects of person-organization fit, and the role fit plays in the hiring process. This review of literature led to the selection of Person-Environment Fit Theory as the theoretical framework for the study.

The Principalship

Before examining literature focused on the role that fit may play in placing head principals, a review of current and relevant literature on the landscape of the principalship today is necessary. The role and responsibilities of the principal have changed over the past several decades. Understanding the factors that influence the principalship and what factors may influence who becomes a principal will be useful. Following is a review of current literature on the roles and responsibilities of the head principal. A discussion of studies examining principal candidates and their motivations for applying for principal positions are then shared followed by literature on principal movement and turnover and the effects on schools.

The Role of the Principal in the School

Coelli and Green (2012) examined the effect school principals can have on student achievement and graduation rates and found that principals have a significant

effect on student achievement. Though their effect on achievement is largely indirect, it does become stronger over time, pointing to the negative effect that principal movement and turnover can have on a school. The researchers found that principals in high schools can have a significant impact on student outcomes, but that impact is dependent on the principal being at the school long enough for their influence to take effect. If principals were moved prematurely, their influence on student outcomes was minimized.

Likewise, Leithwood and Jantzi (2008) found that the efficacy of a principal can have an indirect impact on student achievement. This link is through a principal's influence on school and classroom conditions. The researchers found that, while individual characteristics of the principal (gender, race, or experience) did not appear to moderate the effect of the principal's efficacy, organizational factors (school type and size, for example) did. Similarly, Kythreotis et al. (2010) found that a principal can have an indirect effect on the achievement of students. The researchers discovered a consistent connection between a principal's organizational style and human resource management skills and student outcomes. Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2004) conducted a meta-analysis of literature examining the types of principal behaviors that correlated consistently with student achievement. From the literature they examined, the researchers created a list of 21 principal behaviors that were related to high student achievement (Waters et al., 2004, pp. 3-5). These behaviors include situational awareness, intellectual stimulation, being an effective change agent, and the creation of school culture.

While the impact principals may have on student achievement has been examined, other studies have looked specifically at the effect principals can have on the culture of a

school (Taormina, 2008). Specifically, researchers have examined the connection between principals and teachers and its impact on a number of organizational constructs. Price (2011) found that positive relationships between principals and teachers can have an impact on both parties. This relationship can affect a principal's job satisfaction and commitment to the organization while teachers' attitudes are directly related to the relationship they have with the principal. Further, teachers' attitudes directly affected the school climate overall (Price, 2011). Therefore, the role of the principal can have an indirect impact on the overall school culture and climate.

Principal Candidates

Because the role of the principal is influential and can affect a school's climate and student achievement, understanding who is applying for positions and what currently motivates candidates to seek out the position is relevant. When considering the recruitment, hiring, and placement of head principals, Pounder and Crow (2005) recommended looking to classroom teachers. Principals should look to teachers who demonstrate an interest in leadership and provide them with opportunities to hone leadership skills while still in the classroom (Pounder & Crow, 2005). A process known as "tapping", where principals encourage teachers to move into school leadership, is often used to find future school leaders. Tapping can be informal, where principals provide teachers with opportunities to lead committees and chair grade levels. Alternatively, tapping might provide teachers with more specific training on responsibilities of school leadership such as involvement in school-wide decisions or attendance at principal meetings (Pounder & Crow, 2005). Teachers with a desire to take on the role of school leader are more likely to be tapped by their principal than other teachers (Myung, Loeb,

& Horng, 2011). Qualified teacher leaders are regularly tapped for administration based on demonstrated leadership abilities in their current role as teachers. Teachers cite the support and encouragement of their principal or other administrators as a major motivation to pursuing an administrative job (DeAngelis & O'Connor, 2011). Gender can play a role in who is tapped. Myung et al. (2011) stated that, counter-intuitively, both male and female principals were more likely to tap male teachers than they were to tap female teachers.

Another obvious pipeline for finding suitable head principals would be to look at current assistant principals. Assistant principals' desire to move into the role of head principal seems to be affected more by professional, demographic, and motivational factors than by school factors (Walker & Kwan, 2009). Walker and Kwan (2009) found a strong correlation between those assistant principals who aggressively sought out their own professional development and those who were motivated to move into head principal roles. Walker and Kwan (2009) also stated that age may be a factor in who is interested in advancement, by noting that "Respondents with equal engagement in professional development and who are aged 45 to 54 are more eager to assume principalships than are their either older or younger colleagues" (p. 608).

While a relationship appears to exist between the extent of professional development assistant principals participate in and their desire to assume the role of head principal, other variables may also play a role. In a study of assistant principals and their professional development needs, assistant principals communicated certain areas of training that would encourage the move to a head principal position (Abebe et al., 2010). The most common area requiring more training was in the field of technology in schools.

Abebe and colleagues (2010) explained that candidates for head principalships in rural and urban schools ranked the need for training around technology as more important than peers who were considering head principal jobs in suburban schools. This finding indicates that context speaks to different priorities in considering principal placement.

To prepare assistant principals for the role of head principal, current school leaders must monitor the duties and responsibilities they currently delegate to their assistant principal(s). Walker and Kwan (2009) suggested that superintendents and district leaders are aware that if assistant principals only manage menial tasks such as discipline and scheduling, they may not have the opportunity to appropriately develop their managerial skills. Kwan (2009) surveyed assistant principals and asked them what school duties they spent most of their time on and correlated those duties with the assistant principals' perceptions regarding their readiness to ascend to the role of head principal. The researcher stated that assistant principals spend most of their time managing teachers and other school staff and the least amount of time managing the school budget, a duty they will assume when they become the head principal (Kwan, 2009). Kwan further suggested that assistant principals most highly linked strategic planning and policy environment with preparedness for being a head principal, suggesting that those assistant principals who are most involved with setting strategic goals for the school feel the most prepared to move into the head principal role (Kwan, 2009). To better prepare assistant principals to assume the role of head principal, the role of the assistant principal must be re-designed to include more instructional leadership opportunities (Pounder & Crow, 2005). School and district leaders should have an intentional succession plan in place regarding the training, support, and motivation of

assistant principals to eventually move into the role of head principal (Kwan & Walker, 2009).

Candidate Shortage

While getting the right person in the right position is important, finding that person can often be difficult. The increasing complexities of the role of head principal make finding qualified candidates and retaining mid-career leaders challenging (Pounder & Crow, 2005). Pijanowski et al. (2009) stated that superintendents tend to note a shortage of principal candidates, though on average they underestimate the actual applicant pool size by 15%. According to the superintendents surveyed, approximately half of the candidates who apply for a head principal position are qualified enough to interview (Pijanowski et al., 2009). Pijanowski et al. (2009) noted a discrepancy, however, between urban schools and rural school districts. While rural schools have approximately half the number of applicants for an open head principal position compared to their urban counterparts, district leaders in rural districts report far less concern regarding the applicant pool (Pijanowski et al., 2009).

The academic performance of the students in a particular school also appears to influence the applicant pool for head principal jobs. Winter and Morgenthal (2002) remarked that assistant principals considered schools whose students had low academic achievement to be the least desirable type of school to apply to lead when compared to schools with above average or moderate achievement. These same assistant principals, however, did not express a preference for placement based on the location of the school specifically (Winter & Morgenthal, 2002). Thus, attracting a qualified candidate to a low-

achieving school may prove more difficult than finding a leader for a high-achieving school.

One area of shortage noted in the literature concerns female principals and high schools. While there is little research about placing males in the position of head principal in high schools, some studies suggest that finding qualified and interested females to fill the role can be difficult. Whitaker (2001) indicated that superintendents spoke frequently about qualified men ready and willing to take the helm of high schools, but few comments were made concerning qualified women. Interestingly, there is no difference in confidence levels between men and women when contemplating ascending to the role of head principal (Kwan, 2009).

Another challenge facing districts is finding qualified minority candidates for head principal jobs. In a recent study, 54 superintendents were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with minority applicants for the head principal role. A majority of the superintendents surveyed, 58%, said that they were either not satisfied or only somewhat satisfied with the quality of the minority applicant pool (Whitaker, 2001). Whitaker went on to state that superintendents had difficulty finding quality people to even apply to the head principal role, and that few minority candidates ever sought the role themselves (Whitaker, 2001). Minorities are often not encouraged by their principals to pursue administrative positions. Principals of either gender favor supporting teachers of their own race to consider school administration (Myung et al., 2011). This finding aligns with research on the dearth of minority candidates for head principal jobs (Whitaker, 2001). If minority principals generally support minority candidates more often than other principals, an increase in the number of minority principals will be difficult to achieve.

Principals should involve other school staff members – such as assistant principals and guidance counselors – in choosing which teachers to encourage. This may decrease the likelihood that a principal will only support teachers similar to themselves (Pounder & Crow, 2005). Whitaker (2001) stated:

This research raises important questions. For example, is the quality of candidates really diminishing? Are educational leadership pre-service programs preparing individuals for the realities of the job? Are minorities being prepared and recruited for principal positions? Are females recruited and considered for high school principalships? (p. 90).

When considering the process of principal recruitment, hiring, and placement, looking specifically at the need to find appropriate women and minority candidates likely will be an ongoing challenge to district leaders.

One possible reason for the dearth of candidates is that many potential applicants to the head principalship feel that the increased responsibilities of the job do not coincide with the salaries earned (Whitaker, 2001). Salary was seen by superintendents as the number one factor for attracting qualified applicants to apply to open head principal positions (Pijanowski, et al., 2009). In fact, financial compensation plays an important role in what motivates candidates to seek an administrative position. Money, in tandem with working conditions, is a strong motivator for qualified candidates to seek or not seek an administrative position (Pijanowski & Brady, 2009). Teachers are often reluctant to move from the classroom to the office because the job appears too stressful and the demands of the job do not align with the compensation (DeAngelis & O'Connor, 2011; Hewitt, Denny, & Pijanowski, 2011). Salary can also influence the likelihood that a

principal will remain in their current position. In general, principals with higher salaries than their peers tend to be more stable and less likely to move from one school to another (Baker et al., 2010). Salaries can offset the demographic factors that prompt principals to move schools, such as race or percentage of students who are economically disadvantaged (Gates et al., 2006; Papa, 2007; Tekleselassie & Villareal, 2011).

Principals' salaries can also affect principal turnover in another way. The expectation of a higher salary can actually motivate a principal to move from one school to another (Akiba & Reichardt, 2004).

Principal Movement and Turnover

Loeb et al. (2010) found that principals are regularly placed in positions independent of their individual preferences. As a result, there can be significant movement from school to school later in the principal's career. Principal movement and turnover can occur in a variety of ways. Principals may retire from the profession. They may leave the field entirely and transition into a new field. Principal movement might also include a school leader moving from one school to another. Just as the role of the principal can influence a school's culture and achievement, principal turnover may influence the success of a school. This study will examine the role fit plays in head principal placement. Because fit can influence a variety of personnel factors, including whether a person leaves the organization, examining literature on principal turnover – its occurrence and effects – is worthwhile.

In a longitudinal study of 2,700 school principals in Missouri conducted between 1999 and 2006, Baker et al. (2010) found that, over any five-year span of time, 75% of the state's principals moved at least once from one school to another. School level

appeared to play a part in principal turnover in Missouri, with elementary principals being the most stable (least likely to move), followed by high school principals and then middle school principals. Tekleselassie and Villarreal (2011) found that principal movement varied depending on age and gender. In general, an increase in the principal's age coincided with a decreased likelihood of movement. The researchers also found that women principals were less likely to leave the school and less likely to leave the profession completely compared to their male counterparts. Turnover and mobility does not just affect public schools. According to a recent study in Utah, charter schools experience a higher rate of principal movement and turnover than public schools (Ni, Sun, & Rorrer, 2014). Moreover, researchers found in their study when principals left a charter school, they were also more likely to leave the profession altogether (Ni et al., 2014).

Principal movement can have significant effects on the school and its culture. In general, replacing people who vacate the most complex jobs can be a great financial burden to any organization (Tracey & Hinkin, 2008). This is due, in part, to the costs associated with training new employees. While some schools may benefit from a change in leadership, principal turnover can have a negative effect on overall school performance (Beteille et al., 2012; Berrong, 2012; Mascall & Leithwood, 2010). This can be especially true in schools that serve at-risk students (Beteille et al., 2012). These schools tend to see significant principal movement, which, in turn, means that they often are led by principals who are new to the role as experienced principals depart (Loeb et al., 2010). Schools that serve predominantly African-American students also tend to have the least stable/most likely to move principals (Baker et al., 2010). While principals serving these

schools may leave the school, they do not often leave the system. Instead, they regularly relocate to other schools within the same district (Gates et al., 2006). In general, schools with the most at-risk students and least-qualified teachers are also the same schools that have the most difficult time attracting seasoned, successful principals and retaining principals (Papa, 2007). This turnover could be mitigated by replacing a principal serving a high-needs school with a more experienced principal, but most schools serving these populations are led by beginning principals (Beteille et al., 2012; Loeb et al., 2010).

While the exit of a principal can be followed by a downturn in student achievement, Miller (2013) found that the period before a principal's transition is also characterized by a downturn in achievement, calling into question whether there is a causal relationship between turnover and achievement or what variable is the dependent variable. While turnover may cause a decrease in achievement, the converse could also be true. Research repeatedly supports the idea, however, that principal transitions can have a negative impact on schools. This specifically can be true in times of change. Principal movement actually can be a barrier to change in a school if the staff and other stakeholders believe that a principal is not stable in the position (Fink & Brayman, 2006). This seems to indicate that it would be beneficial for principals to remain in a position, particularly when a change process is occurring, to allow for the change to take hold (Fink & Brayman, 2006; Coelli & Green, 2012).

While principal turnover is especially significant in high needs schools, factors other than the demographics of the school also appear to influence principal turnover and movement. Principals regularly cite the demands of the job as a major motivation for transitioning out of the field entirely or moving to more favorable schools (Gajda &

Militello, 2008). As the role of principal becomes more demanding and complex, districts have a more difficult time attracting new principals and retaining mid-career principals (Pounder & Crow, 2005). Another factor that appears to prompt principals to vacate the field is the increasing lack of autonomy associated with the role. As district, state, and federal mandates become more prevalent and the role of the principal becomes more about enforcing mandates rather than managing and leading a specific school, principals are motivated to either retire or leave the profession for other fields (Reames, Kochan, & Zhu, 2014; Tekleselassie & Villarreal, 2011).

Principal training programs may also play a role in principal transitions and movement. In a quantitative study of 5,000 U.S. public school principals, McKibben (2009) found that while local training programs do not have a specific influence on principal turnover, the quality of the training program a principal engages in may affect many factors of their success and career, including mobility and turnover. This seems to suggest that simply providing a principal preparation program will not help districts retain principals, but rather the quality of the program is more influential in principal retention (McKibben, 2009).

Another factor that seems to influence principals' decisions to remain in their current position is job satisfaction. While there is much research to support the trend that principals tend to move from schools serving at-risk students, that is not always the case. While the majority of research supports this trend, Tekleselassie and Villarreal (2011) found the opposite – that urban principals in the United States are less likely than their suburban counterparts to move schools. Job satisfaction may be a mitigating factor, that is when a principal is satisfied with their job, they are less likely to leave (Tekleselassie

& Villarreal, 2011). Principals are regularly placed in their initial school as principal without consideration of the individual preference (Loeb et al., 2010). Farley-Ripple (2012) stated that hiring bodies should consider an applicant's choices when making hiring decisions. Research has shown that one factor that influences job satisfaction is fit between the individual and the organization (Piasentin & Chapman, 2006; Alniacik et al., 2013; Liu et al., 2010). A closer examination of the literature discussing the concept of fit, therefore, is needed.

Fit

As previously discussed, movement and turnover among school leaders is a regular occurrence, particularly with high needs schools. Often, however, these schools arguably have the highest need for qualified candidates who will remain in the position for a significant amount of time. Because principal movement and turnover can have a negative effect on a school's culture and, ultimately, a negative effect on student achievement (Miller, 2013; Mascall & Leithwood, 2010), understanding factors that may influence whether a principal remains at a school or leaves can be relevant. Many factors may influence and individual's decision to remain with an organization. Both the individual and the organization have certain expectations for the other. If these expectations are not met, the individual's commitment to the organization, and the likelihood they remain with the organization, diminishes (Lester, Claire, & Kickul, 2001). Research has reported that one variable that affects an employee's likelihood to stay with an organization is the fit between the employee and the organization (Carless, 2005). Since fit can affect whether a person leaves the organization, it is relevant, therefore to

examine the meaning of fit – its definitions and operationalizations – as well as how researchers measure fit and what effects it can have for individuals.

Definitions and Operationalizations

There are different types of fit to be considered when thinking about the relationship between an organization's leader and the company or school they lead as well as many different ways to both describe and measure the concept of fit (Schneider, 2001). Person-environment (P-E) fit is an overarching concept that is meant to describe all types of fit between a person and some element of the organization in which they work (Kristof, 1996). Kristof (1996) defined person-organization (P-O) fit as “the compatibility between people and organizations that occurs when: (a) at least one entity provides what the other needs, or (b) they share similar fundamental characteristics, or (c) both” (p. 45). P-O fit is one type of fit, but there are others types that are studied as well. The other major categories of fit are person-job (P-J) fit and person-supervisor (P-S) fit. P-S fit is the connection between a person and their superior or boss. P-J fit involves the fit between a person and the job they are hired to do (Kristof, 1996). P-J fit and P-O fit are measured differently (Kristof-Brown, 2000). While both P-J fit and P-O fit can affect an employee's attitudes and behaviors (Pfeffelman, Wagner, & Libkuman, 2010), employees regularly distinguish between the two types (Piasentin & Chapman, 2006). Kristof (1996) further describes P-O fit as being either supplementary or complimentary. Supplementary fit involves the goals and vision of an organization. Positive supplementary fit is when the goals of an organization align with the personal goals and vision of its leader. Conversely, negative supplementary fit would be when the goals of an organization are in conflict with those of the leader. Complementary fit involves the

leader and organization's strengths and needs. Complementary fit, according to Kristof (1996), can be further broken down into what she calls needs-supplies fit and demands-abilities fit. Needs-supplies fit would be the relationship between the needs of an individual and the ability of the organization to meet those needs. Demands-supply fit would be the connection between the demands of a company and the ability of the individual to meet those demands. Positive complementary fit is when the needs of an organization are met effectively by the leader of the organization or when the individual leader's needs are met by the organization itself. Negative complementary fit is when there is poor alignment between the needs of an organization and the ability of the leader to meet those needs. Negative complementary fit can also occur when the needs of an individual leader do not align well with the possibility that the organization the person leads can meet their personal needs and desires as a leader (Kristof, 1996). Because it has been under investigated, complementary fit is worthy of further study (Kausel & Slaughter, 2011). While both supplementary and complimentary fit have been shown to affect employee outcomes (Cable & Edwards, 2004), perceived complimentary fit is a stronger predictor of job acceptance by applicants (Carless, 2005). Yet few studies have attempted to study the effects of perceived complementary fit in the recruitment and hiring process (Piasentin & Chapman, 2006).

Fit can also be measured in a variety of ways (Schneider, 2001). Kristof (1996) describes three different types of fit based on the way it is measured – perceived fit, subjective fit, and objective fit. Perceived fit, also described as a direct measure of fit, involves asking an individual directly about their perceptions of the fit between themselves and the organization. Subjective fit and objective fit are described as indirect

measures of fit. Subjective fit is measured by asking an individual about themselves and about the organization, then measuring the relationship between the two based on the information shared. Objective fit is assessed by asking an individual about themselves, then gathering information on the company by asking other people within the organization. The fit between the person's self-description and the objective descriptions from other parties about the organization would then be assessed. Most research on fit operationalizes the measurement of fit to mean what Kristof (1996) describes as subjective fit (Piasentin & Chapman, 2006; Schneider, Goldstein, & Smith, 1995).

Effects of Positive and Negative Fit

As discussed earlier, principal turnover can have a negative effect on the culture of a school as well as on student achievement (Berrong, 2012; Beteille et al., 2012). Significant research has been conducted examining the effects of positive or negative fit once an employee has been hired. Assessing perceived fit in the recruitment process will be discussed later in this chapter. Most research examining the effects of fit have focused on the effects positive or negative fit has for individuals rather than effects on the organization as a whole (Schneider, 2001). Effects of fit on individuals generally fall into two categories – effects on individuals' attitudes and effects on individuals' outcomes or behaviors.

When discussing individuals' attitudes and fit, attitudes are generally operationalized as job satisfaction and organizational commitment, meaning the degree to which an individual is satisfied with their current job as well as how committed they are to the organization in general. When individuals perceive a positive fit between themselves and the organization they work for, they express an increased level of

satisfaction with their job in general (Alniacik et al., 2013; McCulloch & Turban, 2007; Westerman & Cyr, 2004). Liu et al. (2010) studied this relationship in an international setting. In a study of 259 employees who worked in public sector positions in China, they found person-organization fit to be positively related to job satisfaction. Kristof-Brown et al. (2005), in a meta-analysis of studies examining multiple types of fit, found P-O fit to have strong correlations with job satisfaction (.44) and organizational commitment (.51) as well as with organizational satisfaction (.65). Other studies have yielded similar results, uncovering a strong correlation between the level of P-O fit and organizational commitment (Alniacid et al., 2013; Ostroff, Shin, & Kinicki, 2005). This is true even in periods of change. Meyer, Hecht, Gill, and Toplonystsky (2010) found that perceived fit is correlated to organizational commitment in times of organizational change, meaning a higher perceived fit before the organizational change will lead to a higher perceived fit after the change occurs. Perceived fit can specifically affect how an employee feels about the human resource department. The stronger the perceived fit by an individual with the organization they work for, the more positively they view the human resource department and its decisions regarding human capital (Boone, Hartog, Boselie, & Paauwe (2011). Conversely, Mostafa and Gould-Williams (2014) found that strong human resource department policies can lead not only to more positive employee attitudes and organizational commitment but better person-organization fit as well. Ensuring a positive fit, therefore, between a person and the organization they work in or lead can positively affect the individual's satisfaction with their current role, both the actual job they perform as well as a commitment to the organization in general.

Some studies have examined the effect fit may have individual attitudes as well as individual outcomes or behaviors. These behaviors may include, but are not limited to, organizational commitment behavior (behaviors that are beneficial to the organization such as good job performance). The initial fit between an employee and the organization they work for can impact their job performance (Tilcsik, 2014). Arthur et al. (2005) found that P-O fit has a relationship with both an individual's work attitudes as well as with the individual's work performance. This is especially relevant information for human resource departments whose main responsibility is to maximize personnel output. The strength of the fit between an individual's perception of an organization's culture and the actual organizational culture can affect how well the individual performs in his job (Goodman & Svyantek, 1998). A correlation has also been found between fit and not only task performance and organizational commitment behaviors but turnover intentions as well (Hoffman & Woehr, 2005; Verquer, Beehr, & Wagner, 2003). P-O fit has been found to be a stronger prediction of turnover intentions than the fit with the individual's job (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Ostroff, Shin, and Kinicki (2005), in a survey of 951 employees from 113 bank branches, found that perceived P-O fit affected the employees' job satisfaction, commitment to the organization, and turnover intentions. Liu, Liu, and Hu (2010) found that P-O fit affected individuals' turnover intentions with job satisfaction acting as a mediator, meaning if a person was satisfied with their job, they were less likely to leave the organization, even if they perceived a weak fit between themselves and the organization. Cable and DeRue (2002), in a study of 215 employees of a small telecommunications company, found that individuals will differentiate between fit with their job, fit with the rewards offered (compensation, benefits, etc.), and fit with

the organization's values. Even when employees perceived a strong fit with their job and rewards, a weak perceived fit with the values of the organization led to a higher intention to turnover or leave the organization. The role fit plays in an employee's intentions to remain with the organization is mitigated by the number of job alternatives. When an employee has a variety of alternate job opportunities, fit is less of a motivator to remain with the organization (Silva, Hutcheson, & Wahl, 2010). Perceived fit may not only affect a person's intentions to remain with an organization, but it may also affect the person's intentions to stay with the profession altogether (Carless, 2005). Personnel data, such as employee references, employee attitudes about the job, and confidence level can be used to predict the likelihood that a person may leave an organization (Barrick & Zimmerman, 2005). These traits can be assessed before an individual is hired and may be useful for human resource departments interested in predicting turnover.

Because turnover can have negative implications for organizations, an understanding of the relationship between fit and turnover is important. The study of fit has been influenced by Benjamin Schneider's ASA model of organizational culture (Schneider et al., 1995). According to Schneider's theory, the culture of an organization is defined and created through a three-step process of attraction, selection, and attrition (ASA). Individuals are attracted to organizations that share their own goals, ethics, and vision. Organizational leaders then select individuals to work in the organization who share the goals and vision of the organization and its leader. Here, fit would be relevant in the recruitment and hiring process. In the final stage of the process, the attrition phase, individuals who do not fit with the organization are either pushed out or leave voluntarily, thus cementing the culture of the entire organization. In this phase, the fit of

the individual and the organization would impact how likely the person is to stay with the organization or leave (turnover). Cooman, Gieter, Pepermans, Hermans, DuBois, Caers, and Jegers (2009) conducted a longitudinal study to test Schneider's ASA model, measuring the organizational commitment of 142 teachers prior to entering the profession and then again two years later. They found that respondents expressed a better match between their values and that of the organization they work for than they expressed two years prior as they were just entering the organization. The researchers speculated that socialization and the ASA process both were at play. Socialization affected the organizational commitment of the participants while those whose goals did not align with the organization left (attrition), thus providing validity for Schneider's model. Other studies have also found that strong socialization has an impact on a new employee's perceived fit with the organization (Kim, Cable, & Kim, 2005) and can strengthen the initial fit between an individual and the organization over time (Tilcsik, 2014). This theory has influenced the research on fit and is regularly referenced in studies on fit (Kristof-Brown, 2000; Carless, 2005; Hoffman & Woehr, 2006).

The Hiring Process

As previously discussed, principal turnover can have a negative effect on a school's culture and student achievement. Understanding more about fit, specifically what role fit may play in the hiring process, is the focus of this study. Following is a discussion of current literature on fit and the hiring process. Most studies were conducted in a business context, but the findings regarding fit and the recruitment and hiring process may be relevant to the focus of this study. Previously discussed literature on the effects of fit examined what Kristof (1996) calls subjective or objective fit, that is

fit was studied with regard to a person already working in an organization. Following is a discussion of literature examining fit in the hiring process. Because study participants would not have worked in the organization yet, fit in the following discussion is what Kristof (1996) calls perceived fit. Here, the concept of fit is not measured with feedback from employees currently working in the organization but rather is a projected potential of fit, both from the point of view of applicants as well as hiring bodies.

Job Applicants and Fit in the Hiring Process

There is extensive research examining the role of fit in the hiring process, particularly from the point of view of the applicants themselves. While the majority of these studies have been conducted in a business setting, the concept has been examined from multiple angles. Fit is most often assessed by job applicants as being a congruence between their own goals and values and that of the company or organization to which they are applying (Cable & Judge, 1996). As previously discussed, this would be using the supplementary definition of fit, where a good fit would mean an alignment between an individual's goals and values and that of the organization (Kristof, 1996). In a meta-analysis of studies examining the role of fit in the hiring process, Piasentin and Chapman (2006) found that fit was conceptualized as value congruence in 78% of the studies they examined. Other studies defined fit as goal congruence. Only three of the 36 studies they examined conceptualized fit as a match between the skills and needs of the individual and the demands of the organization. Kristof (1996) labeled this type of fit complimentary fit. The dearth of studies examining fit from the complimentary fit perspective points to a need for further examination of fit using this operationalization of

the concept. The current study will potentially add to the existing literature on fit by filling this gap.

When attempting to assess values congruence with an organization, applicants may assess the overall organizational culture and seek to understand the level of congruence between their own personality and the type of organizational culture they perceive. Different personality types will often match with different organizational cultures (Gardner et al., 2012). How information is presented to the applicant, however, appears to have little impact on their assessment of fit. Whether applicants learn only positive characteristics of an organization or both positive and negative characteristics does not affect their perceived fit with the organization in general (Gardner et al., 2012).

Once an applicant feels that a positive fit exists between themselves and the organization, this perception can have a variety of effects on the hiring process. Positive perceived fit between an applicant and an organization increases the applicant's attraction to the organization in general (Carless, 2005; Dineen, Ash, & Noe, 2002; Uggerslev, Fassina, & Kraichy, 2012). This attraction to the organization is positively related to an applicant's intention to apply for open positions (Gomes & Neves, 2011). Perceived positive fit, in addition to increasing the attraction to the organization as a whole may also increase the applicant's attraction to a specific job (Gully, Phillips, & Castellano, 2013; Saks & Ashforth, 2002). This interest in pursuing a specific job may be the result of the attraction to the organization discussed previously (Gully et al., 2013). Intent to pursue a job may be the direct result, however, of the positive perceived P-O fit (Cable & Judge, 1996; Chapman et al., 2005).

How an individual assesses fit in the recruitment and hiring process may be effected by individual characteristics such as race or gender. Catanzaro, Moore, & Marshall (2010) found that men were more likely than women to pursue a job if they assessed the organizational culture to be competitive. Both men and women, however, were more likely to pursue a job when the organizational culture was deemed to be supportive (Catanzaro et al., 2010). This proved true regardless of the salary attached to the job, indicating that perceived fit may prove a greater motivator for job applicants than other components of the job, such as compensation. When assessing the fit between themselves and an organization's culture and values, women and minorities are drawn to organizations that value diversity amongst its workforce (Ng & Burke, 2005). Interestingly, high achievers also valued diversity practices when considering an organization (Ng & Burke, 2005).

Rather than assessing an organization's values and culture generally, applicants often look specifically at an organization's purported ethics and social responsibility. Perceived P-O fit and organizational commitment is influenced by the ethical values an organization communicates to potential employees (Valentine, Godkin, & Lucero, 2002). Individuals who desire for their work to be meaningful and helpful to others will perceive a better fit between themselves and organizations that communicate clearly the organization's social responsibilities (Gully et al., 2013). When there is a positive perceived fit between an individual's personality and social responsibility in general and a positive fit between an individual's personality and the social responsibility of an organization, they are more likely to pursue a job in the organization (Zhang & Gowan, 2012). Communicating, therefore, an organization's ethical values and social

responsibility can be a useful recruitment tool for increasing the likelihood that a potential job applicant will successful fit with the organization.

While job applicants often assess perceived fit between themselves and the organization based on the characteristics and culture of the organization itself, applicants look to other avenues to assess fit as well. Pfieffelman, Wagner, and Libkuman (2010) found that the more user-friendly a company or organizations website was, the more likely job applicants were to perceive a positive fit between themselves and the organization. The recruiter or interviewer may also affect how well an applicant perceives he may fit. How personable the recruiter is in the initial stages of the recruitment process affects how well an applicant perceives he may fit with the organization. The more personable the recruiter is, the better the perceived fit on the part of the applicant (Chapman et al., 2005). This factor was less relevant, however, once an applicant moved through the process and learned more about the specifics of the job. When recruiters give potential employees feedback during the recruiting or interviewing process about how well they (the recruiter) perceive the applicant to fit with the organization, the more attractive the organization becomes to the applicant (Dineen et al., 2002). The demographics of the recruiter (age, gender, race, etc.), however, do not appear to influence an applicant's perception of their fit with the organization as a whole (Cable & Judge, 1996). While potential applicants to an open position in an organization may look to the recruiter to assess potential fit, those responsible for recruiting and hiring are often assessing fit between the applicant and the organization as well.

Hiring Bodies and Fit in the Hiring Process

While the role fit plays in the hiring process for job applicants has been amply studied, researchers have also examined the role of fit from the point of view of those who do the hiring. A review of the literature on the role fit plays in the hiring process for hiring bodies (managers or others responsible for interviewing and either making hiring recommendations or making job offers directly to applicants) shows a consistent correlation between the level to which a candidate is perceived to fit with the organization and the likelihood that a recommendation for hiring occurs (Chen et al., 2008; Tsai & Chi, 2011). Hiring bodies regularly assess the perceived fit between a candidate and the organization based on the perceived similarity between the individual applying for a job and the organization itself, though this process does not seem to be influenced by the interviewer's personal preferences (Rynes & Gerhart, 1990). This perceived similarity could be assessed culturally. This would especially be true to organizations recruiting employees from other countries or cultures. In a quantitative study of managers from ten Norwegian managers, researchers found that managers responsible for hiring international applicants assessed the applicant's cultural fit with the company and labeled candidates with low levels of cultural fit as being less similar, less likable, less likely to perform well in the job, and as having lower levels of P-O fit than candidates with a higher level of perceived cultural fit (Bye et al., 2014). A study was conducted of 28 companies using questionnaires to examine the role of P-O fit in the hiring process. The researchers found a significant correlation existed between the interviewer's perceived similarity and perceived P-O fit with the organization. They also detected a correlation between the perceived fit and hiring recommendations and between

the perceived similarity and hiring recommendation (Chen et al. (2008). This study shows when hiring bodies perceive a positive fit between an applicant and the organization, they are more likely to view the applicant as similar to the organization and to make recommendations to hire them. Garcia, Posthuma, and Colella (2008) similarly found a correlation between perceived similarity, perceived fit, and hiring recommendations. This study also discovered that these relationships existed independent of whether or not the recruiter found the candidate likeable as a person (Garcia et al., 2008). While most studies examine the role fit plays in hiring employees in general, research shows that perceived fit and the assessment of organizational commitment behaviors (being committed to an organization, performing tasks well, etc.) may be more relevant for hiring employees into a leadership role than an assistant role (Tsai & Chi, 2011). This would support the relevance of the current study in examining the role of fit in hiring school principals.

Mechanisms for Assessing Fit

Understanding the mechanisms and processes by which fit is assessed in the hiring process is a necessary piece in understanding the role fit plays in this process overall. As discussed earlier, applicants for a job may assess their perceived fit with the organization based on something as elementary as the friendliness usability of the website application process (Pfieffermann et al., 2010). Hiring bodies also use specific mechanisms to assess the fit between an applicant and the organization. Recruiters and hiring bodies may use information gleaned from an applicant's resume (work experience, educational background, etc.) to assess the applicant's fit. This fit perception can then affect recommendations for hiring (Tsai & Chi, 2011). Another obvious process hiring

bodies use to assess fit is the interview. Interviews are often used to assess the supplementary (goals or values congruence) fit between an individual and the organization to which they are applying (Cable & Judge, 1997). Once an interviewer assesses a candidate's fit, this fit assessment will influence the decision to hire them or not (Cable & Judge, 1997). Interviewers will assess a candidate's organization-specific fit differently than they assess the general employability of the candidate (Rynes & Gerhart, 1990).

The interview process may also be used by candidates themselves to assess their perceived fit with the organization they are considering. In a recent study by Kutcher, Bragger, and Masco (2013), 213 participants were presented with a series of interview scenarios and asked to rate each scenario in terms of their perceived P-O fit. The results of the study showed that the participants utilized the behaviors of the interviewer as well as the interview process itself more to assess their perceived fit with the organization than they did the actual content of the interview questions. In a meta-analysis of studies examining job applicants' intentions to seek and accept jobs, recruiters' behaviors were also found to affect an applicant's intentions to pursue a job, though these initial impressions of the recruiter became less significant toward the end of the interview than they were at the beginning (Chapman et al., 2005).

Some organizations may assess candidates in a single interview while others may use a series of interviews or a multi-stage process to assess a candidate's fit and employability. Researchers have studied the role of fit across the different stages of the hiring process (Chapman et al., 2005; Chuang & Sackett, 2005; Uggerslev et al., 2012). While some organizations utilize a single interview as the main process for collecting

information on a job applicant, other times the process may involve a series of steps or interviews. P-O fit is more important than other types of fit, such as person-job (P-J) fit in a single interview (Chung & Sackett, 2005). When multiple interviews are involved, P-O fit plays a more important role in later interviews than it does toward the beginning of the process. In initial interviews, assessing the capabilities of the person to perform the job or task appears to be more relevant. Once a person is deemed qualified for the job involved, how well the applicant fits with the organization becomes more important (Chung & Sackett, 2005). Other researchers, however, have found that P-O fit plays an important and consistent role across the hiring process (Uggerslev et al., 2012).

Several studies have looked at specific techniques by applicants and interviewers in an interview setting and the effects those techniques may have on fit perception, job pursuits, and hiring decisions. Ingratiation is the process by which a job applicant would attempt to impress or get in the good graces of an interviewer during the interview process. Ingratiation on the part of a job applicant has been found to increase the interviewer's perception of similarity between himself and the applicant, which then leads to increased perceptions of P-O fit with the organization and may also influence the likelihood the interviewer would recommend hiring the applicant (Chapman et al., 2005; Higgins & Judge, 2004). Self-promotion, alternatively, did not seem to affect perceived fit or hiring decisions (Higgins & Judge, 2004). An interview technique the interviewer may use is to attempt to promote or "sell" the organization to a job applicant. This technique would be employed when an organization is actively seeking to attract a desired candidate for a position. Engaging in a selling orientation during an interview, however, has been found to negatively influence the ability of the interviewer to evaluate

the applicant's organizational commitment, potential job performance, and perceived P-O fit. When interviewers did not engage in selling the organization, however, the ability to assess the applicant increased (Marr & Cable, 2014).

Hiring Process for Principals

The focus of this study is to examine the recruitment and hiring process for head principals specifically. Therefore, reviewing current literature on how head principals are currently sought out, hired, and placed is relevant. When looking at applicants for the role of head principal, district leaders must consider what traits and abilities are important for the role. Anyone assuming the head principalship must be highly qualified in the area of generic managerial skills (Kwan, 2012). Kwan (2012) also stated that principals must be prepared to be moral stewards. Knowledge and experience are also important when considering filling head principal positions, and this area is of special importance for two reasons. First, knowledge and experience are directly linked to teaching and learning (Kwan, 2012). Second, a candidate's knowledge and experience are more easily assessed objectively compared to other candidate traits that are harder to detect and evaluate in an interview (Kwan, 2012). Both aspiring principals and district leaders charged with recruitment, hiring, and placement of head principals believe that communication and presentation skills are important, though the two groups differ on the importance placed on these skills, with aspiring and newly hired principals placing more importance on communication skills than do hiring bodies (Kwan & Walker, 2009).

Walker and Kwan (2012) surveyed leaders and school principals who had participated on selection boards. The participants were given a 19-item Likert Scale survey and were asked to rank their agreement, 1-6, on different statements pertaining to

the hiring process, with 1 being low and 6 being high. The items were then grouped into four factors. The factors were panel professionalism, the interview, making the cut and pre-interview, in rank order of importance. While district leaders and principals were in agreement on 3 of the 4 factors, they differed on the level of professionalism of non-educator panel members. Panel members who had not served as educators ranked themselves higher in professionalism than did educator panel members (Walker & Kwan, 2012). Both district leaders and principal applicants believed head principals should be skilled in the areas of general managerial skills, communication and presentation, experience and credence, and external connections, in that order of importance. (Kwan, 2012; Kwan & Walker, 2009). These findings point to the importance that principal placement panel make-up can have on the selection process.

A meta-analysis of research regarding principal traits that were correlated highly with student achievement was conducted by Waters et al. (2004). From the relevant literature, the researchers created a list of 21 responsibilities of principals that were related to high student achievement (Waters et al., 2004). Using these 21 responsibilities as a guide, Rammer (2007) surveyed superintendents in Wisconsin examining two research questions: How do superintendents consider the skills, traits, behaviors, and responsibilities identified in the literature for effective principals in their selection of school principals? How do superintendents assess these skills, traits, behaviors, and responsibilities in the candidates whom they hire? (Rammer, 2007). Of the superintendents surveyed, 92% agreed that the 21 responsibilities outlined by Waters et al. (2004) were important to consider when hiring a principal. The four traits ranked highest by the superintendents were communication, culture, outreach, and focus, in that

order (Rammer, 2007). While the superintendents surveyed believed the 21 traits to be important characteristics that skilled principals should have, they did not regularly assess those traits in an interview or reference check (Rammer, 2007). This points to a disconnect between what the superintendents stated was important and what they actually practiced in the hiring process.

Districts, in general, tend to lean toward hiring people who are known to them rather than seeking out unknown candidates (Kwan, 2012). Hiring bodies often seek candidates for head principal positions who are similar in gender, racial background, and experience to the head principal they are seeking to replace. Kwan (2012) stated that the “...principal selection (is) a form of ‘cloning’ through which hiring bodies seek candidates who best meet their prototype of a prospective incumbent” (p. 344).

The process of gathering information on a prospective candidate for a head principal position is interesting. Of the four groups of character traits that most district leaders and principal candidates believe are important for potential head principals to possess – general managerial skills, communication and presentation, experience and credence, and external connections – only experience and credence can be assessed objectively (Kwan, 2012). As with the recruiting, hiring, and placing of other positions within a school (teachers, assistants, etc.), interviewing is the prevailing process by which most head principals are placed (Kwan, 2012). Yet gathering information on a candidate’s general managerial skills, communication and presentation, and external connections would be difficult, if not impossible, simply by relying on an interview, no matter the length or number of district officials involved in the process. Currently, while district leaders understand and believe certain traits are important for school-based

leaders to possess, the superintendents responsible for hiring and placing principals were not found to have a systematic way of assessing the desired traits (Rammer, 2007).

All schools within a district will not have the same needs and challenges. Therefore, examining literature around how principals are placed in certain schools is useful. One trend is principal placement and high-needs schools. A study conducted in the Miami-Dade County Public Schools examining principal and assistant principal placement and turnover/transfers found that schools that enroll more economically disadvantaged students are more likely to be led by a principal who has less experience, is a temporary or interim principal, is a first-year principal, or by a principal who was trained in a less-prestigious leadership training program than schools with less economically disadvantaged students (Loeb et al., 2010). They also concluded that 20% of schools with the largest proportion of poor students were led by first-year principals. This is compared to schools with fewer students of poverty, where only approximately 11% of the principals were in their first year (Loeb et al., 2010). Schools with a higher percentage of economically disadvantaged students also experienced more principal turnover. The authors stated that “Transfer and attrition from the principal position are more common in schools serving more poor, minority, and/or low-achieving students, and principals who transfer tend to move to schools with lower concentrations of these students” (Loeb et al., 2010, p. 226).

One of the factors involved in placing and moving head principals appears to be the preference of the candidate or principal. This is less the case in original placements than with principal transfers. Principals are usually matched with open vacancies independent of their preference, perhaps leading to significant movement after the initial

placement (Loeb et al., 2010). By influencing the types of schools that candidates apply to, principal and assistant principal applications are likely to influence the placement and movement/transfer of leaders from one building with higher needs to one with lower needs (Loeb et al., 2010). Loeb and colleagues (2010) suggested that principals and assistant principals often stated strong preferences for working in schools that were safe and closer to where they live. These characteristics tended to align with schools that have lower concentrations of economically disadvantaged students (Loeb et al., 2010). Winter and Morgenthal (2002) further stated that qualified assistant principals, when asked to rate potential head principal openings based on the level of achievement of the school, rated schools with high achievement as most attractive. Assistant principals, however, did not indicate a significant preference for head principal jobs based solely on the school's location (Winter & Morgenthal, 2002). The assistant principals surveyed rated potential head principal jobs in suburban schools, rural schools, and urban schools as being equally attractive and would consider applying and interviewing for any job opening independent of the school's location.

When choosing which schools to lead as head principal, applicants should become knowledgeable about the strengths and needs of the school. Hiring bodies are more likely to choose candidates who have a connection to the school they are hoping to lead, as well as candidates whose personal growth goals align effectively with those of the school (Walker & Kwan, 2012). The selection of principals is, at best, an uncertain science (Walker & Kwan, 2012) and a field that is understudied, according to Kwan (2012). Therefore, examining the recruitment and hiring process in general, and studying the role fit may play in the process specifically, will add to the existing body of literature.

To examine the role of fit, operationalized for this study as complementary fit, I will use Person-Environment Fit Theory as a theoretical framework.

Theoretical Framework

For the purposes of this study, data were examined through the lens of Person-Environment Fit Theory. French and his colleagues developed a theory of fit based on Kurt Lewin's programmatic formula, $B = f(P, E)$, or behavior is a function of the person and the environment (Lewin, 1951). Person-Environment Fit Theory purports that stress arises from a negative interaction between a person and the environment in which they exist (French, Rogers & Cobb, 1974). Stress is caused not by the individual or the environment in isolation but rather by the interaction between the two. According to the theory, fit between an individual and their environment can be described in two different ways – objectively and subjectively. The objective person describes the actual traits of an individual. The subjective person is an individual's assessment or description of himself or herself or the subjective description of an individual by another person. Similarly, the objective environment is described as the actual environment as it exists. The subjective environment would be an individual's perception of or description of an environment. Objective fit is the actual fit between an objective person and an objective environment. Subjective fit would be the perceived fit between a subjective person and the subjective environment (French et al., 1974).

Person-Environment Fit Theory postulates there are two types of fit. The first type of fit, called demands-abilities fit, describes the connection between the demands of an organization and the ability of the individual to meet those demands. The second type of fit is needs-supplies fit. Here, fit is described as the connection between the needs of

the individual and the level to which the organization can meet, or supply, those needs. For both demands-abilities fit and needs-supplies fit, the relationship between the person and the environment must be measured using the same construct. For example, fit could be assessed using the concept of a caring culture. A positive fit would occur when the needs of the individual to work in a caring culture are high and the organization the individual works for is characterized by a culture that is caring and supportive. When a negative objective or subjective fit exists, individuals will respond in one of two ways. One outcome involves individuals experiencing psychological strains such as depression, anxiety, and dissatisfaction. The second outcome has individuals coping with the ensuing stress.

The current study examined the role fit may play in the recruitment, hiring, and placement process for head principals. The current study did not examine the actual fit between a principal and the school. Further, the current study did not examine the outcome of the perceived fit between the principal and the school. The perception of fit was examined through two lens – the hiring bodies (human resource directors and Superintendents) that recruit, hire, and place head principals and the principal candidates themselves. With both groups of participants, data were gathered on the perceived fit between the principal (person) and school (environment) prior to the placement of the principal in the school. This perceived fit is an example of subjective fit described by Person-Environment Fit Theory. The findings from the current study will, therefore, be examined through the lens of this theory. Findings may also add to or expand the understanding of Person-Environment Fit Theory and its implications.

Studies Using Person-Environment Fit Theory

Many studies have used Person-Environment Fit Theory as a theoretical framework through which data were examined and discussed. Edwards and Rothbard (1999) explored the relationship between a person's values and the experiences they have both at work and at home. The fit between the participants' values and experiences were then compared to the level of stress and well-being the individuals experienced. The researchers administered surveys to 5,833 employees at a large public university. Usable surveys were returned by 1,758 participants. The surveys measured the participants' values, experiences, well-being, and stress. The findings supported the researchers' hypothesis that higher levels of fit between a person's values and their experiences at work and at home correlated with a higher sense of well-being and lower stress levels (Edwards & Rothbard, 1999). These correlations were strongest when looking at in-domain comparisons. For example, the relationship between work fit and work satisfaction was high as well as the connection between home fit and home satisfaction.

Lambert and Altheimer (2011) used Person-Environment Fit Theory in a study conducted in a correctional institution for convicted felons. The correctional facility, located in the midwestern United States, is a high security prison that housed approximately 1,000 male prisoners. The facility implemented a treatment program meant to rehabilitate inmates and prepare them for reintegration into society. Surveys were given to 400 employees of the facility, and 272 of the employees returned usable surveys to the researchers. The surveys measured the participants' level of agreement with the process of prisoner treatment and rehabilitation. The level of agreement with prisoner punishment, without treatment, was also measured. Further, the participants

were surveyed on their level of role stress, organizational fairness, work on family conflict, and life satisfaction. The researchers found that as the level of agreement with a treatment and rehabilitation approach increased, so did the participant's sense of organizational fairness and life satisfaction. Further, the more the participant agreed with the facility's program, the lower their level of role stress and family conflict. Conversely, participants who had a stronger belief in a punishment approach to prisoner management, which conflicted with the programming at the facility, the higher their level of role stress and family conflict. Additionally, these participants expressed lower levels of organizational fairness and overall life satisfaction. In general, the researchers found that a positive fit between the values of a person and those of the organization they work in leads to more positive experiences for the individual. Conversely, when a negative fit exists, it can have an undesirable effect on the individual (Lambert & Altheimer, 2011). These findings aligned with the researchers expectations.

A Dutch study by Steijn (2008) also used the Person-Environment Fit framework to examine the relationship between public sector workers' commitment to public service and their level of job satisfaction. Public service motivation, or PSM, was measured, along with job satisfaction, using two separate questionnaires. These questionnaires were examined for 4,502 national civil service employees. Additionally, the researcher surveyed 1,947 public sector workers, again assessing their commitment to public service and their level of job satisfaction. First, the researcher found an expected difference between the level of commitment to public service between participants who currently work in the public sector versus those who work in the private sector. Participants who currently work in the public sector had higher levels of PSM, or public service

motivation, than those who work in the private sector (Steijn, 2008). Finally, researchers discovered a relationship between the level of an individual's PSM and job satisfaction. Participants who worked in the public sector and were highly committed to public service experienced greater levels of job satisfaction than individuals who either worked in the public sector and had a low level of PSM or workers who were employed in a private sector job but had a high level of PSM (Steijn, 2008). Again, these findings aligned with the researchers' hypothesis.

Person-Environment Fit Theory has been used in numerous studies to examine the effects of both objective and subjective fit between an individual and the environment. The current study sought to examine the role perceived fit between a principal candidate and the environment (school) they may work in may play in the recruitment, hiring, and placement of head principals. Person-Environment Fit Theory, therefore, was an effective theoretical framework through which data were examined. Further, findings will be examined in relationship to this theory. The findings from the current study will enhance the understanding of Person-Environment Fit Theory and its implications.

Conclusion

The process of recruiting, hiring, and placing head principals is a critical part of school and district success. This review of literature focused on studies that examined the principalship – its relevance as well as candidates for the job. Next, literature discussing the concept of fit was examined. The review also looked at studies examining literature focused on the hiring process in general and principal hiring specifically. The current study will add to the existing literature in several ways. First, the concept of fit has been studied extensively in the business world, but little consideration has been given

to the role fit may play in education recruitment and placement. Second, the majority of the studies on fit operationalize the concept to be supplementary fit, or the alignment of values and goals between an individual and an organization. The current study, through the lens of Person-Organization Fit Theory, will operationalize fit to mean complementary fit, or the congruence between the needs of an organization and the ability of the leader to meet those needs. Finally, the majority of studies on fit have used quantitative methods to study the concept. The current study will utilize a qualitative methodology. Chapter 3 will provide a discussion of the study's methodology.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In Chapter 2, relevant literature was reviewed. The review of literature began with a review of studies focusing on the principalship. A discussion of literature on the relevance of the principalship as well as specific issues, including candidate shortages, was included. Literature on fit – the definitions and operationalizations of the concept as well as effects of positive and negative fit – was reviewed. Research on the hiring process was also discussed, examining specifically the role fit plays in the hiring process and the process for hiring principals. The purpose of this study was to examine the role of fit when placing head principals. While research on the role of leader fit has been done in the business world (Hoffman & Woehr, 2005; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005), there has been little research done on the role fit plays when placing head principals. Two research questions guided this study.

1. To what extent do principal candidates consider fit when making decisions regarding which principal positions to pursue and/or accept?
2. To what extent is fit a consideration on the part of hiring bodies when making decisions regarding the recruitment, hiring, and placing of head principals?

This chapter will outline the study design and a rationale for the selection of the design. A discussion of the role of the researcher as well as specific details about the sites for the study and the study's participants will be included. Specific information about the data collection process as well as how the data were analyzed will be included.

Research Design

Merriam (2009) describes qualitative research as a way of learning about a person's interpretation of their experiences. The intention of qualitative research is to deeply examine how people create meaning based on their own experiences. A qualitative research study, therefore, would yield sophisticated data in which people describe their understanding of phenomena. Qualitative data by its very nature is rich and detailed (Merriam, 2009). The intention of using qualitative research methods is to gain a deep understanding of a person's interpretation of their experiences in general and of certain phenomena specifically (Merriam, 2009). Researchers employ a qualitative design when they desire a complex, detailed understanding of the subject (Creswell, 2013). Basic qualitative research at its heart has the intention of discovering how people view their world. Qualitative research is employed when there is a problem or issue that needs to be explored in depth (Creswell, 2013). The underlying theory behind qualitative research is that there is no true objective reality but rather reality is created through a combination of experiences and a person's interpretation of those experiences (Merriam, 2009).

The current study employed an exploratory qualitative research design. Exploratory qualitative research seeks to understand a phenomenon and explore how and why it is occurring. While other types of qualitative research attempt to explain causal relationships or develop theories, the goal of exploratory qualitative research is to increase the researcher's understanding of an issue (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). To implement this type of study, the researcher must be flexible and curious about the phenomenon (Saunders et al., 2009). The purpose of this study was to examine the role

fit plays in the recruiting, hiring, and placing of head principals, both from the point of view of hiring bodies (human resource managers and superintendents) as well as principals. Therefore, employing an exploratory qualitative design with focus on person-organization fit will be most appropriate for gathering the type of data sought. The intention of this study was not to understand better how principals fit with their school but rather what role fit plays, if any, in the process of recruiting, hiring, and placing head principals. This study also did not seek to explain or test a theory or compare variables, as most quantitative research attempts to do (Creswell, 2014). In essence, the purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of how involved parties (superintendents, human resource directors, and principals) interpret and understand the role of fit and how it affects the process of placing principals. Specific questions about the definition of fit, its role in hiring and placing principals, and the perceived impact that good or bad fit may play in a principal's success were posed to the study's participants to gather data that would answer the study's research questions. Figure 1 represents the structure of the current study, beginning with the identification of a purpose and theoretical framework and continuing through the drafting of research questions, collection of data, and data analysis.

Role of the Researcher

One key criticism of qualitative research and the subjectivity potentially involved in the process revolves around the role of the researcher. In qualitative research, the researcher is the key instrument for data collection (Creswell, 2013). For the findings of this study to be valid and understandable by the reader, clarifying the role of the researcher is necessary.

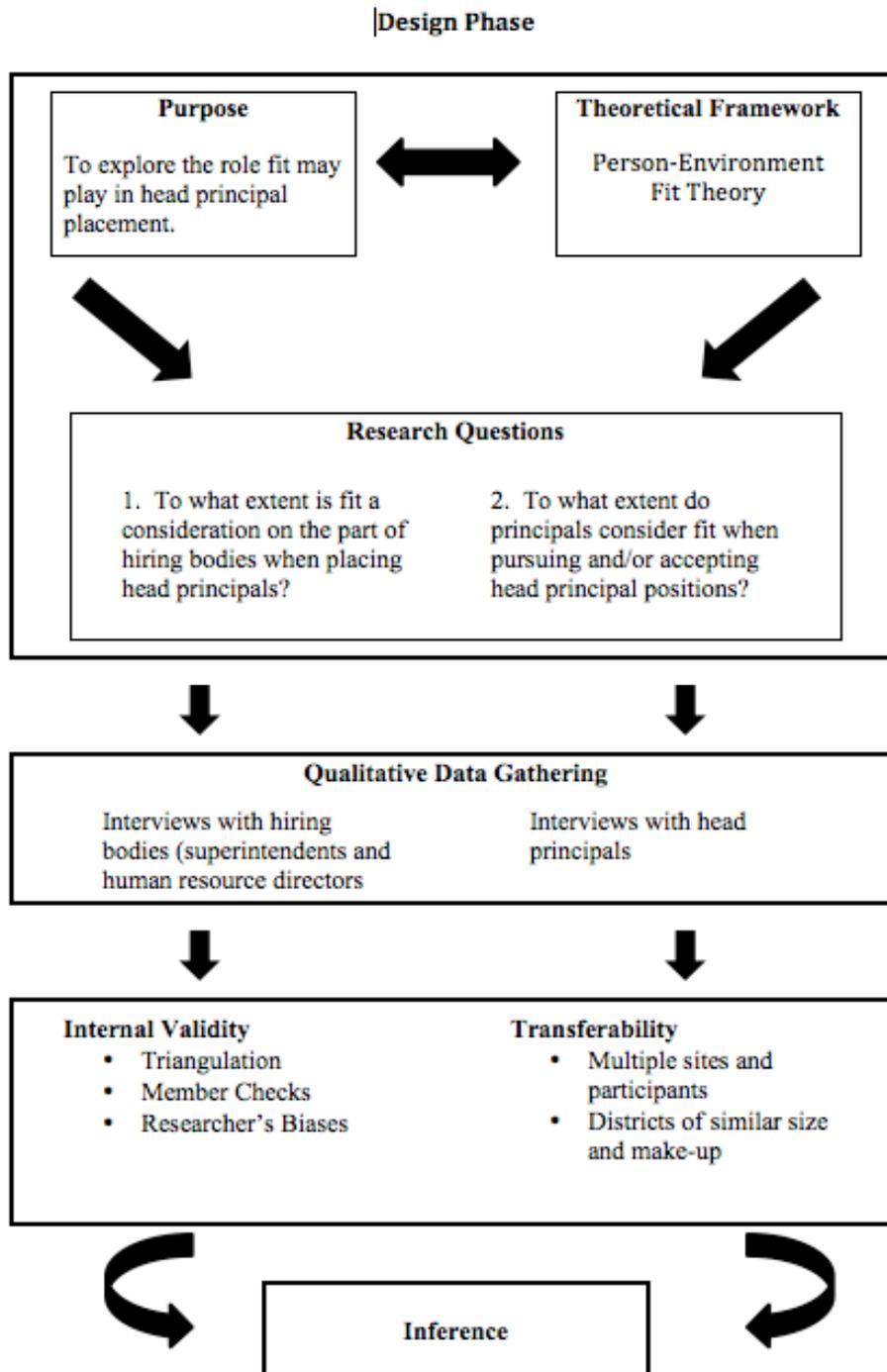


Figure 1: Research Design

The researcher currently works as an assistant principal at a suburban primary school. Because the researcher has a vested interest in the data collected for the study, it will be important to maintain the role of data collector as objectively as possible. Using the study's theoretical framework, guiding literature, and interview protocols as a guide will help to minimize researcher bias. Throughout the data collection process, reflexivity was necessary to minimize expectations or bias concerning the data. Creswell (2014) describes reflexivity as the process where the researcher "reflects about how their role in the study and their personal background, culture, and experiences hold potential for shaping their interpretations" (p. 186). As data were collected, the researcher consistently reflected on the data collection process to monitor and minimize any contamination of the data by biases and expectations.

Concerns may exist about the types of questions posed as well as how the questions are presented. To neutralize this potential bias and avoid the influence it may have when interviewing subjects for the study, data were collected from districts other than the district where the researcher is currently employed. Creswell (2014) stated that data should not be collected from sites or participants where the researcher has a vested interest in the data or its implications. For that reason, this study did not involve collecting data from the district where the researcher is employed.

When considering instrumentation in qualitative data collection, it is also important to remember that the research was an integral part of the data collection process. This can be another way qualitative research varies from quantitative studies. An essential element in qualitative research is that the reader believe the data were collected in such a way that the findings will be considered honest, accurate, and valid.

One critical component, therefore, of a qualitative research study is that the researcher demonstrates reflexivity. Researchers must explain their “biases, dispositions, and assumptions regarding the research to be undertaken” (Merriam, 2009, p. 219).

There are advantages and disadvantages to the fact that the researcher currently works in the field in which the study was conducted. Understanding how school districts operate and what role principals play in school leadership can be advantageous. First, the topic would not have been identified were it not for the researcher’s professional experience. Also, when developing an interview protocol, having a working knowledge of school leadership helped to create and hone interview questions that explore the study’s research questions thoroughly. Interview questions must be understandable to the interviewee. They must also be specific sub-questions of the main research questions (Creswell, 2013). Understanding the world the study examined made creating questions that were relevant, understandable, and connected to the main research question or questions smoother. It was necessary, however, to avoid researcher bias in conducting the interviews. Because the researcher had a specific idea of the role fit should play in head principal placement, strategically neutralizing research bias through techniques such as triangulation and participant validation (member checks) (Rossman & Rallis, 2012) was necessary. Creswell (2013) stated that all writing is positioned within a particular stance or point of view and that researchers should simply acknowledge this when sharing their findings. This is particularly true of researchers who believe that truth is subjective and knowledge is learned by studying individuals’ understanding of their environment.

Positionality Statement

The researcher has specific thoughts about the relevance of fit that should be acknowledged. The desire to understand the role of fit in the decision making process for head principal placement came from the researcher's experience with the process. When being considered for an administrative position upon completion of a principal training program, the researcher was considered for positions in two very different schools. Having just completed a rigorous training program managed, to some extent, by the district, it was unclear whether the fit between the researcher and the school was considered when making placement decisions. The researcher's experience as a school administrator has led to a belief that fit should be considered by both hiring bodies and principal candidates. This consideration should be made because the effectiveness of a school leader is enhanced, and the learning curve associated with a new placement is minimized, when a positive fit exists between the leader and the school. Acknowledging these beliefs, and monitoring the data collection and analysis process to minimize their effect on the process, was done to increase the validity of the study's results.

Sites and Participants

Qualitative research has been criticized for its lack of transparency in sampling (Higginbottom, 2004). When choosing the participants of a qualitative research study, careful consideration should be given to who is chosen and why. For this study, the researcher employed a purposeful sampling process. Site participants were chosen intentionally with the expectation that data gathered will best answer the research questions guiding the study. Creswell (2009) stated that "the inquirer selects individuals

and sites for the study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon of the study” (p. 156).

To answer the research questions for the study, which sought to examine the role fit plays when placing head principals, both from the perspective of hiring bodies (human resource directors and superintendents) as well as principals, data were gathered from hiring bodies and principals in three to five school districts in the southeastern United States. The school districts are of similar size and make-up. The purpose of gathering data from similar districts was to increase the likelihood that the findings of the study may be generalizable to other similar districts. The researcher focused on districts in the southeastern United States for the purposes of practicality and proximity. Pseudonyms were given to district names, school names, and the names of the participants themselves to protect their identity and privacy.

Permission was sought from the superintendent in each district to collect data from both hiring bodies and principals within the district. The superintendents were given information on the study including an outline, focus of the study, and research questions. Once permission was obtained, the researcher requested consent from the superintendent, human resource director, and principals within the district to participate in the study.

Sites

When choosing the sites for this study, the researcher focused on school districts with between 75 and 100 schools. School districts in this range would likely have a variety of school types (suburban, urban, and rural). Collecting data from hiring bodies and principals in districts that operate different types of schools increased the likelihood

that fit may play a role in head principal placement. In districts that are smaller and may operate more homogenous types of schools, for example a small rural district where all schools tend to be similar, fit may be less of a factor in placing head principals since the characteristics of the school would likely vary less.

Permission to collect data was sought from 9 different school districts that met the previously mentioned criteria throughout the southeastern United States. Two districts gave permission to collect data initially, with 4 other districts declining permission. All districts provided explanations for why permission was not granted. One district denied permission because prior IRB approval was not obtained. Another district stated their policy was to only allow research studies conducted by employees of the district itself. Two other districts declined permission because they could not see how the results and findings of the study would benefit the district. Permission from a final third district was obtained 5 months after the initial application process began.

This study was conducted in three school districts in three different states in the southeastern United States: Craven School District, West School District, and Raser School District. Craven School District operates 84 schools, including rural, urban, and suburban schools. West School District consists of 95 schools including all three types of schools – rural, urban, and suburban. Finally, Raser School District is comprised of 78 rural, urban, and suburban schools.

Participants

The participants in the study, namely district human resource directors, superintendents, and head principals were interviewed because data collected from these participants will provide specific answers to the research questions guiding the study.

The purpose of the study is to examine the role person-organization fit plays in placing head principals. By interviewing human resource directors, superintendents, and head principals, sophisticated data will be collected on the role of fit from the point of view of both entities responsible for the recruitment, hiring, and placing of the head principals in the district. The intention of gathering data from both hiring bodies and principals was to collect data on the concept of fit from multiple perspectives. Site participants participated in the study voluntarily, and the identity of both the participant and the district in which they work will remain confidential. Table 1 shows the participants, their roles, genders, and types of school and communities they work in. Once permission to conduct the study was obtained from district superintendents, consent was obtained from the superintendent or human resource director to conduct interviews about the role fit plays in placing principals from the point of view of the hiring bodies. To collect data regarding the role of fit from the perspective of principals, the researchers narrowed the list of potential principal participants to those who have served as head principal 3 years or less in their current school. The intention behind this focus on recently appointed principals was to collect data from principals who have relatively recent experiences with the hiring process. Principals were interviewed until saturation was reached.

Data Collection

To gather qualitative data on the role fit plays in head principal placement, the researcher used a semi-structured interview protocol to collect data from superintendents, human resource directors, and head principals. Interviews are a common way for qualitative researchers to gather data on events or phenomena they cannot observe directly, either because it is not possible or appropriate for the researcher to collect the

Table 1: Study Participants

Participant	Role	Gender	Grade Range	Community Type
Karen	Principal	Female	6-8	Urban
Marilyn	Principal	Female	K-5	Suburban
Larry	Principal	Male	K-5	Urban
William	Principal	Male	K-5	Rural
Vivian	Principal	Female	K-5	Rural
Aaron	Principal	Male	6-8	Suburban
Steve	Principal	Male	K-5	Suburban
Alyssa	Principal	Female	K-5	Urban
Madeline	Principal	Female	K-5	Urban
Chase	Principal	Male	K-5	Rural
Dan	HR Director	Male		
Abby	HR Director	Female		
Kyle	Superintendent	Male		
Lindsey	HR Director	Female		
Alan	Superintendent	Male		
Linda	Superintendent	Female		

data through an observation or because the data collected references a past event. Merriam (2009) described a semi-structured interview as one that includes a mix of more structured and less structured questions. While a large part of the interview process is guided by pre-written questions, the semi-structured interview also allows for the responses from the participants to guide the interview itself. The researcher can expand on responses or use responses to pose follow-up or clarifying questions. Because the current study sought to gather data on a specific subject, an unstructured format with open-ended questions were too vague to gather the deep data sought. Conversely, using a structured format with pre-determined questions only would likely have resulted in missed opportunities to dive deeper into the participants' experiences and understanding of fit. Table 2 shows the analysis of interview protocol questions related to each research questions. Table 3 shows interview questions by category.

Data for this study were collected from human resource directors, superintendents, and head principals at three districts in the southeastern United States. When possible, the researcher traveled to districts in person to interview participants.

Data Analysis

Once data were collected from the study's participants, the data were analyzed and examined for trends and themes. The coding of the data occurred in three phases. Phase one included the identification of major themes or patterns in the data. This involved extensive reading of transcribed interviews and coding the data. Coding data involves dividing the data into small categories and assigning descriptive words or phrases to the categories (Creswell, 2013). The coding process should include looking for data that the researcher expects to find, data that was surprising to find, and data that

Table 2: Interview Questions Type Analysis

Category of Interview Question	Hiring Body Interview	Principal Interview
Introductory/Demographic		P1, P2, P3
Procedural	HB1, HB2, HB3, HB4, HB5, HB6	P4, P5, P6
School	HB7, HB8, HB9	P7, P8, P9, P10
Principal Candidate	HB10, HB11, HB12, HB13, HB14, HB15, HB16	P11, P12, P13, P14, P15
Principal-School Fit	HB17, HB18, HB19, HB20, HB21	P16, P17, P18, P19, P20, P21
Key	Appendix A	Appendix B

Table 3: Research Questions Related to Interview Questions

Research Question	Interview Questions
1. To what extent do principals consider fit when pursuing and/or accepting head principal positions?	P1 – P21
2. To what extent is fit a consideration on the part of hiring bodies when making decisions regarding the recruitment, hiring, and placing of head principals?	HB1 – HB21

is interesting to the researcher and, potentially, to the reader (Creswell, 2013). Once data were analyzed from each of the three districts, the codes were examined for similarities and differences across districts. A cross-case analysis was conducted, comparing codes across the three districts where data were collected. Similarities and differences in the data were analyzed and the common trends as well as district-specific differences were shared. The data were also analyzed for commonalities and differences between participant groups – responses from hiring bodies compared and contrasted with responses from principals.

Once codes were collapsed and grouped under three major themes, the themes that developed from the data collection process were analyzed and a discussion and interpretation of the findings was formulated. Creswell (2013) describes this process as “abstracting out beyond the codes and themes to the larger meaning of the data” (p 187). This process of interpreting the data and presenting the findings can be time consuming but was necessary to flesh out the data and make it relevant for the reader.

Ethical Safeguards

When collecting data in qualitative research, it is important to consider ethical issues (Creswell, 2013). Site participants were informed fully about the details of the study in advance. The privacy and anonymity of participants was maintained throughout the collection of and presentation of data. Interviews that were conducted in person were done in private offices where participants’ responses could not be overheard. When conducting interviews using Skype, the researcher was located in a private home, also maintaining the privacy of the participants’ answers. Because the site participants are all working professionals, attention and care was given to scheduling interviews. Consistent

Final Iteration: Themes		
The Applicant	The School	The Relationships
Second Iteration: Categories		
Experience/Background Traits/Styles of Leadership Identifying Traits/Styles Succession Transferability	Familiarity with School School Needs and Demands School Size	Building Relationships Experience – Community Community Input
First Iteration: Initial Codes		
Teaching Career Connections to Community Tiered Process Preparation Programs Looking for a Challenge Proximity to Home Building Relationships Continuity of Leadership Previous Administration Culture and Climate Communication Experience with Community Self-Organization Positions Must Be Accepted Serving People	Knowledge of School Experience as Asst. Principal Understanding Parents Experience as Student Learning Curve Confidence Faith in District Core Values Selling Self in Interview Trust and School Size Adaptability Stakeholder Expectations Race and Gender Longitudinal Planning Previous Experience as Principal	Candidate Preference School Level Community Savvy Understanding School Experience - School Ability to Delegate Personality Comfortableness Principal Movement People Skills Continuity or Change School Committee Preparing for Success Size of School Leadership Style

Figure 2: Final Iteration: Themes

attempts were made to minimize the disruption caused by the interview process. The participants were asked to choose dates and times that were convenient for their schedules, and the interview was kept to one hour or less for all participants.

There were ethical issues involved in the data collection process as well. Sharing one's thoughts and feelings to a stranger can be an uncomfortable and uncertain process for the participant of any study. The ethical qualitative researcher will take this into account and attempt to minimize a participant's discomfort. This may include conducting the interview in a location that is familiar to the participant as well as ensuring reciprocity of benefit is practiced. Participants have the opportunity to benefit from participation. Sharing findings of the study is one way participants can benefit from participation.

Methods of Verification

When collecting data through interviews, considering the issues of validity and transferability is essential. These concepts vary slightly from quantitative research. In the traditional scientific model of research, validity speaks to how well an instrument measures what it claims to measure. For qualitative research, validity is commonly meant to describe how much the responses of a participant resemble the actual experience they are describing (Merriam, 2009). In other words, how closely to the truth is the participant's description. It was important, in order to increase the validity of the study, that techniques designed to strengthen validity in qualitative research were used. First, the interview protocol was tested on two human resource directors and three principals. Feedback from the protocol test was used to eliminate questions that did not garner data aligned with the research questions. Other questions were discarded or altered to align

with the study's focus. Another technique used to increase validity was triangulation. Triangulation involves collecting data from multiple sources and using the entire collection of data to develop themes for presentation and discussion (Creswell, 2014). For the current study, the researcher collected data on the role of fit in recruiting, hiring, and placing head principals from superintendents and human resource directors as well as from head principals and principal candidates. Collecting data from multiple perspectives strengthened the likelihood that the data collected regarding the perception of how fit influences the process of principal hiring and placement closely aligns with the role that fit actually plays in the process. This strengthened the validity of the data collected. Another strategy for increasing the validity of the data and findings is using member checks. This process involved presenting collected data in aggregate form back to participants. Participants then examined the data and provided the researcher with feedback on its accuracy. Triangulation and members checks were both be used in the current study as a way of increasing the validity of the data and findings on the role of fit.

Another issue all researchers must address is the transferability of their results. For traditional quantitative research, transferability is the likelihood that similar studies will yield the same or comparable results if the study were to be replicated in another setting. Again, this concept differs slightly for most qualitative research. For the qualitative researcher, transferability is akin to transferability, meaning the extent to which the findings of the study could be generalized to other situations. To increase the transferability of a qualitative study, the researcher must describe in detail the setting of the study – its context, location, and participants (Shenton, 2004). This allows the reader to ascertain whether the findings may or may not be applicable to a similar setting or with

similar participants. For this study, describing the districts data were collected from will allow the reader to decide the transferability of the researcher's findings. Understanding the role fit may play in the districts data were collected in will likely help the reader decide what role fit may play in the recruitment, hiring, and placement process of similar districts.

The general rigor of the instrument is another common criticism of qualitative interviewing (Chenail, 2011). Developing an appropriately rigorous interview protocol will be necessary to strengthen the findings of the study. A detailed interview protocol will also increase the likelihood that the study yields the rich, detailed data hoped for.

A pilot test on the interview protocol was conducted prior to the research initiation. The pilot was conducted in a district similar in size and demographics to the study sites. The pilot district currently has 91 schools of varying sizes and consists of suburban, urban, and rural schools. The principal interview protocol was tested on 4 current school administrators, each with experience of 3 years or less. The hiring bodies interview protocol was tested on the former director of human resources for the district. At the completion of each pilot interview, the researcher asked the pilot participants to provide specific feedback on the protocol. The researcher analyzed responses along with feedback received on the protocol and made adjustments. Where redundancy existed, questions were combined or eliminated. Feedback from one school administrator resulted in the addition of a question. Thus the original protocol consisted of 43 items and, after adjustments, the final protocol consisted of 42 items. No pilot participants expressed unease with any questions nor did they perceive any items as irrelevant or

misleading. From the analysis perspective, the pilot responses provided data useful in answering the study's research questions.

Conclusion

Chapter 3 was an overview of the current study's methodology. The chapter began with a discussion of the study's research design. The study employed an exploratory qualitative design intended to collect sophisticated, detailed data about the role of fit in head principal placement. The role of the researcher and its implications to the current study were discussed. The researcher currently works as an assistant principal at a large, suburban primary school. Strategies for minimizing the role of the researcher were shared. Next, the chapter detailed the study's sites and participants. Data were gathered from superintendents, human resource directors, and principals at 3 school districts in the southeastern United States. To collect data to answer the research questions, the researcher interviewed human resource directors, superintendents, and head principals working in three to five similar districts in the southeastern United States. The researcher posed specific questions about person-organization fit and the role it played or did not play in the placement process for head principals. The data were then analyzed for themes across site participants. Ethical safeguards designed to protect the anonymity of the participants were then discussed. Interviews were done privately, and the identities of the sites and participants were altered in the presentation of data. Chapter 3 concluded with a discussion regarding the strategies used to verify the findings and increase the likelihood the results could be generalized to other districts. Chapter 4 will include a discussion of the findings from the study.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Chapter 3 focused on the study's methodology, research design, the role of the researcher, the sites and participants, and the data collection process. Chapter 4 will include an analysis of the data collected as well as findings from the analysis. The analysis and findings will attempt to answer the study's two research questions.

1. To what extent do principal candidates consider fit when making decisions regarding which principal positions to pursue and/or accept?
2. To what extent is fit a consideration on the part of hiring bodies when making decisions regarding the recruitment, hiring, and placing of head principals?

Data were collected from principals (n=10) and district officials (n=6), seeking to identify the degree to which fit was a factor in the recruitment, hiring, and placement of head principals. Table 1 in Chapter 3 lists the study participants' pseudonyms and information. The data were collected with principal and district personnel interviews and were analyzed, using codes identified from the data. These codes were collapsed into pattern variables in a second phase of analysis. Finally, three themes emerged from the data. Chapter 4 reports analysis of the data through the lens of the research questions using the three identified themes as an outline. Each of the three themes – the applicant, the school, and the relationships - will be discussed from the point of view of principals and district officials. Both principal participants and district personnel discussed similar topics relating to the role of fit in the hiring and placement process. For the purposes of clarity, Chapter 4 will present these topics and discuss them from the point of view of each group of participants. Data collected from principal participants, who had been in

their current position, 3 years or less, required that they reflect on the recruitment, hiring, and placement process as it pertained to their current position. Data collected from district officials invited officials to reflect more broadly on the recruitment, hiring, and placement process in the district in which they work. Following discussion of the data analysis, Chapter 4 will conclude with the findings from the study and how these findings answer the study's research questions.

The Applicant

Following data analysis, one theme that emerged centered on the applicant. For purposes of this study, the applicant is defined as the candidate in contention for a head principal position. Data focusing on the applicant will be discussed from the point of view of principals and district officials.

Principal Candidates' Experience

Data collected from principal participants revealed that they regularly reflected on themselves as potential candidates for vacant head principal positions. One major consideration on the part of principals was the experience they brought to the role of head principal. The professional experiences principal participants had prior to considering a vacant head principal position seemed to influence decisions around the pursuit of an open principal spot. One type of experience discussed by principals was the participants' teaching experience. Principal participants felt the experiences they had as a classroom teacher may increase the likelihood of success as a principal in a similar environment. For example, if a principal had worked in an urban setting as a teacher, they perceived a greater likelihood of success as a principal in an urban setting. Karen shared, "all my teaching experience was in Title I schools", which she felt increased the likelihood of

success as a principal in Title I schools. Alyssa stated, “my strength is working with Title 1 families, that socio-economic class. Not because of anything other than that’s all I’ve had practice with in my years of experience.” In addition to her teaching experience, Alyssa went on to discuss her experience as a head principal in a previous school.

I felt like I was really prepared for this. I had been an elementary principal of kind of the same demographics, at a Title 1 school with multi-BE prior. And then they moved me to a middle school where I did the master schedule and the curriculum piece, but still in the same area, being with a Title 1 school. The population, the clientele, I was very familiar with, just a different group of people. If principal participants felt they were successful in one type of school as a teacher or even as a head principal, they were more likely to look for opportunities in schools that were similar to past placements. Karen communicated this idea.

It (current school) has some gifted learners, which over those 7 years at (previous school) I had really learned to adore. But it also had the more at risk population that my heart has always been connected to. It had the student population that I felt like my focus on instruction would impact. So I think my background helped, and my experience working with both levels of learners.

Understanding the type of school with a vacant head principal position was relevant for principal participants because they recognized the situation as similar to something they had experienced in previous placements. Many participants were drawn to certain opportunities because the type of school was familiar to them in some way. Chase described his research process as he moved with his family from another state and began looking for head principal positions in his new district.

When I was looking at different school systems and where they had openings, I found (school name) as one that was vacant, and my review (of the school) convinced me that they were already doing a lot of the work that I had my faculty doing in Georgia.

Other principal participants mentioned their experience as an assistant principal. Similar to references of teaching experience or previous head principal experience, participants considered their experiences as assistant principals. Principal Larry shared, “I was assistant principal at a neighboring school for eight years. Fit was very important to me. I like the small atmosphere. It (his current school where he serves as head principal) was similar – the demographics were very similar.”

While principal participants explained the types of experiences they’d had, the extent of experience played a role in their process as well. In general, principal participants expressed that the more professional experience they had, whether as a teacher, assistant principal, or principal, the more likely they were to consider fit in the recruitment, hiring, and placement process. Chase, a principal with more than 30 years of experience as an educator, explained in depth the volume of his experience and the way the experience deepened his understanding of himself and what type of leader he is.

The 16 years of principalship experience that I bring to the table coming here... has allowed me to be very self-actualized as a principal. I have a very good idea about where my blind spots are, what my weaknesses are, what my strengths are.

While principals often discussed the types and volume of professional experience they may bring to a head principal spot, principal participants also talked about their own personal experiences as students growing up. Principals expressed a belief that working

as a head principal in a school similar to the one in which they grew up might be a better fit than working in a different and unfamiliar environment. The professional and personal experiences of the principals were consistently a topic of consideration and reflection during the process of deciding on the pursuit or acceptance of head principal vacancies.

While principal participants regularly demonstrated a reflection on their own experiences, district personnel similarly valued a principal candidate's experience. For district personnel, however, their consideration of a candidate's experience focused mostly on an applicant's professional experience, specifically the extent of experience in school administration. Dan shared the effect candidates' experience in leadership had on the decision making process around the placement of a high school head principal.

It more comes from what experiences they had. We've just filled a high school vacancy. There were two finalists – the middle school principal who got it and a principal of a smaller (school). They have nine teachers on that staff. It's a huge step.

Similarly, Kyle shared the way an applicant's inexperience could influence the decision making process when placing new head principals.

They have to be a principal at some point for the first time. There are challenges to being a first time principal that have nothing to do with what kind of school it is. So we try to look at that...Where will a person most likely be successful?

Because the school will have the greater likelihood of success as well.

The data collected indicated that both principals and district personnel responsible for hiring and placing them consistently consider an applicant's experiences and what they may bring to the role of principal when making decisions about vacancies.

Traits and Leadership Style

In addition to professional and personal experiences, principal participants regularly spoke in depth about what they knew of themselves – their personality, character traits, and style of leadership. Principal Aaron stated, “I felt like my personality was going to lend itself well to this situation.” Principal Steve, who was in his first year as head principal of a high-functioning, suburban elementary school with high community involvement and experienced, capable teachers shared, “I certainly didn't feel like I needed to come in and put fires out or make huge changes at all, which isn't my style, and that is probably a big part of that fit that (superintendent) saw.” In general, principal participants appeared to give careful consideration to what they knew of themselves as people and as educators and reflected on themselves in the context of a potential head principal position. Most defined this match, or fit, similar to Madeline when she asked herself, prior to pursuing a position, “what are my personality traits as compared to what are the specific needs of the population?” While principal applicants generally considered personality and leadership traits, one also expressed a perceived fit with a placement because of his race. Larry stated that he likes “some of the challenges of students who are minorities needing to see a minority leader. I think that’s important to me.”

While principal participants demonstrated an awareness of their own individual traits and leadership styles the effect those may have on the fit between themselves and a school, district personnel also expressed that a principal candidate’s individual skill sets and characteristics were relevant and warranted attention in this process. When identifying potential principals for a vacant head principal position, district participants

shared that understanding who an applicant was and what they could bring to the position beyond just their experiences was important to reflect on and understand. Dan shared, “it’s about how your personality, your skill set has to match with what the school needs.” Abby explained assessing a potential leader’s style when trying to find a principal to maximize the output of a given school. “Then fit means I need a leader who can take them where they are without destroying the people and the programs but push them to the next level. And that kind of is a personality kind of thing.”

Identifying Traits and Leadership Style

While candidates often gave considerable thought to what type of leader they are and what experience they had, principal participants also stated that a detailed process for identifying head principal candidates may be a useful platform to communicate who they are and what they could bring to specific schools. For example, in Craven School District, assistant principals are placed into one of three “tiers” based on job performance and a screening program which includes responding to common situations head principals could encounter. Assistant principals may move through the tiers, with tier 3 being the step just prior to appointment as a head principal. Raser School District operated a two-year program for assistant principals that provided individualized professional development meant to grow future head principals. Marilyn described the identification process in her district and its advantages when finding qualified, prepared candidates.

When (the superintendent) came, she started this scaffolding for assistant principals to determine who was the most prepared and ready for that and I went through some of that. I mean, you had to show interest in that to do that. It’s

some initial assessments and then based on that they would determine what kind of professional development would help you fill gaps. It did develop for the district a pool of candidates who they felt like were ready based on the assessments and people's opinion of them and recommendations and that kind of thing.

Principal William described the two-year process his district used to identify principal candidates.

That program itself is meant to be for preparation, however...they are trying to determine the best fit. They mention that all the time. When we have interviews with different individuals – they're trying to identify what our strengths and styles and personalities are.

Principal participants regularly stated a belief that not only were identification programs used by districts to spot potential head principals functioning as a growth process, the programs were also used by district personnel for identification of a candidate's strengths when matching a leader with a school. These processes allowed principal candidates to demonstrate general capacity for school leadership but were also opportunities to exhibit specific strengths to decision makers at the district level.

While district personnel are on the opposite side of the equation, seeking the best person to fill an open head principal position, many of the things they consider in this process are similar to those considered by the applicants themselves. Two sites in the study – Craven School District and Raser School District – have internal internship programs meant to prepare future leaders – most often current assistant principals – for the principalship. District participants viewed these programs as a way of assessing

applicants, getting to know their strengths and weaknesses as potential leaders. This information is then used throughout the process of tapping potential head principals. Abby explained her district's internship program and its usefulness in assessing a candidate for head principal.

We actually have an internal program called the Assistant Principal Institute. So people have to interview and be selected for that program. Then it's not a guarantee that you would get a principalship, but it is an opportunity for district level people to interface with those people more regularly, to get to know them. District participant Alan shared the district's internship program was a valuable part of principal readiness.

Well, we are out in the schools. We probably spend 70% to 80% of our time out in the schools with principals and assistant principals. So we get to know them. That's probably the most important way. We also do have a formal interview process one time each year where all of the prospective principal interns who are in that principal internship come in and they are then interviewed yearly to determine the level of readiness for a principalship.

Both district participants and principal participants viewed principal preparation and identification programs run by the district as an opportunity to assess candidates' strengths. Both groups gave significant consideration to the applicants for head principal jobs and what they could potentially bring to a head principal position.

In addition to principal preparation programs provided by districts, principal participants discussed using the interview process as a way of communicating their perceived strengths and interests regarding vacant head principal positions. While there

was little to no data suggesting that principal applicants communicated explicitly their perceptions about fit regarding specific head principal positions to district personnel, 30% of principal participants indicated that they attempted to communicate in less direct ways in the interview process about what schools they thought they would be the most successful in based on what they knew of themselves as a school leader – their leadership style, temperament, and personality. This was particularly true when principal applicants were presented with multiple principal vacancies at once. Participants discussed they investigated the schools with open head principal positions and attempt to sell themselves as a strong candidate for a particular setting. Principal William stated, “in the interview I really answered all questions pointed toward as the principal of one particular school. I wanted to make it clear that I was the best candidate for that school. However, I’m open to both.” Principal Chase, rather than attempting to steer district decision makers in a particular direction, indicated he felt like transparency in an interview ensured that the best fit between himself and a particular head principal position could be achieved.

And I think that the more transparent you can be in the interview process about your thoughts as a candidate and you relate to the candidate and you share those things openly, the better fit can be, you know, can come out as a result of that. So I was just very relaxed and very transparent in the interview process, and I think that played into the decision on the school system’s side.

The idea that participants in the study reflected on strategies for communicating their traits and styles indicates a certain interest in and reflection on themselves as a school leader.

While principal participants often viewed the interview process as an opportunity to share, express, and even persuade district personnel about their own ideas regarding potential fit with open principal positions, district participants also placed value on the process of interviewing potential candidates. However, principal participants and district participants seemed to view the process in slightly different ways. District personnel viewed the process of interviewing candidates for head principal positions as an opportunity to collect detailed and sophisticated data on the principal candidates, often tailoring questions specifically for each candidate based on what they may know of the candidate already. Dan described the process for developing interview questions.

We do two rounds of interviews. The goal of the first is to select two or three finalists. Then they go to a final round. That's where some of that fit comes in. In the first round, we write the interview questions right there. So we don't have a preset list of questions we use every first round because we're looking for what is the school looking for.

Dan went on to describe the process they used to assess what type of environment or school a potential head principal may be the most successful in based the applicant's assessment of certain situations.

A lot of the assessment piece comes from how you respond to situations. We give them ten scenarios. They have to list one of 4 quadrants – important and urgent, not important but urgent, urgent but not important, or not important and not urgent. How you categorize that is going to be solely dependent on your school. So high needs, high poverty schools, what's urgent to them is going to look much different than an upper class school.

This process allows district officials not only to make determinations about a candidate's readiness for the role of head principal but also what type of environment they may be a natural fit for based on what they instinctively prioritize.

While district personnel consistently used the interview to assess principal candidates' strengths, weaknesses, and personality, they also used this process to determine if the principal candidate had any preferences for placement. While principal participants discussed using the interview process to express, often indirectly, their own ideas about which school they may best fit, district participants also saw the interview process as an opportunity to learn about a principal candidate's own view of fit. Lindsey shared her district's practice of using the interview process to assess a candidate's interests.

One of the things that we give them is an opportunity to share with us was where they would like to be placed. If they had their dream school, where would they like to be placed? And that's really probably the most telling part because that's where people are pretty much honest. So that conversation, when they express preferences, that leads to a further conversation.

Abby explained the advantages of working to determine a principal candidate's interests.

For example, we have some candidates who might be interested in schools but they don't express interest in a Title 1 school. So, do you or should you coerce people to go to something they didn't actually apply to? You spend so much of your life at your school if you're a principal. So to me it's important that the person feels good about where they're going as well and that they are willing to work with a component of kids and the parents. I think that's a critical thing.

Both principal participants and district participants discussed that understanding a candidate's interests in certain types of schools or specific schools was part of their practice during the process of filling a vacant head principal position. Each group of participants, however, differed on whether or not these interests should be a determining factor in accepting an offered head principal spot. While principal applicants commonly believed that it is politically wise to apply for and accept any opportunities independent of their interest in the school, district personnel viewed this differently. District officials believed that applicants should only seek out opportunities they are interested in and where they see themselves as being successful. Kyle stated the expectation for principal candidates only pursuing open positions in which they were interested.

I would expect you to know (your interest) before you applied for the job and know what kind of school it is. People get all the way to the finals and they say well, you know, I don't really want to be in this kind of school. Well, that's irritating to me. You wasted your time. If you don't want to work in one, well don't put your name into that one. That's not getting you a positive look.

Data collected suggested that both principal participants and district participants responsible for hiring head principals both valued the interview process as a way of expressing and collecting data on principal candidates with the common goal of getting the right person in the right position.

Succession

As applicants to head principal positions processed their own perceived strengths and weaknesses, they referenced the idea of principal succession, or the process by which one head principal replaces another. As principal applicants considered the likelihood of

success in certain situations, they shared that these reflections often involved the principal they may be replacing. Principal William shared that he knew the school with a head principal vacancy had an issue with a toxic culture. When asked if he felt like he was chosen because he had the characteristics of a leader needed to change the school culture, he responded, “absolutely – that’s why I was put here. I know. I was in stark contrast to the way it was before.” Similarly, Principal Aaron considered the issue of succession from a different point of view. He knew the school where he is now principal was a high-functioning school with a positive school culture. While he also considered the idea of succession, he believed his leadership style and experience (he was an assistant principal at a feeder school) made him a strong candidate for the open position and perceived that he could be successful as the head principal.

The principal that was here before me was at the school since 1999...By no means was it a school in crisis or anything like that. It was actually – it was doing very well. They weren’t looking for any kind of major overhaul or changes. I felt that my personality was going to lend itself to this specific situation. As I was doing my research and studying about the school itself, I felt much more confident that I would be the right fit for the job.

While many factors played into the process for principal applicants to seek out or apply for certain positions, one factor seemed to be the preceding principal and what the applicants felt that they could bring to the situation in relation to the outgoing principal.

Similarly, district participants in the study regularly referenced principal succession – examining the head principal who was leaving a post when thinking about the best candidate to fill the role. Dan shared that when considerations were made

regarding the placement of a head principal, the team of decision makers in his district considered whether “we need to continue it or change it”, referring to the leadership provided by the principal at the school. It can be a special challenge for district leaders who attempt to replace a principal who was successful and popular. Dan went on to explain this challenge in detail.

The principal who was loved left to go open a brand new school. So the other principal came in, struggled. So this principal who opened this school just retired this year. So we had to really think about when we replaced that principal, the person who follows them. What characteristics does this person bring in right behind her and is that going to be the same path or have we set this person up for success?

District official Abby stated, “in my world, succession planning is a big deal. You know that’s just something you do. We might have done it in our minds, but we’ve been more proactive in doing it in the last two or three years.”

Often timing is a factor – what a school needs or demands in a leader at one point in time could be different from what it may need at another point, and those current needs could be a reflection of the outgoing principal. Kyle stated, “it’s also got to be a fit for what I know is needed in the school at the time, which has a lot to do with who left the school and under what circumstances they left.” Kyle went on to discuss the role the outgoing principal played in the placement process.

What do they need?... It’s likely that you don’t need somebody to follow that’s strong in the same areas. All of us have certain strengths, and we have certain weaknesses. Whoever takes my place, at whatever point that is, really needs to be

strong in some of the things I'm not all that strong in or don't spend time on because those will be the things that will need the most improvement. The same thing would be true in a school.

Both principal applicants and district leaders considered the idea of principal succession, examining who had led the school most recently and the effect that principal's leadership had on the placement process.

Transferability and Movement

When considering what a principal candidate brings to a situation – their experiences, traits, characteristics, and styles – district and principal participants in the study also discussed whether principals can be equally successful in any school environment or whether their experiences and traits may be more or less successful depending on the school. All participants were asked whether principal candidates who are effective school leaders could be successful in any environment or whether the school impacted a principal's success. Principal participants (30%) were relatively certain that good, effective principals could be successful independent of the environment. Principal Vivian, stated, “a good principal can be successful in any type of school. Yep, if you're good – it depends on how you define good. A good principal can lead any school.” Principal Aaron shared his thoughts, describing a great principal as one who is able to build relationships with different types of people and communities.

I think that there are great principals, that there's no question they have the make-up and the characteristics of being a great principal. Which means all the qualities that go with that including building those relationships and bridges with others that would have the ability to be successful at any school.

Madeline summed up this idea by sharing, “I think a good principal is a good principal. No matter where you put them they are going to be effective. I think if you’re a well-rounded individual then you’ll make any situation work.”

While 30% of principal participants expressed certainty that good principals can be effective and find success in any situation, 70% of participants were less sure. Those principal participants in this study expressed that, generally, the match between a principal and a school was relevant and could impact the success of the principal, though in varying ways. For them, there was a difference between being a good principal and being a great one. The data showed that these principals believed that being great requires something more than just a set of basic leadership skills and abilities. Principal Karen described this difference.

I think effective – there is a range of effective. So if you are a good leader you could go in and lead any school, but to really impact what might be the needs of a specific school I think that takes something special. It takes fit.

Principal Alyssa shared a similar sentiment when she stated, “I think that a good principal could be successful, but there is a difference between just being successful and being dynamite.” For Chase, the question was not whether a good principal could be successful in any environment but rather what effect a perceived bad match could have on the applicant.

A good principal can be successful in any type of school, but they may not be comfortable. There are certain practices that can be put in place over time at any school with the proper leadership that will in fact improve that school. But, like I

said, they may not be comfortable doing it there, and the people may not be comfortable having him do it there.

Other principals were even more skeptical, sharing that they felt like some principals have the skills and talent to be equally successful while others do not. William shared this sentiment.

I think that some people would be great principals at some schools that would not be successful at other schools, but I think there is a percentage of leaders out there that may be phenomenal principals anywhere they go, but I don't think that's for everybody.

While 30% of principal participants in the study agreed, to varying degrees, that principals who are good, effective, and talented can find some level of success independent of the environment in which they're placed, 70% expressed that the degree of success – often making distinctions between a good principal versus a great one – can be effected by the match between the person and the environment. While the learning curve can be steeper when a match is poor, and while principals can often overcome the obstacles associated with a poor match between themselves and the school, the length of time it requires to bridge this divide can be costly. Principal Marilyn discussed this idea.

I think if you're a good principal you can get there. I think what would matter would be the learning curve and the time that it takes and because our commodity, if you will, is so perishable, I think that's why it goes back to fit.

Understanding what principal participants believed about the consequences of good and bad fit between a principal and a school may provide a frame of reference for

understanding their perceptions about the role fit played in their own decision making around pursuing or accepting head principal positions.

Understanding the ways district personnel, responsible for hiring school principals, viewed this concept may also provide a blueprint examining specific candidates for head principal openings. Data collected from this study indicated that district personnel viewed the idea that a principal can be equally successful in any school environment in varying ways. These data mirrored the data collected from principal participants around the same topic. District participants expressed a belief that certain principals could find equal levels of success in different school settings. However, the length of time required to move from good to great could take longer if the fit between the principal and the school was poor. Lindsey stated, “a good principal can be successful in any setting. I think they can. It may take more work in some settings because they’re going to have to build trust, which may take more time depending on the person.” For Abby, whether or not a principal can be successful in a given setting is dependent on whether or not the school has imminent needs and demands, such as a substantial decrease in student achievement or a critical need for an improved school culture. For schools that have a less immediate need, the likelihood that any principal can be successful is higher, according to the respondent. Abby described her belief that schools with urgent demands may require a specific type of leader to grow.

I believe that a good principal can be successful in any school setting most of the time. Because this is where I would say that might not be true. If they’re coming into a bad situation, you know a situation that we’ve had some issues with the principal. If there’s been a huge issue with climate. There’s been something

that's been very negative. Then you have to be very careful to understand the person, the personality of that person, because you're really not just dealing with running the school. You're dealing with adversity when you come in.

Dan further explained this concept.

I think some can (be successful in any school). I think it takes a certain skill set to hone it. So there's a lot of segregation, a lot of high-needs schools, a lot of low-needs schools, and some in between. Leadership is leadership, but there's so much more that goes into the community involvement and the instruction and the focus. If you look at principals, as I'm thinking through them, I'm not sure. I'd say some could do it – maybe just about half, but I think the majority couldn't.

For the majority of the district personnel who participated, whether or not a person was successful in a situation as the school principal was dependent on the applicant themselves. Linda expressed her belief that success depends on the candidate, at least in part.

I think it depends on the person. I think you have certain principals that no matter where we place them, they would be superstars and move those schools forward.

For others, I believe that one particular school may not be as good a fit as another and they could possibly struggle at one or the other.

Understanding what district personnel responsible for hiring and placing head principals believe about the relevance of a principal applicant's leadership traits and experience can provide a guide for examining more specific data about their experiences recruiting, hiring, and placing head principals.

While district officials consider elements of a candidate when initially placing them in head principal positions, considerations about a candidate's strengths, weaknesses, and experiences may also be examined if a principal fails to succeed in a given school as head principal. District leader Kyle shared, "if you can't handle the leadership and the responsibility of being a principal, the only way for you to go is a downward move, not a lateral or upward move." However, most districts gave consideration to a principal's placement and often provided an opportunity for the principal to serve in another type of school, hoping for a more successful match. Alan stated, "it just may be a matter of placement. So on a few occasions, principals have been transferred to a different location to give them another opportunity." Dan shared that a principal who struggled in a suburban school thrived when moved to an urban setting.

We had one a couple of years ago that, she was a principal of a suburban school, wasn't doing well, moved to an inner city school and is probably one of our best principals. That principal was almost lost because the community wanted to crucify her and a lot more had to do with the succession of who she followed and she was so different from that person. That's kind of what killed her, but then went to this other school and turned it around and legislators come to visit the school.

Understanding what a principal applicant may bring to a vacant head principal position can help guide district personnel and applicants themselves as they all seek to find the best match between the individual and the environment.

The School

While data indicated that both principal applicants and district officials looked at many aspects of the applicants for head principal positions, consideration of principal applicants is only half of the equation when thinking about the match or connection between a principal candidate and the school they may lead. Participants in the study also demonstrated an interest in considering the environment – in this case, the needs and demands, strengths, and opportunities of the school looking for a new leader.

Familiarity with School

Generally, principal participants expressed a consistent interest in the type of school they may potentially lead. This was expressed in a variety of ways and affected the application and interview process. For most principal participants, understanding the school they were applying for was important. For some, this information came as a result of diligent research and fact gathering on the school, particularly if it was a school that was unfamiliar to them. Principal Larry stated, “so my process was, once I committed to the interview, I would do complete research on the school.” Principal Chase shared his process for researching the school in advance of interviewing for the head principal position.

I knew what I was seeing on the website. I knew that (school name) is a great school, but it’s a school that does have its problems. I knew there were things that needed to be changed here. Did I have a full understanding of what I was walking into? Probably not. But I felt like I could walk in here and have at least that much of the picture already taken care of. Just the tone of the information that

was on the website made me think that it would be a real easy step to make to come over here and provide leadership here if I was given the opportunity. Marilyn, when describing her school, stated that she “knew a lot about the school” because she had friends whose children had attended in the past. She went on to relate her familiarity with the school due to a past professional experience.

So one of the things that made me a good fit was my first school was also a school of resources. So I understood those parents and I know I said that in the interview. They asked me a lot of questions about parents, and I kind of understood why.

Larry went on to describe his attraction to his current school by saying, “I was assistant principal at a neighboring school for eight years. I sort of like the small atmosphere of a family school”.

While some principal participants looked for schools that were familiar and comfortable to them in some way, other participants went further, sharing that they looked for opportunities to work as a head principal in specific schools. There is little data from this study to suggest, however, that an interest in a specific school was communicated to district personnel specifically. While applicants to open head principal positions used the interview process to communicate, often implicitly, a sense that they had qualities that matched a certain school or situation better than another, there is no evidence they named a specific school, even if they felt a connection to, interest in, or familiarity with a specific school. Familiarity or interest in specific schools, however, did seem to be something principal participants reflected on in the hiring and placement process, particularly if a familiar school had a vacant head principal position. When

principal participants shared they harbored an unexpressed interest not just in a type of school but in a specific school, the reasons for their interest were varied. Often, principal participants expressed an interest in leading a specific school, not because they felt like their professional experience or personal characteristics indicated possible success but because they had a personal connection to the school. For some, the personal connection existed because they went to the school as a student themselves. For others, the interest existed because family members attended the school in the past or, for some, family members were students currently at the school. William described his interest in the school where he is now head principal by stating, “I went to school here and my mom went to school here. My parents still live in the area and a lot of roots in the city here. So that was a perfect fit.” William went on to describe other connections to the school that influenced his interest in becoming principal there.

I taught there for 6 years and knew a number of the faculty. I was well liked there. When interviewing, I already knew the population. I live in the area. My niece and nephew went to the school. It was just stuff like that. I know the community because I worked there for six years. I felt like I was a good fit for the school.

Sometimes the interest in a specific school was simply a factor of location. Living near the school for Principal Aaron was very relevant and important.

One factor was certainly the location, simply because that’s where I lived.

(District name) is a large district, so therefore it depended on what school became available and it could have been close to an hour drive for me, depending on what school became available. This one, of course, was right in the community close

to my house. It could allow me to spend the time at school but also be with my family for certain events.

District participants in the study also discussed an interest in a candidate's familiarity with a school. For these participants, however, they focused more on the research candidates had done – what they had learned or knew about the school and the process by which they learned it. District personnel often referenced this as a priority. They expressed a desire to find principal applicants who were already familiar in some way with the school and/or community where they may eventually serve as head principal. Lindsey spoke about this idea.

So to me, part of this fit is the candidate's understanding of the schools. So if you come in, and we have 98 schools, if you're even coming in from the outside, how much homework a candidate does is important, too. Because they can look at test scores. They can look at all those things on the website. I would want us to talk about what we could do to improve some of the things they see.

Kyle, in the same district as Lindsey, expressed a similar interest in understanding what candidates know about the schools they are applying to lead.

I want to know what they know about the school. What can you reasonably find out about the school? I would certainly expect (the applicant) to have done some homework and what can you tell me about it? What do you see as the deficits?

While they approached the concept of school familiarity from different points of view, all participants in the study demonstrated a reflection and focus on the candidate's understanding of the school as a relevant factor in the process of hiring and placing head principals.

School Needs and Demands

When principal participants in the study reflected on a school with a vacant head principal position, they considered elements of the school in the context of their own experiences and possible familiarity with the specific school or type of school.

Understanding the needs and demands of the school ensures a good match between the school and the strengths and characteristics of the incoming principal. District personnel are responsible for hiring and placing the principal who is the best match. While principal participants did not consistently express an interest in understanding the demands of a school where the head principal position is vacant, district participants indicated that understanding the demands of the school when looking for a head principal was crucial. This may be due in part to the fact that district officials often have access to data and other information about the needs and demands of a school that principal applicants do not.

Dan described their interview process and the way that process was used to carefully align a principal with the known demands of the school. This district's process has two main phases. While the first phase is meant to determine whether candidates have the basic skills required to lead a school, the second phase is designed to examine if a candidate can meet the demands of specific schools. As the district participant stated, they ask candidates school-specific questions because "we're looking for what is the school looking for". He went on to say, "it's about how your personality, your skill set has to match with what the school needs".

District participants in the study consistently described understanding the needs and demands of a given school when seeking to appoint a new head principal as relevant

and important. Abby considered the focus on understanding the demands of schools by all district officials who participated in recruiting, hiring, and placing head principals. She shared that, “leadership at the district level should know what they need.” Kyle explained that understanding the demands of the school was required for his part in the hiring and placement process when he stated, “it’s got to be a good fit for what I know is needed in the school at the time”.

Understanding the needs and demands of a school is a crucial part of placing the right person in the head principal role from the point of view of the district participants responsible for making these decisions. Dan described that an understanding of the demands of the school affected the interview process as different candidates were considered. “Central Office is also there to say, here’s kind of what we see some of your needs as. So we write our questions around that. That conversation’s happening so when you’re interviewing everybody knows what we’re looking for.”

What a given school needs, however, can be fluid. Schools do not necessarily have consistent demands over time. More likely, the needs and demands of a school will change over time. District participants in the study expressed consistently that understanding the demands of a given school meant understanding the demands of the school at the time a new head principal is being chosen. Abby noted that timing and understanding the needs and demands of the school at that moment in time played into decision making of head principal hiring and placement.

So at that moment in time, who you hire for that job is very much impacted fit wise by what the school needs at that moment. So I think fit depends on timing. It depends on the strengths of the school. And then part of our job is, if we

believe a school is not where it should be, fit means I need a leader who can take them where are and push them to the next level without destroying the people and the programs, a leader who can play to the strengths but raise expectations.

For district participants in the study, understanding the needs and demands of a school was expressed as a requirement and responsibility. Knowledge of what the school's demands were at the moment the school's head principal position was vacant was important. Finding the right leader for that moment in time requires that district officials be in tune with the needs and demands of a school. Without this information, finding the right person to fill the head principal position was noticeably more difficult and less likely to be successful.

School Size

Principal participants expressed interest in different types of schools where they felt they could be successful. They also stated an interest in specific schools where familiarity and experience indicated the potential for a positive fit and successful tenure as head principal. While principal participants communicated an attention to the type of school they were interested in leading, they also discussed the issue of school size. Participants described specific leadership qualities that were required to lead a larger school that may be less important for head principals of a smaller school. One trait principal participants felt was necessary to lead a larger school is organization. By definition, larger schools are bigger operations with many more moving parts and more people than smaller schools. Operating on this scale required, according to principal participants, a certain level of structure and organization for a head principal to succeed.

Vivian shared her experience as the head principal of a larger school and the effect the school's size had on her thinking.

A small school, even though it has some pros and cons when it comes to scheduling and all of that, I think it's much easier. It's much easier. I've got a big school now and it keeps me hopping. So you've got to be able to handle that and multi-task and you've got to be good – that's the part where a strong manager needs to come in. You have to take that into consideration.

Chase shared, “obviously at a larger school you have to give more thought to the organization – the management side of it, because you're dealing with more people.”

Aaron connected the school's size to trust and the ability of the principal to delegate and release responsibilities to others.

You have to be willing and more willing to trust, I think, the larger you get in the school size, just simply because there's going to be more personnel. To be able to work with your admin team, with your leaders in all different grade levels, and be able to work many times through them. Ultimately, (you must) trust that work is going to be completed at a high level.

Steve shared his thoughts on building a sense of community in a larger school. “I think the larger the school, the more difficult to build community. That's not something I'm having to build here.”

While principal participants in the study expressed an understanding of the size of the school they may serve as head principal, as well as the personality and leadership traits necessary to lead a large school, district participants also gave consideration to the needs of a large school when looking to place the head principal. Data from the study,

however, suggested that district leaders do not have a consensus on whether school size matters significantly when placing head principals. Similarly to principal participants, district participants expressed a belief that head principals of large schools must have strong organizational and management skills to be successful. Dan described the process of filling the head principal at a large high school in his district.

We've just filled a high school vacancy. There were two finalists – the middle school principal who got it and a principal of a smaller – our early college. They have nine teachers on that staff. The high school has 90 teachers. So part of it was, does she really know how much that scope is getting reading to grow? That wasn't the only deciding factor by any means, but it was part of the discussion – it's a huge step.

For other district participants, however, size played a smaller role in placing the head principal. This was a difference from data collected from principal participants.

Principals gave consideration to the size of the school before applying to an open head principal position and verbalized specific traits, such as organization and trust, which the leader of a large school should possess. For district leaders, size was less of a focus, even if the candidate for the head principal of a large school brought little to no head principal experience to the role. Abby explained the role that school sized played in their placement process for principals.

We talk about that (school size) a lot, you know, when we're sitting around the table. But if the person has demonstrated to us internally, or has references externally, their abilities and how they've been successful, it wouldn't keep us

from putting someone brand new into a 1,300 kid school. So I think I can't say that size alone is a factor.

While district participants gave consideration to the size of the school, other district participants simply expressed that the size of the school was completely irrelevant and not a part of the process for recruiting, hiring, or placing head principals at all. Kyle, when asked to what degree the size of the school was considered, stated, "we've probably talked about that a little bit. That's not been an overriding discussion." While principal participants demonstrated an interest in the size of the school when considering open head principal positions, district participants appeared to give the size of the school much less weight when making placement decisions.

The Relationships

Both groups of participants in the study – principal participants and district participants – discussed at length the importance of assessing both applicants for head principal positions and the schools they may eventually lead. A final theme discussed by both groups was relationships that were important and relevant when making decisions on filling head principal positions.

Building Relationships

Principal participants in the study regularly expressed that being able to build relationships with a school's community is a necessary element of a successful experience as the school's principal. Principal participants shared consistently that they considered these relationships when analyzing and deciding whether to pursue a specific head principal position. Larry shared, "for a principal to be successful, ... (they must) go in and build trusting relationships with the stakeholders – parents, the staff certainly."

Consistently, principal participants went into great detail about the necessity of building strong relationships with a school's parents and community members. If building these relationships seemed impossible or challenging, principals did not perceive that a successful tenure as head principal was possible at that school. Larry went on to expand on the importance of relationship building.

I don't think it's based on anything other than the person's willingness to go in to whatever atmosphere and accept people where they are and then be willing to work with them and have them accept you for who you are and not try to come in and radicalize or change anybody.

Principal participants in the study consistently communicated, whether working with students and families from upper middle class backgrounds or families struggling financially, that the ability to connect with those they serve was relevant and important. When principal participants detected a strong possibility of connecting with a community, they again brought that information to the interview process. Just as principals shared that they used the interview process to communicate interest in a certain school or type of school, convincing the decision makers in the district that they had the interest and ability to build necessary relationships with a school's students, families, and community members was often a goal in the interview process. One principal participant shared his experience with communicating the importance of relationship building and his potential to build those relationships at a school with a vacant head principal position. Aaron went on to describe his process for communicating his sense that he was the right person to build relationships in the school he now leads in the interview process.

I wanted a chance to start building those relationships over the summer, even before the school year started. I think that certainly helped in my communication during the interview process.

Principal participants expressed that it was important to communicate to district officials when they believed they had the potential to build those important working relationship with stakeholders in the school.

Just as principal participants in the study expressed the importance of building relationships with stakeholders associated with a given school when contemplating pursuing a head principal position, district participants responsible for hiring and placing principals in their districts also regularly stated the relevance of relationship building. Data suggested that district personnel not only gave thought to whether or not an applicant for an open head principal position could work with the school's community, but their perception about whether or not a candidate could build relationships was a major factor in their decision making. Dan shared one of the traits that all principals should have to be successful. "I think for me, it's people skills, being able to navigate people. You have to be able to adapt and say in this situation this way to these people. You can't do it alone." Linda agreed that decision makers in her district consider a candidate's ability to build relationships with a particular school community when making head principal placement decisions.

We have some schools that have high Hispanic populations. Not that the principal has to speak Spanish, but that would be a plus. We have schools that are very challenging. So you look for people that you think can communicate and

collaborate and work with the surrounding community that the particular school is in.

Ultimately, district participants consistently were focused on finding candidates for head principal positions that they felt could build a strong professional relationship with community members, staff, and students. District participants stated a belief that, in addition to relationships with parents, community members, and students, they also believed that a principal must build relationships with the teachers and staff at the school. Kyle shared that officials making hiring and placement decisions considered the ability of candidates to build these crucial relationships when reflecting on a candidate's validity for an open principal position.

By the time they (principal candidates) get to me I'm taking into account what the committee said but also what I know the school needs. It's the fit, just from the perspective of fitting in with that community and fitting in with the leadership and teaching faculty in the school.

For district participants, understanding the ability of a principal to build working relationships with the stakeholders at the school was critical because the success of the principal and, by extension, the success of the entire school depended on whether or not the head principal could bring others into their vision and build a working team out of the other people associated with the school. Kyle, whose role was to make final placement decisions about principal placements, went on to discuss the importance of building relationships with the community, independent of the type of community the school serves.

These characteristics are going to be true. It doesn't matter whether this is a rural community, an urban, suburban – you can draw this across any of these. The answer to it is the key to whether you can be effective or not. Can you effectively communicate with the members of that community in such a way that they feel comfortable dealing with you? And that they have respect for you but do not feel that you are above them or beneath them. It doesn't matter which one it is. If you can do that then you can be successful in all of them.

District participants perceived that building relationships is a transferrable skill. For them, people who can build relationships with stakeholders could do it in any environment or situation. For other district participants responsible for principal placement, building relationships with the community and school personnel may require different skills depending on the community and the school. This was discussed in detail by Kyle.

If you only have that ability (to build relationships) with a certain group of people, then you're probably only going to be successful with that group of people – urban, rural, whatever. You might be very good at talking with people that are much less educated than you are, but you do it in such a way that you are overpowering them or they believe you're arrogant or that you're throwing it in their face.

The ability to connect with people, bond with them, and build effective working relationships, for district participants in the study, was extremely valuable and indicative of success. Without these relationships, schools and principals could not function effectively. Kyle further communicated the importance of these relationships.

We are in a relationship business. That's what the whole thing is about. You have to know your business. You have to be knowledgeable about your business and you have to effectively communicate your business, but you have to be able to relate to and get along with these people.

Making matches between principals and communities where relationships can be built and maintained is a major focus of the work for many district applicants in the study. As district participant Alan, stated, when discussing what they look for in principal candidates, "well, you know, I think overall leadership traits would begin with the ability to build relationships with others."

For participants in the study, the ability of a principal to build relationships with those associated with a school was a factor in determining their potential fit. Building those relationships often was influenced by whether or not the principal candidate had previous experience with the community the school served.

Community Experience

For many principals who participated, building relationships with the community was expedited and easier if their personal background was similar to the community they hoped to serve as head principal. Chase shared his own background, which enabled him to relate to his students and community, as well as the importance of that when assessing which type of school to lead.

I get significant meaning in my work the more demographically challenging the student body is. I feel like I'm the product of blue-collar parents, you know. I'm the first one in my family to go to college. So I am more comfortable the more diverse student body you give me. I think that I can bring more to the table and

have greater influence with my kids and their families if there is probably a greater sense of poverty and need.

Being able to relate to the students, parents, community members, and teachers, according to principal participants, makes it more likely that these necessary relationships can be developed. Not only did principal participants feel more comfortable working and serving communities similar to ones they experienced in their own lives, they anticipated that students and community members might feel more comfortable working with principals who had experience with their community or type of community. The data suggested this was true independent of the needs and socio-economic status of the community. While principal participants understood building relationships with students and families from lower socio-economic backgrounds, similarly other participants shared that growing up in a community with resources and means made it easier to build relationships with students and families associated with schools that serve upper middle class families. Principal Marilyn described the way her own background helped in facilitating relationship building with the parents of her students.

So I understood high maintenance parents. I mean that in the most loving way.

So I understood those parents and I said so in the interview. They asked me a lot of questions about parents and I kind of understood why. I just said I'm one of those people. I was one of those high maintenance parents to some degree.

Having similar backgrounds, as a student or as an adult, eases the process of building strong relationships with students and parents, according to principal participants in the study.

Other principal participants, however, expressed an interest in working with students and families who were quite different from themselves. For these principals, it was an additional challenge relating to and working with students and families, but the process of building these relationships seemed to be a draw when considering where to pursue the head principalship. Principal Karen described her experience of student teaching in an affluent community but finding herself drawn to students and families much different than that.

In my student teaching experience, I learned what type of student I felt most connected to. I student taught in (community name). I was not connected to that kind of kid. It's a small town, but it's very much white, affluent, educated. It just wasn't where my connection was. I aligned with some of the more needy kids in that community. Then I taught in (community name), which is very impoverished, very brown, and that's where I realized that was my passion.

For district personnel responsible for placing principals, getting people in the right role where they can effectively build relationships was a major part of their work. If a principal was placed in a school where relationship building was difficult or impossible, finding success could be more challenging or even impossible to achieve. Kyle shared his perception that this is understood and valued not only by district personnel but by applicants to head principal positions as well.

They (applicants) would rather be, hey, I grew up in this kind of community. I know these people. These are people like me. I can deal with them. I can go over here to this community and I can do that, but I've got to be constantly

working at it. We don't want you to do that. You go over here to this community where you'll be more at home. You'll be more successful.

While participants discussed the importance of relationship building and the factors that influenced that process, district participants saw another aspect of community involvement in the process of head principal placement.

Community Input

Relationships also came into play for district participants in a different way than for principal applicants. District participants responsible for hiring and placing head principals included community members and stakeholders in the actual process of principal placement. In all three districts where data were gathered, district personnel had, as part of their principal placement process, a structure for collecting input from the community. The intention behind this is clearly stated by Lindsey when she said, “it's their school. The school belongs to the community.” District participants used community members to screen applicants for candidates that, they felt, might fit best with the school and community. These community bodies were usually comprised of teachers, other administrators, parents, and even students. For district officials, they are a crucial part of the process for identifying the right leader for a given school. Abby shared at length the make up of the school-based group used in principal placement and their role in the process.

We have school-based interview team that is made up of anywhere from 8 to 12 folks depending on the size of the school. It has a PTA representative, other community members, teacher of the year, parents, and other faculty members that are picked to give the committee diversity. Then we bring in 4 to 6 candidates for

each school team. Our superintendent speaks to them about the importance of their role. Their job is identify 2 or 3 candidates that they believe fit their school culture.

The superintendent in this same district, Kyle, further explained the process, its importance, and his role in supporting the work of the school-based committee.

I always go down and talk with that school level committee, to tell them how important their role is, to get a little feedback from them about the process. We believe at the end of the process that we have gotten the person that has the qualities and the qualifications and is the best fit for the job. By the time they get to that school-based committee, that's really what they're looking for.

For district participants, getting input from the community is necessary for several reasons. Community members and stakeholders will often see the candidates from a different point of view. Community members and school staff will often also have a more detailed understanding of the needs of the school than a district person may. Finally, including community members and school staff in the decision making process may increase the likelihood that these stakeholders accept and embrace the new principal once the district leadership makes a final placement decision. As previously stated, the ability of the new principal to build these relationships is critical for the success of the principal and the school in general.

Summary of Findings

This study examined the degree to which a fit between a candidate for a vacant head principal position and the school they may lead was a consideration for hiring or placement on the part of district personnel charged with appointing head principals. Data

were also collected on the extent to which principals considered the potential fit between themselves and the school they may lead during the process of pursuing or accepting a head principal position. The data were analyzed through the lens of Person-Environment Fit Theory, which states that a perceived negative fit between an individual and their environment will have negative consequences for the individual, including dissatisfaction with the situation.

Findings on Research Question 1

This section will discuss findings for research question 1: to what extent do principal candidates consider fit when making decisions regarding which principal positions to pursue and/or accept? In this section, I will address findings gleaned from the perceptions of principals, specifically the fit between the candidate and the school, individual experiences and school type, principal succession, and the role of principal preparation programs.

Findings from this study indicated that applicants to head principal roles reflected on all aspects of the fit between themselves and the school they may lead. Prior to accepting a head principal position, candidates gave significant consideration to the types of experiences they had as educators in the past. When principals considered a school with similar demographics to a school where they had previously found success, they were more likely to predict a more positive fit than if the school was different from any previous environments. The type of school, therefore, affected the individual candidates' perceptions about the fit between themselves and the school.

Beyond the type of school, individual candidates also saw their own characteristics, traits, and styles of leadership as important variables in the process of

predicting fit with a school environment. This indicated that candidates for the role had an understanding of who they were as people and as leaders and considered those traits relevant and influential to success as a school leader. While individuals reflected on what they knew of themselves, they also believed their unique set of traits and styles mattered to district personnel who may place them. Principal candidates believed that district leaders valued innate characteristics of a school leader and focused on learning more about a potential school leader in different ways including during the candidate's participation in any district-managed preparation program.

While principals believed their own experiences and traits were relevant when seeking to match themselves with a school environment, they also reflected on building relationships with the community the school serves. This community could include parents, teachers, and staff. Principals understood the necessity of building these working relationships with adults associated with the school. Again, their own past experiences influenced their assessments. If a school was similar to a past environment where they were able to build solid relationships with a school's community, they were more likely to predict a positive fit with a school seeking a head principal and, thereby, were more apt to believe they could be successful filling the role.

Finally, principal candidates assessed the potential fit between themselves and a school with a principal vacancy in the context of the school's leadership history. The outgoing principal's tenure impacted the level of success principals believed was possible if they were named as the new principal. This indicated the process for principal placement was longitudinal in nature. Generally, data collected in this study indicated

that educators who aspire to vacant head principal positions gave considerable thought to all variables that may impact the fit between themselves and a given school environment.

Findings on Research Question 2

This section will discuss findings for research question 2: to what extent is fit a consideration on the part of hiring bodies when making decisions regarding the recruitment, hiring, and placement of head principals? In this section, I will address findings gleaned from the perceptions of district personnel, specifically the fit between a candidate and a school, principal succession, a school's needs, and the role of district-run preparation programs.

Data collected from district personnel charged with recruiting, hiring, and placing head principals indicated that these educators also considered many elements affecting the potential fit between an individual candidate for a vacant head principal position and the school environment. District personnel gave consideration to a candidate's personality traits and leadership style when making decisions about hiring and placing a candidate in a certain school. These facets of the candidate were often assessed during principal preparation programs run by the district. In this study, 2 of the 3 sites maintained a process for identifying and training future school principals. These programs not only provided necessary training but also gave the district multiple opportunities to assess a candidate's strengths and weaknesses along with their readiness for the job. District personnel also used the interview process to identify a candidate's character traits, style, strengths, and weaknesses, indicating that these components of a candidate were relevant in the district's decision-making process.

While data collected from district personnel was mixed on whether or not principals can be successful in any environment, district leaders regularly considered a candidate for a vacant head principal position in relation to the previous principal. When seeking to continue a school's success, district personnel looked for candidates with similar traits and experience as the previous principal. Conversely, when a change in culture or student achievement was needed in a specific school, district personnel looked for candidates with traits or styles that were markedly different from the previous principal.

To understand a candidate's viability in relation to the previous principal necessitated an understanding of the school's needs at the time of a head principal vacancy. District personnel assessed not only a candidate for a position but the environment, or school, as well. Specifically, they considered the needs of a school when searching for a principal to fill a vacant spot. Understanding these needs required district personnel to be involved in the school enough to assess the needs of the school at the time of a principal vacancy. District leaders also involved the community the school served in this process. District personnel maintained a belief that candidates for the head principal position must be able to build relationships with the school community and enlisted members of the community to provide input in the hiring and placement process. In general, district personnel considered multiple facets of the match, or fit, between the individual (principal candidate) and environment (school), indicating the relevance of fit as they attempted to find the best candidate for a vacant principal position.

Summary

Data indicated that both principal candidates and the district personnel who recruit, hire, and place them reflected on all elements of the fit between the person and the school environment. For district personnel, this perceived fit directly impacted the decisions they made around principal placement. The consequences for getting these decisions wrong may impact future success for both the principal and the school. For principals, the reflection on fit was a part of the process but, in the end, not the final factor in deciding which positions to entertain, pursue, or accept.

Chapter 4 has been an analysis of the data. Data were used to answer the study's two research questions. Chapter 5 will involve discussing findings from the study. Finally, implications for the field and suggestions for future research will be shared.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine the extent to which principals and district personnel responsible for recruiting, hiring, and placing head principals in schools considered the idea of fit, or the match between the person and the school, in the placement process for head principals. The following questions guided the study.

1. To what extent do principals consider fit when making decisions regarding which principal positions to pursue and/or accept?
2. To what extent is fit a consideration on the part of hiring bodies when making decisions regarding the recruitment, hiring, and placing of head principals?

This chapter will include a discussion of the findings from the study as well as implications of the findings. The chapter will conclude with recommendations for future study and concluding thoughts by the researcher.

Discussion

Findings from this study indicated that fit is a relevant concept and influential part of the process for identifying, hiring, and placing head principals. The fit between an individual and an environment is a complicated concept. Following is a discussion of the findings from this study and the ways in which they clarify and expand our understanding of fit and its effects on the principal placement process.

Candidate traits and school environment

Professionals involved in head principal placement – principal candidates themselves and district personnel responsible for hiring and placing them – primarily considered traits of the candidate and the school environment when making placement

decisions. This finding indicates that candidates for vacant principal jobs are not interchangeable. While some candidates may demonstrate the ability to be successful in any type of school environment, whether the school is urban, rural, or suburban, most principal candidates are better suited, based on what they bring to the role, for a certain type of school environment. Previous research has identified general abilities that all principals should possess such as communication skills, managerial skills, and knowledge (Kwan, 2012; Kwan & Walker, 2009). Once a person is deemed qualified for the job, how well the applicant fits with the organization becomes more important (Chung & Sackett, 2005). Basic readiness for the job of head principal is important and a minimal bar must be crossed before consideration, but the fine tuning involved in finding the right person for a vacant head principal position lies in identifying traits of an individual and matching them with the school environment. The intention behind this practice is to maximize the likelihood that the principal will find success in the role. District personnel attempt to find candidates who can meet the needs of a given school while principal candidates seek a school environment they perceive can meet their own needs for achieving success as a school leader. A vital component of this process, in addition to matching the person with the environment based on the candidate's traits, is ensuring the chosen candidate for a vacant principal role has the ability to build working relationships with the key stakeholders in the school environment. Stakeholders may include parents, teachers, students, or other community members. Both individual principal candidates and district personnel gave considerable thought to the individual, the school environment, and the potential of the individual candidate to build strong working

relationships when assessing the potential fit between a potential candidate and school searching for a principal.

Generally, findings from the current study expand our understanding of fit and its role in the hiring and placement process. Previous research has almost exclusively been conducted in a business setting. These business studies have shown that fit is a consideration during the hiring process for both individual applicants (Cable & Judge, 1996; Carless, 2005; Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin, & Jones, 2005; Gardner, Reithel, Cogliser, Wolumbwa, & Foley, 2012; Gomes & Neves, 2011) and those who hire them (Bye, Horverak, Sandal, & Sam, 2014; Chen, Lee, & Yeh, 2008; Higgins & Judge, 2004). Likewise, this study found that both principal candidates and district personnel significantly consider the potential fit between a principal and a school when making principal placement decisions. Previous research conducted in a business setting indicated that individuals will attempt to assess the congruence between their own personality traits and the culture of an organization when contemplating pursuing a position within the organization (Gardner et al., 2012). This study extended those same findings to education by showing that candidates for vacant head principal positions reflect on their own traits and leadership style in relation to the school during the hiring and placement process. A positive perceived fit between the individual and the organization can increase the applicant's attraction to the organization in general (Carless, 2005; Dineen, Ash, & Noe, 2002; Uggerslev, Fassina, & Kraichy, 2012). This attraction to the organization is positively related to an applicant's intention to apply for open positions (Gomes & Neves, 2011). The current study also found that principal candidates were attracted to vacant head principal positions when they perceived, based

largely on previous experience, a positive fit between themselves and the school seeking a principal. Likewise, previous business research indicates that those responsible for hiring and placing individuals within an organization are more likely to hire a candidate if they perceive the individual fits with the organization (Chen et al., 2008; Tsai & Chi, 2011). District personnel respondents in this study also mentioned this same belief. District leaders responsible for hiring and placing head principals value their own perceptions about the fit between an individual candidate – the individual’s traits and style - and the school environment, specifically the needs of the school at the time of a principal vacancy. These perceptions significantly affect decision-making for district personnel as they seek the strongest viable candidate for the vacant principal position. Specifically, principal candidates are more likely placed in a school where district leaders perceive a fit between the candidate and the school. While many studies have examined principal traits in general (Kwan, 2012; Kwan & Walker, 2009; Rammer, 2007; Waters et al., 2004), little research has been conducted on the effect those traits may have on the principal placement process.

The finding that principal candidate traits are a consideration during the placement process for head principals does not align with previous research on the role of race or gender, however. Whitaker (2001) found that minority candidates for leadership roles were difficult to find, indicating that often those charged with hiring principals not only consider a candidate’s race but also give preference to minority candidates for certain schools. Data collected from this study did not indicate this preference or consideration of race, gender, or the age of a principal candidate.

The current study has also expanded the field of research examining a specific operationalization of fit. Previous research nearly exclusively conceptualized fit as supplementary fit, or the alignment between an organization's values and the values of the individual (Cable & Judge, 1996; Piasentin & Chapman, 2006). The current study operationalized fit to mean the ability of the organization to meet the needs of the individual and the ability of the individual to meet the demands of the organization.

School type and school needs

When considering the school environment and assessing the fit with a potential principal, candidates for the role identified the type of school as important while district personnel gave more credence to the known needs of a school. Principal candidates perceived a greater fit and an increased likelihood of success as the head principal if the school with a principal vacancy is similar in demographics to a school where they previously worked as a teacher or assistant principal. The more familiar they were with the type of school, the stronger the perceived fit. This focus on past experiences when assessing fit between themselves and a school environment indicated that the process of principal hiring and placement is not just affected by the moment in time when a vacancy exists. The individual characteristics of the candidate and the school environment were important, but the experiences the individual candidate brought to the role were also influential. This suggests that principal placement is more of a longitudinal process, particularly from the point of view of individuals seeking to fill a vacant position. For district personnel, however, the needs of a school when a vacancy exists were more relevant than the type of school. While the extent of experience a candidate possesses influenced district personnel's perceptions regarding who may be best suited for larger

and more challenging schools, it was the school's needs that most influenced whether a given candidate was perceived by district personnel to be a positive match. This difference is likely due, in part, to the information district personnel have that may not be accessible to individual principal candidates. District personnel will have access to information about the needs of a school, whether they are cultural or academic, that individuals considering the principal position may not have.

The alignment of this finding with previous research is mixed. Walker and Kwan (2009) discussed the demographics of a school and the influence of those demographics on candidates' decision making. Winter and Morgenthal (2002), however, found that assistant principals considered student achievement as a relevant factor when deciding which schools they may want to lead. This focus on student achievement when expressing interest in schools differs slightly from the findings of the current study, which identified school type rather than student achievement as the major consideration by individual candidates. Further, this finding is not clearly aligned with other research, which indicates that new principals are often placed in high-needs schools (Love et al., 2010). District personnel who hire and place principals stated, in the current study, that larger and more challenging schools should be led by more experienced principals, contradicting the findings of previous research on principals in high needs schools (Loeb et al., 2010).

Preparation programs

District-run induction programs can provide district leaders with a significant applicant pool for head principals when vacancies occur. While previous research indicated that district personnel commonly struggle to find qualified candidates for

vacant head principal positions, particularly minority candidates and for high-needs schools (Pijanowski et al., 2009; Pounder & Crow, 2005; Whitaker, 2001), data collected for this study does not indicate this concern for district leaders. The preparation programs run by districts provide leaders with ample viable candidates for vacant principal positions. This, in turn, allows districts to consider elements of fit when making hiring and placement decisions. If the candidate pool was minimal, leaders might not have had the luxury of identifying the absolute strongest candidate and best fit for a vacant position.

In addition to providing districts with a significant number of candidates for vacant head principal positions, district-provided preparation programs are also a vehicle for identifying traits, characteristics, and styles of individual candidates. While these programs are explicitly meant to support the growth of potential head principals, they also give district leaders multiple opportunities to assess candidates well in advance of the principal placement process. As discussed, unique traits of a candidate, in conjunction with elements of the school, are the main factors district leaders and principal candidates use to assess the potential fit between an individual candidate and a school environment. Districts that do not have an organized and intentional program meant to support, grow, and identify future school principals might be at a disadvantage compared to districts that do operate such programs.

Previous research indicated that district personnel tended to hire and place candidates for head principal jobs who were known to them (Kwan, 2012). Findings from the current study indicated that districts use preparation programs as a way of getting to know candidates – their individual strengths and styles. These findings support

the relevance of preparation programs and indicate they may be a useful process for identifying candidates' traits.

As previously discussed, principal turnover is correlated with a downturn in overall achievement (Beteille et al., 2012; Berrong, 2012; Mascall & Leithwood, 2010). McKibben (2009) stated that the quality of a principal preparation program may have an influence on a principal's mobility and turnover. Findings from the current study indicated that preparation programs will provide districts with other benefits, in addition to minimizing turnover and mobility. Districts that operate quality induction programs are more likely to have at their disposal a large and varied candidate pool when looking to replace head principals. Further, the preparation process will provide them with the time and the opportunities to assess each candidate individually and in depth, thereby increasing the likelihood of matching the best candidate with the optimal school environment.

Succession

While district personnel and principal candidates primarily consider traits and characteristics of the individual in conjunction with elements of the school setting when assessing the fit between the two, the outgoing principal can also be a factor in the process. This can be true whether the tenure of the outgoing principal was successful or not. Research indicated that a principal can have an impact on many elements of a school, including the culture and, indirectly, student achievement (Kroth, Boverie, & Zondlo, 2007; Kythreotis, Pashiardis, & Kyriakides, 2010; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008). If the outgoing principal was successful at creating a positive school culture where academic achievement was high or growing, school leaders will likely look to replace the

outgoing leader with a candidate who is similar in traits and/or leadership style.

Conversely, if the school is in need of a change, district personnel may look to replace a departing principal with a candidate who is markedly different from the previous leader. The idea that principals are often chosen in response to the previous leader indicated the importance of identifying defining traits, styles, and strengths of principal candidates. Moreover, this suggests that the process of matching the best person with the school environment may not be solely a function of the individual and the environment at the time of the vacancy but may, in fact, be affected by events that occurred prior to the hiring and placement process. This is more evidence that the process of replacing head principals can be longitudinal. Examining the history of leadership at a school may improve the principal placement process.

Previous research has found that district personnel are influenced by the concept of succession, though in a different way. Kwan (2012) stated that districts will often seek to fill vacant principal positions with candidates who are similar in gender, racial background, and experience to the head principal they are seeking to replace. The findings from this study are not consistent with this understanding of the influence the outgoing principal may have on successor placement. Findings from this study indicated that the traits and strengths of a principal candidate in relation to those of the outgoing principal are the factors that district leaders and the candidates themselves assess rather than the principal candidate's gender or racial background.

Person-Environment Fit Theory

Person-Environment Fit Theory, the theoretical framework used for analyzing data collected in this study, is a better predictor of decision-making for district leaders

than for individual principal candidates. During the process of hiring and placing head principals, district personnel consider elements of both the individual candidate and what they know of the school environment when assessing the potential fit between the two. For district leaders, this perceived fit influenced their final principal placement decisions. All principal candidates must possess certain standardized skills such as communication and organization. Once a candidate is believed to possess these skills, district leaders then turn to more individualized elements of the candidate – their unique traits and leadership style – when making final decisions about principal placement. Matching the right candidate with the right school is an important part of the hiring and placement work district personnel engage in, and the fit between the individual and the school is often the deciding factor in decisions.

For principal candidates, however, perceptions about fit have a different level of influence on their decision-making. Principal candidates for vacant head principal positions also consider their own traits and styles along with the school type in the process leading up to a new principal being appointed. These perceptions about the fit between themselves and the school may influence which vacancies they actively pursue. Their perceptions may also subtly impact the way candidates conduct themselves leading up to a final placement decision, including in the interview process. In the end, though, candidates for vacant principal positions would acquiesce to the decisions made by district personnel regarding final principal placement. This indicated that, while principal candidates gave significant consideration to the fit between themselves and the school, these perceptions do not ultimately impact their decision-making regarding the acceptance of an offered position. Therefore, Person-Environment Fit Theory, while

valuable as a lens to examine data from principals and district personnel, may be more relevant to those professionals who actually make the final decision about principal placement. This finding from the current study expands our understanding of the theory. Previously, this theoretical frame has been used to examine data from studies in a variety of settings and fields such as universities, correctional facilities, and public service organizations. Findings here show that the theory is also applicable to a public school setting. A positive perceived fit between an individual (principal candidate) and an environment (school) will lead to a positive sense of satisfaction for all individuals, though ultimately the perceived fit is differential to the decision-making, depending on the individual's role in the process.

Implications

Findings from this study have implications for the process of recruiting, hiring, and placing head principals. Specifically, there are implications for the preparation process for individuals who may be candidates for a head principal position later in their career. Findings indicated that both principal candidates and district personnel place value on the experiences a candidate had earlier in their career. Thus, individuals who aspire to the role of head principal should be intentional about the types of experiences they have as a teacher or assistant principal. Since individuals predicted that a more positive fit between themselves and a school that is similar to a past experience, tailoring their experiences may influence their perceptions of fit later. For district personnel, the extent of experience a candidate has is relevant, so providing potential head principals with not only a variety of experiences but a significant degree of experiences would serve the individual and the district. This requires that districts think longitudinally about head

principal prospects, not focusing just on those candidates who are interested but grooming individuals over a longer period of time.

The study's findings also have implications for district-provided preparation programs. Both principals and district personnel value these programs as a way not only to prepare an individual for the role of head principal but also to assess who they are as candidates and what type of school where they may find success as a leader. First, these findings indicated that districts that do not currently manage preparation programs are disadvantaged when it comes to preparing and assessing principal candidates. Programs, where they exist, should include intentional processes and opportunities for individuals who participate as well as opportunities for district personnel to carefully assess a candidate's strengths and weaknesses. The more that is known about individuals, the better they, and district people who may hire and place them, can make decisions about what types of environments are the best fit.

While the findings here have implications for principal grooming, they also could impact the actual process of recruitment, hiring, and placement. While assessing individuals – their traits, styles, strengths, and weaknesses – could be done in a preparation program, these assessments could also be part of the interview process. Both principal candidates and district personnel gave significant consideration to who a principal candidate was. Consistently incorporating that into the interview process may be useful. While the data indicated this happens in some districts, the practice is not widespread and consistent. District personnel could tailor interview questions so as to learn about traits of the individual. Principal candidates could use the interview process to share specific details about who they are as people and leaders, given that

understanding the individual matters to the district people looking to place principals. Beyond just sharing information about themselves, principal candidates may also share specific details about their own perceptions about fit – in what type of school or specific school they believe they could be most successful. Findings from this study indicated district personnel value this input.

While principals and district leaders valued knowledge about the individual applicants, they also considered elements of the school environment when assessing fit. For individual candidates, however, the focus was often on the type of school and their familiarity with the demographics of the community. Implications for district personnel may include greater transparency about openings. Candidates may not know details about a school's needs at the time of a principal vacancy, information the district personnel are more likely to know. Sharing information with potential candidates about the needs of a school before a principal is chosen could give all those involved in the process a common set of facts to discuss during interviews. If district personnel give weight to a school's needs, accurately assessing the ability of the individual candidate to meet those demands may be enhanced if the candidate understands and can provide strategies for addressing those needs.

A final implication of the data involves succession. Findings from this study indicated that individual candidates and district personnel consider the outgoing principal when assessing the potential fit of a new leader. These findings indicate that district personnel who hire and place principals should know details about the outgoing principal – their traits and style – in addition to understanding facts about the success or failure of their tenure at the school. If district personnel wish to replace a successful principal with

a candidate who is similar or, conversely, replace a failed principal with someone different, understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the outgoing principal is necessary. Likewise, principal candidates should learn as much as possible about an outgoing principal before assessing the fit between themselves and a school. If the outgoing principal impacts a candidate's perception of fit between themselves and a school, understanding what strengths and weaknesses the outgoing leader possessed would likely sharpen the assessment of fit by the principal candidate.

Findings from this study can help individuals who aspire to the role of head principal and those district leaders seeking to find the strongest candidate for vacant positions. Knowing more about the extent that principal candidates and district personnel consider elements of the fit between the individual (applicant) and the environment (school) can impact the process immediately leading up to the placement. These findings may also influence the types of experiences and preparation a potential school leaders has, or should have, long before the actual process of recruiting, hiring, and placing begins.

Recommendations for Future Study

Findings from the current study have served to clarify, support, and expand the body of literature on fit and its relevance in the process of recruiting, hiring, and placing head principals. While this study expands the scope of understanding fit to include data from educational settings, there are opportunities to expand the body of knowledge further. Continuing research in educational settings could broaden what we know about the role of fit in placing school leaders. The current study was limited to data collected from principals and district personnel. Future research on the role of fit in hiring and

placing assistant principals will further enhance the knowledge base. Data collected here came from principal participants who had been in their current position 3 years or less. Since perceptions and relevance of fit may change over time, conducting research on veteran principals in their current position longer than 3 years may be relevant. This study also had geographic limitations; that is, 3 districts located in the southeastern United States. Conducting research in other parts of the United States will also add to the literature on fit and its role in principal placement. Conducting studies in other countries could further broaden our understanding of the role of fit in hiring and placing principals since the placement process may differ in form from the typical process in the United States. Data could be collected and analyzed within a country or from different countries, similarly to how data was collected for the current study from different states.

The current study also utilized qualitative methodology. Future research may collect quantitative data on the role fit plays in the placement of head principals. This may require researchers constructing a quantitative instrument for data collection. While qualitative data collected in this study indicated that participants gave considerable thought to all elements of fit between the individual and the environment, quantitative studies could collect data from a larger participant group than the current study, nationally or internationally.

While the current study added to the body of research on fit, principal placement, and Person-Environment Fit Theory, future studies could be conducted in other settings such as non-profit organizations or government agencies. Understanding more about the role of fit in the recruitment, hiring, and placement of personnel, specifically leaders, in these settings will additionally contribute to the body of research on fit. Continuing to

explore the concept of fit and its relevance in the hiring and placement process by broadening from whom, where, and how data are collected will be beneficial future progressions from the current study.

Concluding Thoughts

The motivation for this study came from my own experiences with placement as an educational leader. After completing a principal preparation program, I was considered for placement as an assistant principal at two schools with varying demographics and cultures, prompting questions about the relevance of fit on the part of district officials responsible for placing assistant principals and principals in my district. I was aware that fit was relevant to me. I believed intuitively that my efficiency and efficacy as a school leader would be expedited and enhanced if I were placed in an environment where my experience and expertise were maximized. Collecting and analyzing data for this study has confirmed that most people involved in the placement of school leaders – those who may be placed as a principal and those who are responsible for hiring and placing them – give considerable thought and consideration to all elements of the fit between the principal and the school.

I was surprised during the process of data collection by the interest of all participants in the topic, particularly principals. Participants were consistently vested in sharing their own thoughts about fit and the role it played in the principal position they currently held. The original finding from the study – the concept of principal succession - also surprised me. In general, this study has deepened my own knowledge of human resources – a professional interest – and has inspired me to consider future research possibilities.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Principals Interview Protocol

Introductory/Demographic

1. How long have you been a head principal? At this school?
2. How many administrative positions have you held in your career? What has your trajectory looked like?
3. What led to your decision to seek a head principal position?

Procedural

4. Describe the recruitment process you experienced as it relates to your current role.
Were you recruited, did you seek out the position, or both?
5. Describe the hiring process for your current role as head principal.
6. Describe the process of placement – how did you come to be the principal at your school?

School

7. Describe the school you currently lead. What are its strengths and challenges?
8. To what extent did you investigate details about your school prior to your placement as its principal?
9. Have you worked at other schools in the district? If so, were previous schools similar to your current school or different? How so?
10. In what ways do you affect the culture and student achievement at your school?

Candidate

11. How would you describe your leadership style?

12. To what extent did you think about your leadership style when choosing to pursue and/or accept your current position?
13. How important is it to match a principal's leadership style with the school they lead?
14. What types of skills do all principals need?
15. How transferrable, from site to site, do principals' skills, strengths, and leadership styles need to be?

Principal-School Fit

16. What is your understanding of the concept of fit? How would you define it?
17. If you were to imagine a school different in size, level, or demographic from the one you currently work in, would you be interested in leading that school? Why or why not?
18. In what type of school would you see yourself as being least effective or least successful as a principal?
19. What type of principal is most likely to be successful in a suburban school?
Urban? Rural?
20. What skills are necessary for a small school principal? Large?
21. Some say that a good principal can be successful leading any type of school.
How would you respond to that?

Appendix B

Hiring Bodies Interview Protocol

Procedural

1. What is your role in recruiting, hiring, and placing head principals?
2. Describe the process in your district for recruiting, hiring, and placing head principals.
3. Before hiring principal candidates, what is important for you to know about the candidate? How do you go about learning these traits or characteristics?
4. What do you want to know about a candidate before placing them as head principal in a certain school?
5. How is the success of a principal measured in your district?
6. If a principal isn't successful as an instructional leader as measured by student achievement, or successful as a relationship builder with staff and stakeholders, what steps are typically taken by the district?

Schools

7. Looking at your schools as a whole, what strengths come to mind when looking at schools in your district? Overall, do your schools have some general needs?
8. Are these strengths and needs considered when placing a principal?
9. To what degree are school characteristics – size, type, level – considered when choosing a head principal?

Principal Candidates

10. Describe the ideal candidate for a head principal position.

11. What impact, specifically, do principals have on schools' culture and student achievement in your district?
12. Describe the landscape for principal recruitment. What issues do you face when recruiting candidates?
13. What does principal movement look like in your district?
14. How transferrable, from site to site, do principals' skills, strengths, and leadership styles need to be?
15. What types of skills do all principals need?
16. How important is it to match a candidate's leadership style and strengths with the needs of the school? What are your considerations in matching strengths to needs?

Principal-School Fit

17. What is your understanding of the concept of fit as it pertains to schools and principals? What does good or bad fit look like?
18. Have you seen an occasion where a principal was unsuccessful in one school but succeeded in another? If so, can you describe the situation?
19. What type of principal is most likely to be successful in a suburban school?
Urban? Rural?
20. What skills are necessary for a small school principal? Large?
21. Some people say that a good principal can be successful in any school setting.
What would you say to them?

VITA

Keith Cottrell was born in Knoxville, Tennessee and continues to reside there. He completed his Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Tennessee in 1994 and his Master of Arts in Teaching degree from Carson-Newman University (formerly Carson-Newman College) in 1997. He earned an Educational Specialist degree in Educational Administration from Lincoln Memorial University in 2009. He completed his doctorate in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies from the University of Tennessee in 2017. He currently works as an elementary school principal with the Knox County Schools.