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# TEACHERS' AND ADMINISTRATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP FOR K-12 INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

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TEACHERS' AND ADMINISTRATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE  
CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP FOR K-12 INTERNATIONAL  
SCHOOLS

By

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THESIS

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to investigate teachers' and administrators' perceptions of the characteristics of effective leadership for K-12 international schools. The data produced three themes; these include emotional intelligence, the ability to establish school culture, and administrative mindset. The literature review focused on the survey data points of humor, cultural intelligence, and vision embedded within these themes. The research findings are intended to advance the knowledge of leadership for K-12 international schools.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Humanity has witnessed many changes due to globalization over the past 500 years. In his book, *The World Is Flat*, Pulitzer Prize winning author Thomas Friedman described the three eras of globalization. Friedman (2007) contended, “Globalization 1.0 [1492-until around 1800] was countries globalizing...the dynamic force in Globalization 2.0 [roughly 1800-2000] was companies globalizing...the dynamic force in Globalization 3.0 [around 2000-present]...is the newfound power for *individuals* to collaborate and compete globally” (p. 10). This rapid expansion of the globalization is based upon technological improvements and scientific innovation. Prominent Chinese economist, Gao Shangquan (2000) explains,

“Today’s ocean shipping cost is only a half of that in the year 1930, the current airfreight 1/6, and telecommunication cost 1%. The price level of computers in 1990 was only about 1/125 of that in 1960, and this price level in 1998 reduced again by about 80%” (p. 1).

Humankind has faster access to cheaper goods and services than at any other point in history.

People have increased opportunities to work abroad, as national economies become more globalized. Families become “expatriates” as they leave their home countries and become residents in foreign lands. Accordingly, expatriate families demand K-12 international schools that accept their home culture and traditions and meet their educational expectations.

K-12 international schools around the world share a common essence. Invariably, these institutions serve as melting pots of cultures, religions, and ideas. The students' faces reflect the diversity and educators embrace these differences. Deal and Peterson (2013) contended in schools our actions portray what we value. Subsequently, K-12 international schools provide a culture of learning based upon equity and opportunity.

In addition to promoting lifelong learning through equity and opportunity, K-12 international school culture inspires academic excellence. Schools encourage students to gain the skills necessary to go forth successfully in the globalized world. Barth (2013) suggested the school's cultural impact on students starts from within the schoolhouse walls. The latent expectations found inside the walls of K-12 international schools inspire students to do well in school, travel internationally, and be accepted to the top universities in the world. Interestingly, these expectations are not elitist, rather, simply the international educational norm. The lifelong learner must embrace these expectations to be an engaged global citizen of the 21st century.

Many international schools ascribe to the International Baccalaureate (IB). Founded in 1968 as a non-profit educational foundation, this Geneva, Switzerland based organization offers four international education programs. These include, the Primary Years Programme, Middle Years Programme, Diploma Programme, and Career-related Programme. These programs provide a common international education platform for students throughout the world. The IB stated, "There [are] 5,578 programmes being offered worldwide, across 4,335 schools" ("Facts and figures", 2016).

IB programming may be widespread; however, a number of other program options are available to K-12 international schools and students. Many British based K-

12 international schools teach through the lens of the English National Curriculum and the Cambridge International Examinations (“World Education”, 2014). American based K-12 international schools choosing to teach through a U.S. perspective may use the Common Core State Standards or other state standards in the absence of a true national curriculum (“Common Core”, 2016). Additionally, these U.S. based schools may eventually guide high school students toward Advanced Placement courses. Other programming options are available to schools as well. The variety of choices attests to the differences in educational offerings found in K-12 international schools throughout the world.

The IB has grown to become one of the preeminent international education organizations in the world. The “learner profile” is at the heart of the IB educational programs. IB learners endeavor to be Inquirers, Knowledgeable, Thinkers, Communicators, Principled, Open-Minded, Caring, Risk-Takers, Balanced, and Reflective. The IB maintains that, “The aim of all IB programmes is to develop internationally minded people who, recognizing their common humanity and shared guardianship of the planet, help to create a better and more peaceful world” (“What is an IB education”, 2013).

The IB’s scope of influence continues to grow. “Between February 2011 and February 2016, the number of IB programmes offered worldwide grew by 46.40%” (“Facts and figures”, 2016). Additionally, over 141,831 students graduated in the spring of 2015 (“Graduates”, 2015). This marks a 4.8% increase in graduates compared to the previous year. Since the IBO’s inception, 1,300,000 students, in 140 countries, have graduated from the Diploma Programme.

In International Baccalaureate schools and other international schools, the educational experience of expatriate students begins with the educational leadership. Leaders must understand the characteristics of effective leadership for K-12 international schools to be successful. This understanding allows leaders to provide the best possible education for both expatriate and local students.

### Problem

The world is experiencing an increased demand for K-12 international schools that meet the educational expectations of expatriate students and families. International School Consultancy reported that “there are now over 8,000 international schools teaching 4.26 million students. By 2025...there will be at least 15,000 English-medium international schools teaching over 8 million students” (“International Schools Market”, 2015). This rapidly expanding segment of education will need school leaders who understand the characteristics of effective leadership for international schools. At this time, limited research represents international school leadership, as compared to research focused on educational leadership in the United States of America.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of the study is to investigate teachers’ and administrators’ perceptions of the characteristics of effective leadership for K-12 international schools in order to help current and future educational leaders. In this study, current and former international educators described what matters regarding the characteristics of effective leadership for K-12 international schools. Survey results led to the development of a model for K-12 international school leadership.

## **Research Questions**

1. What do teachers and administrators of international schools believe to be the characteristics of an effective international school administrator?
2. What do teachers and administrators of international schools believe to be the differences in characteristics of an effective school administrator in your home country as compared to an effective international school administrator?

## **Theoretical Framework**

A variety of leadership styles remain applicable to a multitude of organizational settings throughout the world. Flesher et al. noted that sixty-five dimensions of leader behavior have been developed over the course of 50 years (1991). Among these important classifications of leadership behavior, K-12 international school leaders should consider the characteristics found in transformational leadership. The theoretical framework underpinning this study is based upon the theory of transformational leadership.

In 1978, Burns introduced the concept of transformational leadership. His study of power, politicians and leadership, led to the identification of the transactional and transforming leadership styles. The relationship between a transactional leader and follower is marked by the activity of exchanging one thing for another. Conversely, the transformational leader looks for what motivates a follower, and “seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full person of the follower” (p. 4). Describing the power of relationships, Burns (1978) wrote, “the most powerful human influences consist of deeply human relationships in which two or more persons engage one another. It lies in a...sophisticated understanding of power, and...more consequential exercise of mutual

persuasion, exchange, elevation, and transformation” (p. 11). The transactional leader works within the culture of the organization, whereas the transformational leader tries to change organizational culture.

Extending Burns’ work, Bass and Riggio (2006) described the components of a transformational leader as idealized influence (attributed charisma), inspirational motivation (behaviors), intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration. They found transformational leadership applies to every organizational setting around the world. Leithwood and Jantzi (2009) extended transformational leadership into the field of education. Their model of transformational leadership practices consist of three broad categories, which include setting directions, developing people, and redesigning the organization. Notably, school heads perceived to be effective are also considered to have the qualities of a transformational leader (Mancuso et al., 2010).

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

Research indicates a number of leadership traits germane to the success of leaders in multicultural organizations. These leadership traits may be found in both educational and non-educational settings. The study of teachers' and administrators' perceptions of the characteristics of effective leadership for K-12 international schools endeavors add to this body of knowledge.

The qualitative survey data spoke to a number of different characteristics found amongst effective K-12 international school leaders. The researcher focused on three specific qualitative survey data points in the literature review. These data points include cultural intelligence, humor, and vision.

### **Cultural Intelligence**

A diverse, transient English-speaking population characterizes the culturally diverse environments of K-12 international schools. Hayden and Thompson (2011) noted students and staff represent cultural diversity; students and staff continuously enter and leave the school culture creating a transient school environment; and English represents the preferred communication medium found in the educational environment (Hayden & Thompson, 2008). Educational leaders must have a cultural foundation of understanding when working with international school community.

Due to the myriad of differences found in the K-12 international school environment, school leaders must understand their professional success may be impacted by their ability to be culturally intelligent. Cultural intelligence (CQ) has been defined as "a person's capability to adapt effectively to new cultural contexts" (Earley & Ang, 2003, p. 58). Ang, Van Dyne, Koh, Yee Ng, Templer, Tay, and Anand Chandrasekar (2007)

modified this definition, contending CQ is “an individual difference characteristic that identifies the ability of an individual to function competently in a culturally diverse environment” (p. 336).

Four intelligences comprise CQ. These include metacognition, cognition, motivation, and behavior (Earley and Ang, 2003). Metacognitive CQ consists of the ability to acquire, understand, and be in control of the process of learning about culture (Flavel, 1979). The second dimension of CQ, cognitive CQ, represents the sum of a person’s education and experiences learned through exposure to cultural norms and customs (Ang et al., 2007). However, cognitive CQ developed in one cultural setting is not limited to the norms found amongst that group of people. Brislin, Worthley, and Macnab (2006) noted individuals with high levels of cognitive CQ are able to apply their knowledge across cultural settings.

Motivational CQ is the third dimension of CQ. Ang et al. (2007) claimed “motivational CQ reflects the capability to direct attention and energy toward learning about functioning in situations characterized by cultural differences” (p. 338). The purpose to learn about functioning in cross-cultural contexts is driven by intrinsic motivation. Deci and Ryan (1985) noted intrinsic motivation is an important aspect in individuals with high levels of motivational CQ.

Various people groups use specific actions, physical signs, or expressions that are appropriate and indicative to a particular culture. However, these same representations may not be appropriate in a cross-cultural context. Behavioral CQ, the fourth dimension of CQ, is marked by the ability of an individual to use proper verbal and nonverbal behaviors in a cross-cultural context (Ang et al., 2007).



Three studies by Ang et al., (2007) further explored the relationships between the four dimensions of CQ in conjunction with three intercultural effectiveness outcomes (cultural judgement and decision making, cultural adaptation and task performance in culturally diverse setting). In the first study, 235 undergraduates in the American Midwest and 358 undergraduates in Singapore provided quantitative data. Students completed measures testing cultural judgement and decision making, cultural adaptation, cultural intelligence, cognitive ability, emotional intelligence, personality, and cross cultural competency. Ang et al. (2007) found an individual's cultural judgment and decision making could be predicted by metacognitive CQ ( $b = 0.21, p < 0.01/b = 0.15, p < 0.05$ ). Additionally, an individual's cultural judgment and decision making could be predicted by cognitive CQ ( $b = 0.16, p < 0.05/b = 0.13, p < 0.05$ ).

Ang et al. (2007) performed a second study to triangulate data from the first study. They collected quantitative data from 98 international managers representing 17 countries. Participants completed measures testing cultural judgement and decision making, task performance, cultural intelligence, and cognitive ability. The data demonstrated "metacognitive CQ (H1a:  $b = 0.30, p < 0.05$ ) and cognitive CQ (H1b:  $b = 0.37, p < 0.05$ ) predicted cultural judgment and decision making" (Ang et al., 2007). The data indicated metacognitive CQ ( $b = 0.30, p < 0.05$ ) and behavioural CQ ( $b = 0.47, p < 0.001$ ) predicted task performance" (Ang et al., 2007).

A third study helped strengthen the previous findings. Ang et al. (2007) analyzed the quantitative data gathered from 103 foreign professionals and their supervisors representing 12 countries. Participants completed measures testing task performance, cultural adaptation, and CQ. Ang et al. contend, supervisor rated interactional adjustment

could be predicted by motivational CQ and behavioural CQ ( $b = 0.42, p < 0.01/b = 0.28, p < 0.05$ ). Moreover, work adjustment could be predicted by motivational CQ and behavioural CQ ( $b = 0.41, p < 0.01/b = 0.35, p < 0.05$ ). The results also reveal supervisor rated task performance could be predicted by metacognitive CQ ( $b = 0.47, p < 0.01$ ) and behavioural CQ ( $b = 0.31, p < 0.05$ ).

The results of the study are important for K-12 international school leaders. Ang et al. (2007) found, “metacognitive CQ and cognitive CQ predicted cultural judgment and decision making; motivational CQ and behavioural CQ predicted cultural adaptation; and metacognitive CQ and behavioural CQ predicted task performance” (p. 335). Leaders in K-12 international education with high levels of CQ have the ability to successfully interact with students, staff, and parents across cultural boundaries.

Further studying the impact of leadership across cultures, Romano and Platania (2014) investigated a leader’s capacity for CQ. Their quantitative study sought to understand “the relative predictive ability of need for cognition, global mindset and cultural intelligence on a set of items measuring attitudes towards internationalism” (p. 5). The researchers used a Four Factor Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS) to garner survey data from 159 undergraduate research participants. The researchers noted the CQS establishes that “individuals with increased levels of cultural intelligence are significantly more effective at inter-cultural decision-making compared to their lower scoring counterpart” (p. 3). Analysis of the data through linear regression confirms the importance of understanding global issues in a cross-cultural environment. Romano and Platania stated that “with respect to cultural intelligence, we are reassured that cultural intelligence is an important attribute when assessing international attitudes and global

awareness” (p. 8). These findings are important for leaders of people from a variety of cultural backgrounds. Moreover, the data indicates culturally intelligent K-12 international school leaders have the capacity to better understand and interact with various cultures represented by the international school community.

Culturally intelligent K-12 international school leaders have the potential to flourish within the international school context. Kim, Kirkman, and Chen (2008) contended individuals with higher levels of CQ are better equipped to navigate the challenges of international work assignments and exhibit higher levels of job performance in different cultural settings. Kim and Van Dyne (2011) further suggested a positive relationship exists between CQ and international leadership potential. The CQ of 181 working adults enrolled in part-time graduate coursework was examined by 708 observers. Additionally, a different group of non-overlapping, randomly selected observers rated international leadership potential. Kim and Van Dyne (2011) indicate observation ratings of CQ and international leadership potential show a significant correlation ( $r = .27, p < .01$ ). Moreover, CQ was found to be a predictor of international leadership potential ( $b = .20, p < .05$ ). The results of the study indicate K-12 international school leaders with higher levels of CQ have the skills that enable them to work successfully across cultures.

K-12 international school leaders have a multitude of responsibilities. In addition to the routine tasks associated with educating children, school leaders must navigate various social issues presented by students coming from a variety of cultural backgrounds. Mumford, Zaccaro, Harding, Jacobs, & Fleishman (2000) contend the ability to solve complex social problems is an indicator of effective leadership. However,

solving these problems effectively among various cultures require specific abilities. Rockstuhl, Seiler, Ang, Van Dyne, and Annen (2011) tested general intelligence, emotional intelligence and CQ to predict leadership effectiveness in cross-border contexts. Research participants included 126 military leaders studying in a 3-year domestic and cross-border leadership skill building program (Rockstuhl et al., 2011). General leadership effectiveness and cross-border leadership were assessed by fellow program participants. The results of the quantitative study indicate “general intelligence was positively related to general leadership effectiveness ( $\beta=.23$ ,  $p< .05$ ) and cross-border leadership effectiveness ( $\beta=.18$ ,  $p< .05$ )” (Rockstuhl et al., 2011, p. 831). However the data revealed disparate results for emotional intelligence and CQ. Rockstuhl et al. (2014) reported emotional intelligence was positively related to general leadership effectiveness ( $\beta=.27$ ,  $p< .05$ ) and CQ was positively related to cross-border leadership effectiveness ( $\beta=.24$ ,  $p< .05$ ). The data indicate general intelligence and CQ are essential attributes for leaders working with a myriad of cultures. Accordingly, effective K-12 international school leaders must have the capacity for CQ in order to solve complex social problems across a variety of cultural backgrounds.

CQ is an important multicultural leadership attribute. Considering the impact of this leadership trait, Keung and Szapkiw (2013) examined the relationship between CQ and organizational culture changing perspective of transformational leadership amongst 193 school leaders. Americans and British Nationals comprised the majority of respondents, 58% and 14.5% respectively. The researchers used the Multiple Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) to study transformational leadership qualities and the Cultural Intelligence Scale to explore CQ traits. The researchers used standard multiple regression

to analyze survey responses. The data reveal CQ significantly predicts transformational leadership style,  $R^2=0.20$ , Adjusted  $R^2=0.18$ ,  $F(4,192)=11.58$ ,  $p<0.01$ . In conclusion, K-12 international schools leaders with high levels of CQ may in fact be transformational leaders.

## **Humor**

Over the course of a lifetime, citizens of a country may develop strategies necessary to navigate life in their country of residence. These same people may not be able to apply similar approaches to analogous situations in foreign lands. Often daily tasks take on a new significance abroad as expatriates discover new challenges to be part and parcel of daily life.

International K-12 educators also face difficulties associated with life and travel abroad. However, humor may be one of the key ingredients to successful outcomes, as humor has the potential to turn obstacles into opportunities. Moreover, humor may play an integral role in shaping the experiences of K-12 international school leaders.

There are various styles of humor available to leaders in and out of K-12 international schools. Amongst these styles, self-deprecating humor has the power to shrink the social gap between leader and follower and provide a more even, level relationship (Kets de Vries, 1990; Martin et al., 2003). Self-deprecating humor is a type of affiliative humor in which the joke teller is the target. In a non-hostile manner the joke teller simultaneously affirms themselves and others (Martin et al., 2003). Hopton, Barling, and Turner (2013) studied the use of self-deprecating humor as related to transformational leadership. Study participants included 155 undergraduate business students from a Canadian university. Research results indicate that amongst the

components of transformational leadership, humor had a significant effect on individualized consideration  $F(3, 119) = 4.17, p < 0.01, \eta^2 = 0.10$ . Hopton, Barling, and Turner (2013) contended the type of humor used by transformational leaders is an indicator of their values. K-12 international school leaders should recognize individualized consideration, an aspect of transformational leadership, is marked by the action of putting followers first and is supported by the use of self-deprecating humor.

Humor provides many important benefits. Amongst these assets, Holmes and Marra (2002) identified humor as an important part of workplace culture. However, the culture found in a workplace or organization can vary dramatically across nations and in K-12 international schools as well. School leaders must be cognizant of potential cultural differences when using humor. In a related quantitative study, Kalliny, Cruthirds, and Minor (2006) sought to determine differences in humor styles of American, Egyptian, and Lebanese peoples. Researchers used the Humor Styles Questionnaire to measure the humor style of 157 Arab and 197 U.S. participants (Kalliny, Cruthirds, & Minor, 2006). The data show Americans use more self-defeating humor ( $M = 27.76, p < .01$ ) and self-enhancing humor ( $M = 38.68, p < .01$ ). Whereas, Arab men used more aggressive humor than women ( $M = 26.48, p < .01$ ). The results of the study confirm K-12 international school leaders need to balance the potential benefits of humor with the fact that humor styles vary across cultures.

As humor varies across cultural groups, humor is also a meaningful aspect of workplace culture. Saphier and King (1985) noted humor continues to be a critical element found in a strong school culture. Robert, Dunne, and Iun (2015) investigated the impact of leader humor, leader-subordinate relationship quality, and subordinate job

satisfaction. Their quantitative study compared questionnaire responses of 241 subordinate and 70 leaders in 54 organizations in Hong Kong. A three-item scale measured subordinate job satisfaction; a seven-item scale measured leader-subordinate relationship quality; and the Humor Styles Questionnaire measured the humor behavior of leaders. The researchers found, “a positive relationship between leader affiliative and aggressive humor styles and subordinate job satisfaction when the leader-subordinate relationship quality was high...job satisfaction was negative when the leader-subordinate relationship quality was low” (p. 19). The sum of the relationship between the leader and subordinate is impacted by humor. K-12 international education leaders must first build a positive relationship with staff before humor can be used to grow a strong school culture. Due to the transient nature of faculty, incoming staff must integrate into a positive school culture when they arrive on campus.

K-12 international schools are marked by staff turnover. However, a K-12 international school leader’s capacity for humor has the potential to positively impact the organizational climate and possibly reduce turnover amongst staff. Ingersoll (2001) contends, “High levels of employee turnover are both cause and effect of ineffectiveness and low performance in organizations” (p. 505). Mesmer-Magnus, Glew, and Viswesvaran (2012) conducted a meta-analysis focused on positive humor in the workplace. The results of their study suggested, “supervisor humor positively relates to subordinate job satisfaction ( $p=0.39$ ,  $k=5$ ) and workgroup cohesion ( $p=0.42$ ,  $k=3$ ), and negatively relates to subordinate work withdrawal ( $p=-0.31$ ,  $k=3$ )” (p. 171). Humor must be harnessed by the K-12 international school leader. This critical element has the potential to increase job satisfaction and reduce staff turnover.

Transient people often comprise the community of K-12 international schools. Retention of faculty members is a dilemma for educational leadership in these situations (Hardman, 2001). Teachers leave schools for a number of reasons. Odland and Ruzicka (2009) found teacher turnover is often due to administrative leadership in the areas of communication, support, and teacher involvement in decision-making. Humor is an important aspect of administrative leadership. A 2009 quantitative study investigated the use of humor between 179 principal-teacher pairs in California public high schools. Vecchio, Justin, & Pearce (2009) found principal humor to be positively correlated with teacher job satisfaction ( $r=.25$ ,  $p<.01$ ). In summary, K-12 international school faculty transience may be potentially reduced due to the use of humor by school leaders

## **Vision**

Leaders use a variety of behaviors to guide an organization. Amongst these, a strong vision is an essential leadership attribute. The leader's vision establishes the parameters in which people function and hopefully thrive. K-12 international school leaders have the added duty of articulating a vision amongst a variety of cultural groups.

A key aspect of transformational leadership is the ability to develop relationships (Cannella & Monroe, 1997). The leader influences people to believe in the organizational vision through relationships. Articulating a vision is critical for the leader to engender ambition and energy among organizational members in an effort to attain organizational goals (Wang, Tsui, & Xin, 2011). A 2011 quantitative study by Wang Tsui, and Xin, investigated the relationship between Chinese CEO leadership behavior and organizational performance. Respondents consisted of 739 middle managers and top supervisors from 125 companies. The researchers found task-focused CEO leadership



behaviors, including the leader's ability to articulate a vision, are related to firm performance ( $\beta=0.53$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). Similarly, transformational leaders of K-12 international schools must use their ability to articulate their vision for the school to positively guide students, staff, and parents.

The relationship between a leader's vision and an organizational member's belief in the vision, impacts the perceived effectiveness of an organization. To measure the impact of visionary leadership upon organizational effectiveness, Taylor, Cornelius, and Colvin (2014) performed a quantitative study using the Leadership Behavior Questionnaire-Revised (LBQ-R) and the Competing Values Scale (CVS). The researchers investigated survey results from 135 executive directors and 221 subordinates from participating non-profit organizations (Taylor et al, 2014). The respondents had diverse educational backgrounds and years of experience in their current position. The survey represented data collected from respondents (48% female and 52% male) with 15.2 years of nonprofit experience (Taylor et al., 2014). The researchers used multiple regression analysis to study the data and found a relationship between visionary leadership and perceived organizational effectiveness ( $R=0.460$  and  $R^2=0.211$ ) (Taylor et al., 2014). The effectiveness of an organization can be based in part on the subordinate's belief in the leader's vision. Trust and collaboration must also be integrated into the leader's relationships amongst students, staff, and community to keep the vision of the organization moving in a positive direction.

Educational leaders build trust and induce constituents to follow their vision for the school. A K-12 international school leader interacts with a range of people, including, but not limited to, students, staff, parents, host country politicians, foreign government

ambassadors, local and foreign business leaders, supporters, detractors, etc. Primarily, a school leader must work to engender trust from staff members to embrace the vision for the school. Teachers willingly support an administrative vision if teachers participate in beginning stages of instituting the vision (Blase & Kirby, 2014). A quantitative study looked at the relationship between trust and the collaborative efforts of staff and the principal. The survey elicited 898 teachers' survey responses from 45 elementary schools in an urban district. Tschannen-Moran (2001) found "collaboration with the principal was positively and significantly related to trust in the principal ( $r=0.32$ ,  $p<0.05$ )" (p. 324). Higher levels of principal-faculty collaboration led to increased trust of leadership amongst staff members (Tschannen-Moran, 2001). Trust and collaboration cannot begin without the collective effort of working together. The educational leader must involve faculty through intentional collaboration to develop trust. "Schools where there was a high level of trust could be predicted to be schools where there would be a high level of collaboration" (Tschannen-Moran, 2001, p. 327). A K-12 international school leader who collaborates with staff and builds trust, will ultimately lead them toward the vision for the school.

A school leader establishes and promotes their organizational vision by working together with members of the school community. To encourage this school-community partnership, the country of Indonesia established mandatory school councils. Gamage (2003) contended this type of school-based management unleashes a wide-range of stakeholder potential, participation, and leadership. The chief goal of the Indonesian model is for the councils to work with school principals to make collaborative decisions. Bandur (2011), investigated the impact of shifting educational decision making authority

from the Indonesian government to school councils. The councils are comprised of parents, teachers, local community members, local government members, principal, and alumni from primary schools in the Ngada District Department of Education on the island of Flores. School council members provided 504 survey responses. Additionally, the researcher conducted 42 interviews and focus group discussions across the various school council stakeholder groups. The survey results indicate 96.2% of respondents felt empowered to be part of the school vision. Moreover, the results ( $r=0.098$ ,  $n=485$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), indicate the empowerment of school councils to make school-level decisions have improved the educational environments of schools. K-12 international school leaders may consider employing a school council approach to leadership. Incorporating a variety of school community resources helps disseminate the school vision.

The significance of visionary leadership extends beyond the geopolitical boundaries of Indonesia. Dinham (2005) noted the presence of strong leadership as the hallmark of Australian schools experiencing outstanding outcomes. Further, Salfi (2011) identified the successful leadership practices of head teachers (also known as principals) in the Punjab province of Pakistan. This mixed methods study elicited survey responses from 105 head teachers and 210 teachers. Moreover, 12 head teachers and 24 teachers participated in semi-structured interviews. The survey produced eight major aspects of a head teacher's leadership practices (Salfi, 2011). Among these aspects, survey respondents believed it is necessary for leaders to develop a collective and shared school vision (head teachers,  $\mu=4.03$ ,  $\sigma=.56$ ; teachers,  $\mu=3.41$ ,  $\sigma=.87$ ;  $t=2.364$ ). The results of the survey are important for K-12 international school leaders. They too are charged with producing successful educational outcomes. However, unlike the head teachers in

Pakistan, K-12 international leaders have the added complexity of working amongst a myriad of cultures, often in foreign lands.

A visionary K-12 educational leader charts a course for the future of the school. Tschannen-Moran (2013) claimed, "If anyone is responsible for lifting up a vision of the school as a trustworthy environment for all constituencies, it is the person charged with the responsibility for school leadership" (p. 43). In a 2015 mixed-methods study of leadership and curriculum change in Botswana, Rubhumbu collected survey data from 162 academic middle managers at five private institutions of higher learning. Moreover, the researcher interviewed 10 academic middle managers to provide additional data. The quantitative results were analyzed and ranked by mean score to show how leadership techniques generate curriculum change. The respondents believed the most important leadership technique includes, "Providing a clear vision to the department and communicating it in a clear and inspirational way to all department staff members" ( $M=4.34$ ,  $SD=1.1$ ) (Rubhumbu, 2015, p. 5). Moreover, the qualitative data provides additional perspective to the results. Interviewees believed change occurred due to teamwork and participation of staff members (Rubhumbu, 2015). The vision of the leader charts a course for the school. The future success of the school will ultimately be determined by the school's perception and belief in the leader's vision.

The study of teachers' and administrators' perceptions of the characteristics of effective leadership for K-12 international schools endeavored to identify essential leadership qualities. A variety of effective leadership characteristics were provided by survey respondents. Subsequently, the literature review focused on the leadership characteristics of cultural intelligence, humor, and vision. The literature review affirms

these specific leadership characteristics are germane to effective leaders in and out of education.

## **Chapter 3: Methods**

### **Research Methodological Frame**

Mixed-methods were employed to investigate the research problem. The researcher selected Grounded Theory to study respondents' answers to the open-ended survey questions. Glasser and Strauss (1967), founders of grounded theory, wrote the "main goal in developing new theories is their purposeful systematic generation from the data of social research" (p. 28). This qualitative approach allowed the researcher to fully develop respondents' answers to open-ended questions.

The researcher employed descriptive statistics as part of the mixed-methodology. Shields and Rangarajan (2013) wrote, "Descriptive statistics (frequency distributions, cross tabulations, mean, median, mode, standard deviation, range) are often used to summarize data" (p. 72). This quantitative approach to research provided a general demographic description of the survey respondents.

### **Participants and context**

The 50 research participants were current or former international school teachers and administrators, 60% of whom were from the United States of America and 28% of whom represented the Commonwealth of Nations. Many K-12 international schools desire western-trained English speaking educators. It is possible the high-number of respondents from the United States of America and the Commonwealth of Nations reflect this demand. Additionally, the survey data includes responses from indigenous educators working at international schools.

## **Data Collection**

An internet-based survey opportunistically obtained data to determine the perceptions of effective leadership for K-12 international schools. Thirty current and former international school teachers and administrators received the survey on August 3, 2015. The timing of the survey was intentional. The researcher believed maximum response would be realized from educators transitioning from summer break to their international post for start of school. Moreover, snowball sampling was employed as research participants were asked to share the survey electronically with other international educators. Twenty additional educators participated in the survey through this sampling technique.

The researcher constructed the anonymous online survey. Four international educators reviewed the survey before it was activated. These international educators have a collective number of years teaching experience at a variety of schools on several continents. These study participants viewed the survey through the lens of an international educator. Subsequently, these international educators served an essential purpose as they helped increase survey validity.

The participants answered two open-ended survey questions and 12 closed ended survey questions. The open-ended questions attempted to induce participants to write their perceptions in detail. The closed-ended questions endeavored to gain an understanding of the average demographics of survey participants. The estimated time to complete the survey was 10 minutes (Appendix A).

## **Data Analysis**

The survey generated data representative of the voice of international educators. The researcher used the systematic design approach for ground theory to analyze data. Corbin and Strauss (2014) affirmed, “The procedures [found in grounded theory] can be used to uncover the beliefs and meanings that underlie action, to examine rational as well as nonrational aspects of behavior, and to demonstrate how logic and emotion combine to influence how persons respond to events or handle problems through action and interaction” (p. 11).

Systematic design analyzes data through coding. The three phases of coding include open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Creswell, 2012). Additionally, the researcher created a visual representation of data constructed from answers generated through the open-ended survey questions.

The researcher employed data triangulation to validate the coding results. “Triangulation is a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 126). The validation of data through triangulation occurred by cross verifying the qualitative responses of teachers and administrators to both open-ended and closed-ended questions found within the survey. Furthermore, the nature of the survey provides additional validation as current and former international teachers and administrators have equal opportunity to share their perceptions of the characteristics of effective leadership for K-12 international schools.



The researcher used Microsoft Excel to produce descriptive statistics for the closed-ended survey questions. These 12 closed-ended questions provide valuable information in regards to the demographics of the survey participants.

The qualitative survey data represents coded responses to the open-ended question: *Please explain in detail what you believe to be the characteristics of an effective international school administrator.* The researcher looked for relationships among the data and grouped like codes together. These relationships produced 17 categories. Similar codes and categories were funneled together to develop three themes.

An international educator reviewed the codes, categories, and themes to validate the researcher's findings. They recognized that the relationship between data points and codes were accurate. The international educator agreed with how the codes and categories were funneled together to develop themes.

The researcher used In Vivo Coding to analyze the data. Charmaz (2006) believed in vivo coding, "can provide a crucial check on whether you have grasped what is significant" (p. 57). Strauss (1987) supported this method of analysis as in vivo codes depict, "behaviors or process which will explain to the analyst how the basic problem of the actors is resolved or processed" (p. 33). Analyzing the open-ended survey question responses, the researcher found the data produced 126 codes in total.

The frequency of each code was noted in an effort to accurately represent the voice of each respondent. The data produced a range of code frequency. At the high end of the range, one code appeared in the qualitative survey data 18 times and two other codes appeared 16 times. At the low end of the range, 39 codes appeared only once. In

total, 126 codes occurred 471 times throughout the survey. See Table 4 for further explanation.

## Chapter 4: Results

The mixed-methods study investigated the characteristics of effective leadership for K-12 international schools. Teachers and administrators provided data that led to the creation of codes, categories, and themes. These themes include emotional intelligence, the ability to establish school culture, and administrative mindset.

Emotional intelligence represents data found in the first theme. Salovey and Mayer (1990) defined, emotional intelligence as “...the subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions” (p. 188). “Emotional intelligence encompasses a variety of emotionally and socially competent behaviors, including intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligences” (Ciarrochi, Forgas, & Mayer, 2001, p. 72). Nine categories comprise the theme of emotional intelligence. The relationships found amongst the 72 survey codes developed the categories. The survey codes are indicative of the characteristics of intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligences. Table 1 lists the categories of emotional intelligence and selected participants' excerpts.

Table 1

*Emotional Intelligence*

Category	Selected Participants' Excerpts
Visible	"...visible before, during, and after school."
Trust	"One who is trusted and believed for not only what they say, but how they interact with colleagues."
Integrity	"Uncompromising High Ethical and Moral Standards."
Personality Traits	"Laughter is medicine when living overseas. On nearly every international teaching application, having a good sense of humor is a profound trait that is a necessary requirement. Each day living overseas has its own set of twists and turns."
International/ Global Mindfulness	"Because of the intercultural aspects of international education, it is of vital importance that the international administrator is both aware of and sensitive to culture. Every day s/he is dealing with multiple cultures and in a multi-cultural environment. This individual should be prepared to learn from the cultures in which s/he comes into contact, and be able to contribute meaningfully to the multi-cultural experience. This includes being culturally smart and culturally knowledgeable. This calls for a great deal of flexibility on the part of the international administrator. S/he must be prepared to deal with potential cultural conflict, and play the role of mediator between cultures."
Teamwork	"The capacity to work effectively with a Board of Trustees/Directors/Governors to ensure the continued vitality and continuous improvement of the school."
Faculty Development	"The leader must...be passionate about developing future leaders."
Relationships	"The leader should have a totally trustworthy, transparent, and open relationship with the school board..."
Supportive	"The leader needs to be available with their time, provide a listening ear, and show unwavering support of the staff, students and families."

Establishing School Culture represents data found in the second theme. Writing about school culture, Deal and Peterson (1990) highlight the commonality found among

principals in their research. The authors claim: “All of them had a deep understanding of where their schools had been, where, and needed to go. Their success was determined primarily by an ability to read the culture of a school and to articulate a shared destiny” (p. 87). Subsequently, the researcher used survey data to form three categories characterized by traits common to the theme of establishing school culture. The relationships found amongst the 17 survey codes formed the categories. Table 2 lists the categories of establishing school culture and selected participants’ excerpts.

Table 2

*Establishing School Culture*

Category	Selected Participants' Excerpts
Culture of School	"Creating a safe and nurturing environment for students who are displaced from their comfort zone."
Improve Student Learning	"The school leader needs to engage the community at all levels to be able to understand the complex issues and ensure that the best interests are being made in student learning.'
Understanding Curriculum/Best Practices	"Knowledge of the program the schools uses, such as IB or AP."

Administrative Mindset exemplifies data found in the third theme. The researcher defines administrative mindset as a combination of ability and background which allows the educational leader to perform the duties of the position. The definition represents information yielded by the survey data. Additionally, six categories comprise the theme. Relationships found amongst 37 survey codes formed the categories. Table 3 lists the categories of administrative mindset and selected participants’ excerpts.

Table 3

*Administrative Mindset*

Category	Selected Participants' Excerpts
Pragmatic	"Pragmatism: The leader is at times required to deal quickly and decisively with issues contrary to a collaborative style. The leader needs the courage to know when to make these calls and the ability to make calls that are generally sound."
Practiced	"There is no doubt that it helps to have been a teacher and a mid-level administrator before taking on top administrative jobs in schools..."
System Understanding	"Understanding budgets and resourcing and how to efficiently purchase needed resources..."
Visionary Leader	"One who is able to plan and lead an international school towards a goal while not losing sight of the present."
Learned	"Brains- because without them you won't win the respect of your teachers or Trustees, and you won't be able to answer the myriad of questions that are asked of you every day."
Professional	"High levels of preparedness. I find international schools to be fast moving places in comparison with national/state schools. Students and staff tend to turn over quickly and if effective routines are not in place from the very beginning then the learning process could be significantly hindered."

Table 4

*Code Frequency*

Category	Theme	Number of the 126 Total Survey Codes Per Theme	Percentage of 126 Total Survey Codes Per Theme (rounded to nearest hundredth)	Number of the 471 Frequency of Survey Codes Found Per Theme	Percentage of the 471 Frequency of Survey Codes Per Theme (rounded to the nearest hundredth)
Intrapersonal Skills: Visible, Trust, Integrity, Personality Traits, Cultural Intelligence Interpersonal Skills: Team Work Faculty Development, Relationships, Supportive	Emotional Intelligence	72	57.14%	262	55.63%
Culture of School, Improve Student Learning, Understanding of Curriculum/Best Practices	Establishing School Culture	17	13.49%	70	15.10%
Pragmatic, Practiced, System Understanding, Visionary Leader, Learned, Professional	Administrative Mindset	37	29.37%	139	29.51%

Table 5 includes results for the 12 closed ended demographic questions. The table includes both mode and mean to help provide accurate representation of the central tendency of data. The possibility exists that the use of mode represented by the answer “none” in some questions may not be truly representative of respondent demographics.

The researcher noted some interesting findings in the demographic questions data set that may be explored in future research. A Master’s degree is the highest level of educational achievement for 65% of survey respondents as compared to 8% of respondents having only earning a bachelor’s degree. This is curious considering many K-12 international school contracts may not allow educators enough time on a university campus in their home country to complete the degree process. The researcher is interested to learn at what point in a current administrator’s educational career did they complete a Master's degree and if it was before the recent rise in online university options?

Additionally, the majority of survey respondents (58%) have been a teacher or administrator at three or more international schools. The majority of respondents (59%) have lived in three or more countries. The researcher is curious to learn if a person’s qualitative response would be influenced by the number of years spent teaching at additional international schools and time spent living in additional countries.



Table 5

*Mode and Mean of Demographic Questions*

Question	Answer (Mode)	Number of Respondents (Mode)	Answer (Mean)	Number of Respondents (Mean)
Question 1) What is your home country?	United States of America	30	NA	NA
Question 2) Indicate your current position in education.	International School Director	19	NA	NA
Question 3) Select all former education positions you have held in your career.	International School Teacher	37	NA	NA
Question 4) How many years have you worked as an international school administrator?	None	13	6-10 years	7
Question 5) How many years have you worked as an international school teacher?	1-5 years	15	6-10 years	14

Question 6) How many years have you worked as an administrator in your home country?	None	27	1-5 years	12
Question 7) How many years have you worked as a teacher in your home country?	1-5 years	24	6-10 years	9
Question 8) At how many international schools have you been a teacher or administrator?	1-2 schools(s)	27	3-4 schools	14
Question 9) In how many different countries have you been a teacher or administrator?	1-2 country(ies)	20	3-4 countries	18
Question 10) What is your highest level of educational achievement?	Master's degree	32	NA	NA
Question 11) Gender?	Male	35	NA	NA
Question 12) What is your age?	40-49 years old	17	50-59 years old	9

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## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Summary**

### **Limitations**

Several limitations appear to be inherent to the study. These limitations include, but are not limited to, the possibility that the study results may have been impacted had the researcher chose to isolate respondent data. Specifically, instead of using all survey respondent data, the researcher could have selected data from either current or former teachers and/or administrators. Isolating for age and gender may have impacted the data as well. Moreover, 88% of survey respondents reported that they originally hail from the United States of America or the Commonwealth of Nations. The countries of Germany, Italy, Jordan, Latvia, and Turkey were represented by the remaining 12% of survey respondents. The possibility exists that survey data overly represents individuals who have completed a doctoral dissertation and/or graduate thesis. Respondents may have been compelled to reply to the survey request due to previous experience creating and disseminating surveys for their own higher education research.

### **Discussion**

The study asked teachers' and administrators' perceptions of the characteristics of effective leadership for K-12 international schools. The researcher asked international educators to answer the question: What do teachers and administrators of international schools believe to be the characteristics of an effective international school administrator? The research findings provide some insight into our understanding of the question.

The growth of K-12 international education has coincided with an era of increased globalization. Many international schools are replete with a mixture of groups of people representing cultures from around the world. However, the diversity found among these groups is part of the challenge for school leadership (Walker & Dimmock, 2005).

“Schools must “respect and reflect the rich cultural strengths of students from diverse groups and use teaching strategies that are consistent with their cultural characteristics” to navigate the diversity contained within the walls of most K-12 international schools (Banks, 2016, p. 100). Similar to Banks, the researcher posits we need leadership strategies that meet the demands of our international students and are consistent with the expectations of a multicultural school staff and community. I agree with survey respondents who believe, effective K-12 international school leaders must possess emotional intelligence (humor, cultural intelligence), have the ability to establish school culture, and hold an administrative mindset (vision) to successfully engage a culturally diverse school constituency.

A leader may naturally possess some of the aforementioned leadership characteristics. However, it is possible these characteristics can be learned. Crow and Crow (1961), suggested: “Learning involves change. It is concerned with the acquisition of habits, knowledge, and attitudes. It enables the individual to make both personal and social adjustments.” (p. 1). The educational leader who learns and employs the characteristics of an effective K-12 international school leader will have the opportunity to successfully guide their school community.

## **Conclusion**

People are increasingly mobile. The world's population included 50.53 million expatriates in 2013; projected to expand 3% to 58.84 million expatriates by 2017 ("Finaccord," 2014). These new residents of foreign lands demand a quality education for their children. K-12 international schools provide a cultural and educational platform to meet this need.

School leaders are charged with creating an educational environment that meets expatriate expectations. The secret to a leader's success is simple. Winik (2001) contended, "it is not brilliance but judgement that separates the great leaders from the routine" (p. 241). However, there is a limited body of knowledge in the field of K-12 international school leadership to help guide educators as they work with students and families who hail from various countries around the globe.

The study of teachers' and administrators' perceptions of the characteristics of effective leadership for K-12 international schools adds to the body of knowledge. The researcher found that current and former international educators believed a successful leader owns a requisite set of characteristics. K-12 international school leaders possess emotional intelligence, have the ability to establish school culture, and hold an administrative mindset to successfully engage a culturally diverse school constituency.

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## Appendix A: Survey Consent Form

8/1/15

Dear Research Participant,

I am writing to invite you to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to learn about the characteristics of effective leadership for international schools.

I am inviting you to be in this study because you have been identified as a leader in international education. Approximately 15 people will take part in this study.

The survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Moreover, the survey contains two written response questions and 12 demographic questions.

Your part in this study is anonymous. That means your answers to all questions are private. No one else will know if you participated in this study and no one else can find out what your answers were. Scientific reports will be based on group data and will not identify you or any individual as being in this project.

There are no known risks from being in this study, and you will not benefit personally. The goal of this research is to discover common characteristics of effective leadership found in international education leaders.

Taking part in this research study is completely voluntary. If you decide not to be in this study, or if you stop participating at any time, you won't be penalized or lose any benefits for which you otherwise qualify.

If you have any further questions regarding your rights as a participant in a research project you may contact Dr. Brian Cherry of the Human Subjects Research Review Committee of Northern Michigan University (1-906-227-2300) [bcherry@nmu.edu](mailto:bcherry@nmu.edu). Any questions you have regarding the nature of this research project will be answered by the principal researcher who can be contacted as follows: Travis Smith, (1-906-869-3479), [travsmi@nmu.edu](mailto:travsmi@nmu.edu).

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Travis Smith

## Appendix B: Survey

12/21/2015

Research Topic: Characteristics of Effective Leadership for International Schools

[Edit this form](#)

# Research Topic: Characteristics of Effective Leadership for International Schools

You are being asked to participate in this survey because you are a current or former international school administrator or teacher. This anonymous survey should take approximately 10 minutes to complete. You will be asked to complete two open-ended survey questions and 12 closed ended survey questions. This information will be used to determine the characteristics of effective leadership for international schools. As a fellow administrator and former international educator, I understand your time is valuable, so thank you for your help!

Research Proposal: HS15-663, Northern Michigan University

### **Please explain in detail what you believe to be the characteristics of an effective INTERNATIONAL school administrator.**

(Describe a minimum of three of the most important characteristics below. Also, please share why you feel these characteristics are the most important. Please write a minimum of two sentences, though more detail is strongly encouraged and appreciated.)

### **What is your home country?**

### **Please explain in detail what you believe to be the differences in characteristics of an effective school administrator in your HOME Country as compared to an effective INTERNATIONAL school administrator.**

(Please give your opinion, even if you have not been a teacher or administrator in your home country. Again, please write a minimum of two sentences, though more detail is strongly encouraged and appreciated.)

[https://docs.google.com/a/mapsnet.org/forms/d/10K9FE4qT7ogib9B2i4isv2upTzDYkG38JlzCUckG\\_J0/viewform](https://docs.google.com/a/mapsnet.org/forms/d/10K9FE4qT7ogib9B2i4isv2upTzDYkG38JlzCUckG_J0/viewform)

1/5

- none
- 1-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years
- 21-25 years
- 26-30 years
- 31+ years

**How many years have you worked as an administrator in your HOME COUNTRY?**

(Please include past school years and the current school year if applicable.)

- none
- 1-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years
- 21-25 years
- 26-30 years
- 31+ years

**How many years have you worked as a teacher in your HOME COUNTRY?**

(Please include past school years and the current school year if applicable.)

- none
- 1-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years
- 21-25 years
- 26-30 years
- 31+ years

**At how many international schools have you been a teacher or administrator?**

- 1-2 school(s)
- 3-4 schools
- 5-6 schools
- 7-8 schools
- 9-10 schools
- 11+ schools



**In how many different countries have you been a teacher or administrator?**

(Not including your home country.)

- 1-2 country(ies)
- 3-4 countries
- 5-6 countries
- 7-8 countries
- 9-10 countries
- 11+ countries

**What is your highest level of educational achievement?**

- Doctorate
- Education Specialist degree
- Masters degree
- Bachelors degree
- Other:

**Gender**

- Female
- Male

**What is your age?**

- 20-29 years old
- 30-39 years old
- 40-49 years old
- 50-59 years old
- 60-69 years old
- 70+ years old

**If you would be interested in a follow-up conversation to possibly be included in this study, please list your contact information below.**

*Never submit passwords through Google Forms.*