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ABSTRACT

INCLUSIVE DELIBERATION (ID): A CASE STUDY OF HOW TEACHERS EXPERIENCE THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS FOR CHANGE INITIATIVES WITHIN A SCHOOL COMMITTEE

by

Adam H. Frank

Research reveals that there is often a major disconnect between leaders and workers in organizational settings, especially when it comes to decision-making. Consequently, organizational decisions are often misunderstood by the employees who must implement top-down directives, which can lead to growing distrust, frustration, and needless resistance toward change initiatives. This kind of disconnect, resulting confusion, and resistance is also found in schools between principals and teachers. Having worked as a teacher and then as an administrator in three separate school districts, I have become overwhelmed by the bureaucratic nature of school committees. In my experience, school committees tend to be exclusive, administrator-driven, and lack authentic, rich discussion. This study seeks to narrow the focus of research on school committees by exploring how teachers experience the decision-making process for change initiatives in a school committee setting when inclusive deliberation (ID) is used as a framework for school committee design. Also, the study explores the impact of school committee design and operation on teacher resistance and feelings of morale. The methodology of this study is a single instrument, action research case study, expressed in a narrative. The case exists at the high school where I work as an assistant principal. During the second semester of the 2018-2019 school year, a committee known as the Building Leadership Team (BLT) altered its design and operation, using the framework of inclusive deliberation (ID). Teachers' experience with the BLT, along with other phenomena that took place during the case study with additional members of the staff, were collected as data. Data was collected through observational field notes, journaling of daily interactions, participant reflection prompts, staff surveys, a focus group reflection, and individual interviews. Inductive analysis was used to triangulate the data to understand the phenomena being researched. The study found that teachers valued their experience with inclusive deliberation (ID), feeling both included and satisfied with a framework (i.e., *The Iceberg Approach*) to help them deliberate major school issues/decisions. In addition, the research discovered that the design and operation of school committees, at least in this school, does not appear to have an impact on teacher resistance or feelings of morale. In fact, the findings suggest that most teachers do not want or have the time to participate in meetings on decision-making for school policy or school operations. However, it appears that teachers still want to feel involved, knowing that there are multiple avenues to express their participation if they feel the need to do so.

INCLUSIVE DELIBERATION (ID): A CASE STUDY OF HOW TEACHERS
EXPERIENCE THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS FOR CHANGE INITIATIVES
WITHIN A SCHOOL COMMITTEE

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DEDICATION

First and foremost, I dedicate this dissertation to Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior, who has created and equipped me to pursue and enjoy lifelong learning. I am thankful that He has placed a passion for education and students in my heart. I am blessed that through Him, I have found peace, joy, and a proper perspective on living.

Next, I dedicate this project to my wife, Katie, who has always supported my career, pursuits, and personality. When I asked her, "Should I get my Ph.D.?," she said, "How would you not?" She is unlike anyone I have ever known and without her friendship and support, getting to this point in this journey would not have been possible.

I want to also dedicate this dissertation to my two children, Tyler and Emmeline ("Emmy"). They are perfectly and wonderfully made by a God who loves them deeply. May this accomplishment in my life be an inspiration in their lives to pursue their own passions with fervor, commitment, and humility, giving thanks in all circumstances. You each will accomplish great things!

Lastly, I dedicate this accomplishment to my parents, Tom and Nancy Frank, for their commitment to me as their youngest child and for their encouragement and praise of my personal interests and abilities. They have always been my biggest fans and advocates.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In analyzing dozens of successful and unsuccessful organizational reforms, Kotter and Schlesinger (2008) remark,

> Few organizational change efforts tend to be complete failures, but few tend to be entirely successful either. Most efforts encounter problems; they often take longer than expected and desired, they sometimes kill morale, and they often cost a great deal in terms of managerial time or emotional upheaval. More than a few organizations have not even tried to initiate needed changes because the managers involved were afraid that they were simply incapable of successfully implementing them. (p. 132)

Unknown are the number of cases that represent the latter approach – not even attempting change. However, when the pursuit of change does occur, too often it is a "quick fix" reaction that defaults to assumptions instead of asking questions, and that provides rash solutions before a problem is properly understood. Furthermore, as implied by its mere definition, committees that are tasked with making decisions are often comprised of only a few individuals – a *committee* of people. The majority of stakeholders aren't able to participate in the committee discussions that affect organizational decisions. Their access to decision-making is confined to their respective representatives who serve on the committee(s). This has been the case in all three of the school districts where I have worked, which includes four different secondary schools.

When studying the perspectives of those affected by change in an organization, Gover and Duxbury (2015) and Brezicha, Bergmark, and Mitra (2015) find significant confusion and various interpretations among those within the organization who are expected to implement new practices. Change usually brings "misunderstanding and lack of trust" because employees do not accurately understand the reasons for change, resulting in false perceptions (Kotter & Schlesinger, 2008, pp. 132-134). As a result, employees may needlessly resist a change initiative or remain in a place of indifference toward the proposed course of action. Elizabeth Green asserts,

> The story of failed school reforms is the same every time; a big excited push, followed by a mass confusion and then a return to conventional practices. (as cited in Fibkins, 2015, p. 21)

Yet, when returning to conventional practices, how much more abundant is the confusion, pessimism, and lack of trust? Consequently, conversations about change exist among a great

divide between the formal rituals that take place in the committee meetings and the uncensored diatribes that happen among teachers in the hallways and workrooms. A collection of change researchers write,

> Our review of the past 30 years of change literature reveals that fewer than one in eight workplace change efforts produces anything other than cynicism. (Grenny, Patterson, Maxfield, McMillan, & Switzler, 2013, p. 9)

Having served as a middle school and high school teacher and as a building-level administrator at three different school districts, I have been overwhelmed with the observation that schoolwide decisions seem to originate from hastily created committees that are comprised of only a handful of teachers, led by administrators who unknowingly manifest a power dynamic between them and the members on the committee, and that meet sparingly or for only a short duration. Committee discussions tend to be overly formal, lack authenticity and rich dialogue, and seldom expose underlying questions, concerns, or complications regarding any topic on the agenda. Furthermore, meeting agendas are usually created and facilitated by administrators. Unfortunately, once decisions are made and implemented, resistance and frustration abound among teachers.

What if the decision-making process about change initiatives in schools was liberated from the bureaucratic structure and rituals that so often characterize school committees? What if every teacher had access to a decision-making or decision-driving committee – access not merely through another teacher representative? Especially in a larger school, how would it be feasible to have such broad member access to decision-making? It's hard to imagine a productive decision-making process at a building-wide staff meeting – unless, heaven forbid, a school reduced its decision-making to the casting of a vote. How many committees would a school need to include everyone and broaden stakeholder interest? Wouldn't teachers decry, "No, not another *committee*!" How can decision-bearing committees facilitate authentic, rich dialogue? When committees are led by an administrator, what are the power dynamics in play? If a new approach to committee work is not explored, then what? How do schools make decisions? How are teachers involved? How is the divide between administration and staff reduced? How are voices heard, perspectives shared, morale improved, or tough problems solved? How is widespread buy-in and positive momentum achieved?

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to contribute to research that may help schools to rethink and reshape how they structure and operate committees, especially as they relate to decision-making processes, so that decisions about change are more effective and more widely embraced by staff within a given school building. Perhaps the problem is not that employees resist change, but that leaders go about change the wrong way. Instead of settling for ineffective solutions that are misunderstood and resisted by the individuals who must implement them, schools may need a different design for their decision-making committees.

There seems to be a gap in research on school committees. There is much research on school reform, teacher attitudes about school culture, resistance to change, and teacher participation in school decision-making, but little research has explored the phenomenon of such concepts specifically within one of the main forums for school decision-making: committees. In addition, this study seeks to narrow the focus of research on school committees to how teachers experience the concepts of inclusivity and deliberation and the impact they may have on teacher resistance and feelings of morale.

This study envisions a school committee design that is characterized by inclusive deliberation (ID). Inclusive deliberation (ID) is a term I have created based on the research from the literature review and from the narratives of my own experiences. Often, committees are comprised of predetermined members, some of whom other people within the school scratch their heads as to how or why they were selected. Regardless, committees almost always represent a small group of stakeholders. To combat an oligarchical spirit, schools typically rely on a representative model to best characterize and include the voice of everyone. However, as suggested in the literature review and in the narrative from the historical background of the school in this case study, such committee design may still pose problems of disenfranchisement, disconnect, misunderstanding, and ultimately resistance toward a schoolwide decision.

The inclusive concept in ID seeks to open the doors of committees to widespread participation of each and every staff member within the school – if they so desire to participate. Inclusivity is essential to garner teacher buy-in (Fibkins, 2015; Fullan, 1994), to clarify or circumvent unnecessary misunderstanding (Kotter & Schlesinger, 2008), and to align and overlap a multitude of individual visions into a singular momentum for change (Fullan, 1994; Kotter, 2012; Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, Dutton, & Kleiner, 2012).

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In addition, committees often lack rich, meaningful discourse. Agenda items are usually bureaucratic and lack the interest of the broader staff. The deliberative concept in ID seeks to cut through the monotony of over-simplified issues, bringing carefully selected agenda items to the table – items that come from administration *and* staff. These should be items that require careful attention and rich dialogue. But, more than just dialogue, ID suggests that the discussion be deliberation. That is, discussion becomes deliberation when it is conducted in a reasoned manner, highly analytical, yet open to broad and exploratory thinking (McCutcheon, 1995). Deliberation reflects a commitment to analyze and discuss the deeper elements of an issue and to arrive at once hidden realizations (Radzicki & Taylor, 1997; Senge et al., 2012). It allows resisters to explore their (un)readiness (Armenakis, Harris, & Mossholder, 1993; Piderit, 2000) and to grow in their development of understanding (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016; Kegan, 1982).

My research is a narrative case study that investigates the phenomenon of how teachers experience the decision-making process for change initiatives within a school committee when the committee design and operation reflect the concept of inclusive deliberation (ID). First, the participants in the school committee for this case study were introduced to the concept of inclusive deliberation (ID). Next, they worked with me to develop a tool to help implement inclusive deliberation (ID). Afterwards, the participants in the school committee practiced school committee work using the tool for and norms of inclusive deliberation (ID). The result is an action research journey that may help the school in this case study or other schools make future adjustments to the design and operation of school committees.

Since this study involves organizational theory and much of the literature review originates from organizational research, I will deviate slightly to address Sergiovanni's (1996) refutation of the schoolhouse as a formal organization. To delve for a moment into my own philosophy of education, I agree with Sergiovanni's (1996) stance as I do with Dewey's (1938) vision of social situations and educative experiences being central to a student-centered school environment. I agree that an ideal school may, in fact, be one that resembles anything other than a formal organization. However, I intend to be clear that the focus of this study is concerned not with the nature or purpose of schooling. Rather, the focus of this inquiry is the nature of how decisions for change are made in schools. In other words, the focus is on the *process* that is used when making decisions for change – what it looks like, how it operates, how it is perceived – and

if there is a more enlightened way to go about it. Perhaps a new approach to the decision-making process for change in schools can lead to change initiatives that better resemble the visions laid forth by student-centered thinkers like Sergiovanni and Dewey. However, since schools currently do seem to resemble a type of formal organization (whether rightly or wrongly is a topic for another time), the purpose of this study is to focus on schools as they currently find themselves – that is, being quite organizational. As a result, I investigated the structure and operation of a school committee in a particular school using a narrative case study approach when inclusive deliberation (ID) is employed.

Research Questions

Since this is a qualitative case study with an action research component, I do not intend to test a hypothesis. Instead, I am interested in investigating the structure and operation of a committee in a particular school setting, especially as it relates to decision-making. My focus for research was to observe and analyze how teachers experienced the decision-making process for change initiatives within a school committee as it related to the theoretical framework of inclusive deliberation (ID). Hopefully, this case study will yield valuable information and insight into school committee design, decision-making processes, and the related impact on teacher resistance and feelings of morale. Thus, my research questions are:

- *How do teachers experience the decision-making process for change initiatives when inclusive deliberation (ID) is used as a framework for school committee design and work?*
- *What impact does the design and operation of school committees have on teacher resistance and feelings of morale?*

School Committees – A Background

My first teaching position was at a large middle school in a large, suburban school district. After three years, I accepted a teaching position at the high school in that district. This school district is one of the larger districts in Ohio. While there, I acquired some administrative experience that allowed me to take a high school administrative position at a small, rural district. After two years working in the smaller district, I accepted a high school administrative job at a mid-sized district nearby. This last district is small when compared to my first place of employment, but still considered large when compared to most districts in the state. All three school districts are prized by their local residents and each of them excel in academic and extra-

curricular performance. The first district mentioned is considered affluent, while the other two are more moderate in terms of financial demographics. The two larger districts are suburban, while the smaller district is rural – although still not very far in proximity from suburban influence. All three districts are predominantly White.

　　While working in K-12 education, one of the challenges I have come to notice is that teachers are expected to constantly grow in their professional development and are encouraged to participate in schoolwide decision-making, yet find themselves spending nearly all their working hours in their classrooms. Even if they wanted to read educational journals on effective teaching practices or participate in dialogue about schoolwide decisions, they have very little time to do so within the workday. However convoluted it may be, there seems to be an expectation, and often a desire on their part, to engage in these extra-classroom activities. Regardless, the structure of the school day does not allow for it. So, what do schools do? Often, they form committees.

　　At the high school where I currently work (which is also the setting for this case study), there are two established committees – established meaning they are structured entities that exist each school year. One committee consists of department chair leaders (e.g., English, Math, World Language, etc…) and the other committee, called the Building Leadership Team (BLT), consists of a teacher representative from each of the various departments. The department chairs receive a paid stipend and must interview with building administration to earn their post. The BLT members are handpicked by the building principal and serve as volunteer teacher-leaders. Thus, each department has two subject matter representatives – the department chair, who sits on the department leader committee, and the BLT representative, who sits on the BLT committee. Each committee is led by a school administrator. The committee agendas are created and facilitated by the school administrator in charge of the respective committee. Teachers can raise auxiliary items for discussion at the end of each meeting. Each committee meets once a month after school. The department chair committee tends to focus on academic topics, whereas the BLT mostly deals with student behavior items and school culture. Agenda items and meeting minutes from each committee are discussed at each department meeting, which occur once a month. In department meetings, teachers discuss committee-based topics, then their collective voice is given opportunity to be heard at the next committee meeting.

　　Other than meeting one-on-one with an administrator or talking directly to their department chair and/or BLT representative, the majority of teachers do not have any avenue for

direct participation in schoolwide discussion or decision-making. And inevitably, the communication of committee topics and minutes to department teachers is prone to changing form because of the "telephone phenomenon" (i.e., where the original message becomes something entirely different than its original intent once it is passed from one person to another). In addition, each committee representative manifests a range of personality traits. For example, one committee member may consistently communicate the desires of his/her department, while another member tries to, but unintentionally fails to do so effectively. Yet another committee member may tend to stay quiet in a group meeting, while another speaks his/her own mind rather than the collective opinions of his/her department. Often, a non-committee teacher will lament, "Why are we doing this or that, or when was that decision made?" Quite regularly, the response is, "It was decided in the BLT meeting. It's in the meeting minutes." Or, "Didn't your committee representative inform your department at your last department meeting?" Sometimes teachers are asked, "This was approved by *your* department chair or BLT representative, so why are you acting surprised by the decision?" Clearly, communication has broken down either through the telephone phenomenon, negligence to inform department members, or perhaps because of the busyness of the workweek and department agendas. Sometimes, maybe a department meeting is too many weeks away from a committee meeting and details of the committee meeting are unintentionally forgotten or de-emphasized. Regardless, there seems to be a disconnect between the broader base of teachers and what happens within committee meetings.

The school in this case study also forms ad hoc committees. For example, math and literacy councils were created to explore best practices for instruction and assessment as they relate to new content standards. Another example of an ad hoc committee occurred recently when the district office selected some teachers to form a hiring committee to select the new high school head principal. Similarly, the district office has formed a committee to examine options for a new alternative education program. My concern with these ad hoc committees is that the selection of participants and quality of deliberation are often inadequate when considering the significance of the given initiative.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

School Committees – Problem #1

In my experience, there are many problems with school committees – despite being a common means for schoolwide decision-making. First and perhaps most problematic, school committees consist of only a small portion of the teaching staff. By its very definition, a committee exists for a particular purpose (typically in schools, to discuss and make decisions), and is comprised of a smaller representation of the larger group. Therefore, everyone on the teaching staff is not given sufficient opportunity to hear information firsthand, to discuss important topics, or to participate in schoolwide decision-making. For a school, as with any organization, the concern with this problem is that teachers may feel devalued and without a voice when it comes to schoolwide decisions. Also, decisions aren't informed by and benefitting from the diverse professional opinions of the broader teaching staff. A large concern with limiting access to discussion about decision-making to only a few teachers is that the remaining teachers may display resistance toward schoolwide initiatives for change.

In his critique of school reform, Nehring (2009) describes the disconnect that often takes place in organizations in the following illustration:

> In Dilbert cartoons, everything always makes perfect organizational sense to that
> famously clueless manager with the pointy hair. But the workers in their cubicles know
> that whatever the manager cooks up actually will make no sense at all in the workplace.
>
> What makes the cartoon so funny is how confident and how wrong the manager is. (p. 4)

This general concept of there being confusion among employees during the change process is supported in several important pieces of literature. When studying the perspectives of those affected by change in an organization, Gover and Duxbury (2015) and Brezicha et al. (2015) find significant confusion and various interpretations among those within the organization who are expected to implement new practices. Similar to the "Dilbert cartoon," in both studies the management held a nice, neat concept of the new plan and assumed everything was being carried out accordingly, but the interpretation, implementation, and emotional response varied greatly among staff. According to Kotter and Schlesinger (2008), people often have "different assessments" because managers and employees often possess different information (pp. 132-134). Change usually brings "misunderstanding and lack of trust" because employees do not

accurately understand the reasons for change, resulting in false perceptions (Kotter & Schlesinger, 2008, pp. 132-134).

Kotter and Schlesinger (2008) find that "surprisingly few take time before an organizational change to assess systematically who might resist the change initiative and for what reasons" (p. 132). Kotter and Schlesinger (2008) reveal four main reasons why people resist change: 1) "self-interest" (i.e., feeling one will lose something of value), 2) "low tolerance for change" (i.e., fearing they are unable to endure the change successfully), 3) "different assessments" from managers and employees because each possess different information, and 4) "misunderstanding and lack of trust" because employees do not accurately understand the reasons for change (pp. 132-134).

Furthermore, resistance to change is all too often conceptualized and analyzed with the organization at-large in mind, and usually from the perspective of management (Brezicha et al., 2015; Gover & Duxbury, 2015; Jermias, 2001). Researchers typically see change as an "episodic occurrence," while people in an organization "experience change as a personal phenomena," seeing "change as continuous" (Gover & Duxbury, 2015, p. 34). Failing to understand the individual's perspective is where so many reform initiatives go wrong. Studies have shown that even when initiatives succeed at the organizational level, they often are resisted at the individual level (Jermias, 2001). According to Jermias (2001), "Researchers have long been puzzled by the fact that new initiatives intended to improve companies performance often encounter resistance by people who are directly affected by the change" (p. 146).

In his book, *The Graveyard of School Reform: Why the Resistance to Change and New Ideas*, Fibkins (2015) passionately argues for active participation of teachers in school reform. He asserts that the "no" of resistance "can be changed," if when "brought on board" teachers are "guaranteed a place to offer their ideas and be at the center of implementing the project" (Fibkins, 2015, p. xvi). Fibkins (2015) argues that they cannot be seen as "just a teacher" (p. 5). Fibkins (2015) continues,

> However, if they are not involved in all the phases of reform – the planning, implementation, and ongoing process – and relegated to a role as a doer, as in, "Here's the plan, you carry it out," their commitment to the reform is often at a low level. (p. 5)

To Fibkins (2015), this is a "'we are in this together, we are a team' model for success" (p. 2). To embrace a model with such a large degree of employee participation, leaders must be willing

to forfeit some control, which ironically is what those affected by change in the workplace have had to forfeit all the while when under the paradigm in the Dilbert cartoon. He claims, "Engaging teachers one by one on their own turf can play a major role in breaking down resistance" (Fibkins, 2015, p. 83). Poetter (2019) suggests that "group life" (i.e., working together to pose and solve difficult and important curricular issues) "allows teachers to own the processes and the outcomes for school change" (p. 210). Habecker (2018) asserts,

> There are those within every organization who see where problems potentially reside and where opportunities are likely to be found. Effective leader-followers understand this reality and regularly structure opportunities to receive this kind of input. Those who don't potentially end up in a fantasyland of their own creation. (p. 196)

Fullan (1994) emphasizes that "focusing on the individual is not a substitute for system change, *it is the most effective strategy for accomplishing it*" (p. 146). School committees need to provide access to all the individuals within a school. Otherwise, needless misunderstanding, confusion, and resistance may derail the potential for effective, widely celebrated decision-making. Allowing those who will be affected by change to participate in deciding the change can be a very effective strategy to reduce resistance and encourage broad staff ownership of an initiative for change.

School Committees – Problem #2

Second, school committees tend to be overly formal and inauthentic, routinely marching through administrator-driven agenda items while teacher-members sneak periodic peeks at the clock or their phones, wondering, "When will this meeting end – I'm tired from a long day of teaching and these aren't even the topics I or my colleagues want to be discussing?" The administrator leading the meeting does most of the talking. Usually there are one or two teachers who will speak up, while the others remain silent. Often, one or several teachers leave before the meeting ends. The agenda topics are characterized as schoolwide goals, but are usually crafted by administration. They are portrayed as building-wide concerns, but seldom reflect the main concerns of the broader staff. The leader(s) and the worker(s) become disconnected in their sense-making of reality, which can breed faulty decisions and debilitating resistance to reform.

As Dewey (1938) asserts,

> Doubtless if a fetish were made of the advice and directions so that they came to be inflexible dictates to be followed under every possible condition, then restriction of freedom of both parent and child would occur. (p. 43)

Yet, that is exactly what seems to happen. "Administrators are likely to resist changes that upset the existing hierarchical equilibrium even if the changes make sense for teachers, parents, and students" (Sergiovanni, 1996, p. 161).

On the other hand, by adopting a different perspective on resistance, administrators might be more welcoming of larger staff participation in decision-making. Piderit (2000) suggests resistance to change is not singular, but that attitudes toward change fall on a positive to negative continuum, existing among three separate, yet interrelated continuums: cognitive, emotional, and manifested behavior. Resistance is often perceived and analyzed as dissent, when in fact, many times it is what Watson (1982) refers to as "reluctance" (Piderit, 2000, p. 786). Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano (2016) implore,

> We need to meet seemingly resistant adults where they are – with our hearts, minds, and ideas – so that they can best hear and absorb what we are trying to say. In other words, in their reluctance, resistant adults may actually be imploring, "Tell me so I can hear you!" (p. 29)

Armenakis et al. (1993) redefine resistance as "(un)readiness" (as cited in Piderit, 2000, p. 786). Seldom is a person 100% for or against an initiative. Rather, his/her reaction falls along a continuum and varies in terms of his/her cognitive, emotional, and behavioral response. For example, a person might *intellectually* agree with a change affecting his/her workplace, but simultaneously *feel* apprehensive. Furthermore, he/she might *behave* in compliance because of not wanting to stand out or appear insubordinate.

Adopting a broader concept of resistance to change can allow leaders to better understand and analyze the reality of "(un)readiness." Quite simply, it can allow leaders to realize that resistance does not necessarily mean refusal. What is often called resistance is much more complex. This should not be surprising because people are complex; situations are complex. "Employee responses to change may evolve over time" (Piderit, 2000, p. 791). Piderit (2000) cautions the use of the concept "resistance," since it often connotes defiance and disobedience when in most cases the resistance signals valid concerns, ideas, and beliefs from those within the

organization. In other words, individuals' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses to change can provide great insight into the merits, roadblocks, and alternative paths inherent in a decision affecting change. As Fullan (2002) has found,

> Successful leaders don't mind when naysayers rock the boat. In fact, doubters sometimes have important points. Leaders look for ways to address those concerns. (p. 18)

> Indeed, there are times when administrators want to solicit staff input and feedback, but

perhaps sometimes forget that a power dynamic can exist when committee meetings are run by the "bosses" who evaluate the teachers on the committee and who are responsible for holding teachers accountable for various situations. Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano (2016) acknowledge,

> Some contexts of relationships can threaten or undermine our growth. In these contexts, we might not try on or try out our fullest selves or developing capacities because we do not feel safe psychologically, and the perceived penalty is too high (e.g., we perceive that our expressions of self would be unwelcomed or unacknowledged – or we could even lose our jobs!). (p. 42)

Buchanan and O'Connell (2006) remind, "Consensus is good, unless it is achieved too easily, in which case it becomes suspect" ("The Meeting of Minds," para. 5). Gardner (1986) wisely states:

> Paradoxically, all leaders know the reality that they "are almost never as much in charge as they are pictured to be, followers almost never are as submissive as one might imagine." (as cited in Habecker, 2018, p. 190)

I would hope Gardner is correct in saying that all leaders know this, but I'm afraid they don't. School committees need to flip the way meeting agendas are created and facilitated. Meeting agendas need to be created in large part by teachers. Something must happen so that committee meetings feel consensual, as if free and authentic thoughts can be shared and discussed. Citing a concept from Staw (1984), Sergiovanni (1996) writes:

> Detailed planning has a tendency to result in the "escalation of commitment" to a course of action that sustains itself irrationally long after it should have been abandoned. (p. 161)

> Schools need to guard against the formality in meetings that can lead to an escalation of

commitment. Otherwise, committee decisions gain a bad reputation as being bureaucratic, out of

touch with the desires of individual teachers, and ultimately, nothing but a waste of time. This is why teachers may vent, "No, not another *committee*!" This is also why some teachers who deeply desire participation in schoolwide decision-making nonetheless refuse to serve on committees. This is a shame because schools need the professional insight and collaboration from a wide base of teachers.

One of the most important prerequisites for change is a sense of *personal purpose/vision* among the *individuals* in the organization (Fullan, 1994). The top echelons of leadership are too far removed from the dynamics of a particular change setting. Change must be driven and take place with, in, and among individuals. Thus, teachers themselves must lead change. Poetter (2019) suggests, "Teachers hold the key to school reform, and without them, any new process or program is doomed to failure" (p. 152).

Rather than dictating change, the formal leader has the role of *facilitating* and *organizing* the personal visions brought to life by individuals who are working their visions out in collaborative forums of discussion and planning. People in an organization don't need to share the same vision. Often there doesn't need to be, nor should there necessarily be, one common goal, but rather an alignment of purpose (Senge et al., 2012). The focus is on creating alignment, not agreement (Senge et al., 2012). Everyone should have their own personal vision and then work to align their various visions. A great deal of "overlap" of purpose and vision will occur (Fullan, 1994). The 2015 National Association of Secondary School Principals' principal of the year, Jayne Ellspermann, states,

> If you understand what might be causing their resistance, then you're better able to fill
> that void between your vision for the school and the direction they're currently headed.
> (Mitchell, 2018, "Building Relationships," para. 15)

Kotter (2012) describes a style of leadership that has a keen understanding of change theory and that operates as an organizer of peoples' visions, strategically moving to catalyze change within a culture. When referring to a successful influencer, Grenny et al. (2013) write,

> His influence didn't result from merely confronting problems but from listening to people
> and then framing the change process in their terms. (p. 88)

Therefore, school administrators can still lead committee meetings, but as facilitators meant to align the various visions among teachers and other stakeholders.

School Committees – Problem #3

Third, school committees seldom engage in rich, meaningful dialogue, and rarely engage in real deliberation. Related to the previous point of being mostly administrative-driven, committee members are reluctant to bare their true feelings on controversial topics – if controversial topics are even on the agenda in the first place. And, related to the first concern with school committees, the teacher who may have the best perspective on a topic or might be the most passionate on a matter may not even be in attendance at the meeting. When there is passion, it usually concerns a peripheral topic, spurred on by a teacher in the committee who is vocalizing some kind of complaint, frustration, or desire, whether it be his/her own or that of a colleague in his/her department. However, as a digression from the agenda, these peripheral topics are usually short-lived. The group needs to "get back on track; back to the agenda." If one of these topics is given space to vent, they are so out of character with the formal setting that very little critical exchange takes place. In the end, committee decisions are often made not with sound thinking, student-centered focus, best practice, or widespread stakeholder consensus, but because the clock has passed the 60- or 90-minute mark and everyone is ready to go home.

This phenomenon is a real shame because school situations and problems are incredibly complex and need carefully crafted thoughts and ideas. Schools specifically, and organizations more generally, seem to be ignorant of the complex causality that encompasses every situation and every decision. If they were to become more aware, then the potential for great and well-received change might occur more readily. School committees need to reframe dialogue, practicing not mere discussion, but instead, deliberation. To deliberate is to discuss something with great intentionality and purpose. To deliberate is to critically analyze a topic or situation with careful reasoning, awareness of underlying variables, and attention to unintended consequences. Deliberation must occur prior to decision-making.

In the forward to McCutcheon's (1995) work on solo and group deliberation, Elliot Eisner writes,

> Efficiency [in the context of preplanning programs] is not a virtue when it reduces the phenomena that need to be addressed and oversimplifies and under-appreciates the conditions within which teachers work. (p. xi)

McCutcheon (1995) describes deliberation as:

> A process of reasoning about practical problems. It is solution oriented, that is, toward deciding on a course of action. A deliberative approach is a decision-making process in which people, individually or in groups, conceive a problem, create and weigh likely alternative solutions to it, envision the probable results of each alternative, and select or develop the best course of action. It is not a linear process… (p. 4)

Deliberation is more than mere discussion and it is the antithesis of "quick fix" decisions or bureaucratic "game playing." Deliberation is focused on an eventual decision and certainly recognizes time constraints and deadlines, but none of these take priority. The priority is careful reasoning that explores multiple avenues and various alternatives. Schwab (1978) argues that the focus is not in choosing the "*right* alternative.., but the *best* one" (as cited in McCutcheon, 1995, p. 9). "Dewey [1922] regards deliberation as 'a dramatic rehearsal (in imagination) of various possible lines of action'" (as cited in McCutcheon, 1995, p. 9). Albeit "complex and arduous" (McCutcheon, 1995, p. 9), it is noble pursuit of arriving at an optimal decision. In fact, McCutcheon (1995) suggests,

> …deliberation may be the most professional part of teaching, for through it teachers conceptualize, envision, and plan by applying their knowledge of students and the context where they work as well as many diverse theories that they and others have developed about their situation. (p. 3)

Complex situations create dynamic problems. Dynamic problems require prudent solutions. The decision-making process used to tackle such problems must be deliberative in nature.

In fact, things are seldom what they seem. Systems theory, and the thinking that seeks to apply it to organizations (i.e., systems thinking), postulates that complex systems, whether living organisms or social behaviors within institutions, are unpredictable. Like looking through a foggy or dirty window, our vision and sense-making are limited to glimpses of partial pictures. By adopting a different kind of thinking – that of systems thinking – and practicing a different kind of discussion – that of deliberation – our eyes and minds can peer through a clearer pane of glass. We can begin to see a fuller, more accurate representation of situations. Like the unfolding of a puzzle that is being pieced together, we can begin to realize that situations are intertwined through complex and dynamic relationships. Rather than predicting complex systems, individuals ought to identify patterns that lead to a better understanding of the deeper

systemic structures and mental models that interact within and around the systems (Senge et al., 2012). Although referring to developmental feedback – not systems thinking – Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano (2016) characterize growth as the development of "a bigger and broader perspective" (p. 9). Systems thinking can help with such a development of perception. However, school committees need to use deliberation to orient themselves around this kind of thinking.

Apart from systems theory, a typical mindset might suggest that the actions of A affect the actions of B. Conflict theory, for instance, might further develop this mindset by articulating a deeper pattern that drives the causal relationship between A and B. In contrast, systems theory, depending on the particular situation and its unique environment, would suggest that in most cases A affects B, but B also affects A. The circular or "two-way" nature of this causal relationship is referred to as a feedback loop. Additionally, systems theory recognizes that feedback loops often connect situations to more than one acting (and receiving) force. For example: A affects B, while B affects A; but A also affects C, which likewise affects A. This example can be carried even further, resulting in a complex archetype that consists of many interrelated, nonlinear causal relationships (see Appendix A). A way to understand systems thinking is to acknowledge that although we see through only one lens, many others exist and are interrelated. Think of the ecosystem, solar system, economics, or social communities. Think of a school!

Although a deliberative approach to committee meetings might be complicated, theoretical, and time-consuming, the alternative – that which is readily used by leaders and individuals in organizational situations – is inconsistent with the dynamic reality of actual events. The alternative approach is a "quick fix" reaction that defaults to assumptions instead of asking questions, and that provides rash solutions before a problem is properly understood. However, this alternative approach to decision-making is common in organizations. It can be described as top-down, authority-based, non-deliberative, and not inclusive. Decision-making is linear and often simplistic. It claims to include a wide range of stakeholders, but usually not in any rich, meaningful manner. Committees are formed, workers are surveyed, but there seems to be an enormous gap in perception between the leaders and the other workers within the organization. This popular type of decision-making often leads to misguided understanding and unintended consequences (see Appendix B). Albeit an efficient model, this traditional approach to decision-

making is ineffective. Without a systems mindset, the problem-solver(s) may fail to realize that the "symptoms of a problem are often separated from the actual problem by time and space" (Radzicki & Taylor, 1997, p. 15).

Therefore, deliberation at committee meetings needs to be oriented around rich, complex, and albeit at times, difficult conversations. Fostering this kind of deliberation will likely require a format and/or a set of norms for discussion. Poetter (2019) cites Smith and Berg (1987) in saying, "groups need to build norms by understanding several important commitments" (p. 210). Poetter (2019) continues by saying,

> …attending to and pushing toward these aspects of group life might make the curriculum deliberation process longer and might even make the group seem disorganized. As a group forms, it creates a subtext (or group agreements about its work and life) and a text (or the curriculum itself). So curriculum work is hardly linear or organized, and it is typically complex, difficult, and contentious. However, there may be no other more rewarding aspect of teaching than engaging in a cycle of curriculum deliberations from problem posing to piloting a new curriculum in the classroom. Typically, coherence and understanding emerge from the process. (p. 210)

Referencing the work of Cohen and Staw (1998), Piderit (2000) writes, "recent research on institutionalized dissent shows that, sometimes, organizations encourage and plan for dissent and ritualize disagreement" (p. 790). MacDonald (2011) writes about challenging the "culture of nice:"

> If a team collaborates without addressing and working to shift the culture of nice, the teacher leader puts the team at risk of gaining no insight into its own practice, obtaining no results (or unsustainable results) for students, going through the motions of collaboration, and ultimately dismissing the process as a waste of time. (pp. 45-46)

MacDonald (2011) recommends that teams adopt the following (or similar) norms to help foster deeper conversations, going beyond the culture of nice:

- Invite others to question your assumptions, beliefs, and actions;
- Go beyond the surface;
- Respectfully challenge viewpoints;
- Agree to disagree without being disagreeable; or
- Zoom in to the real issue. (p. 46)

Citing Stone, Patton, and Heen (1999), MacDonald (2011) offers the technique of entering a difficult conversation with a "stance of curiosity" (p. 47). This approach deepens the critical discourse without suggesting judgment or personalizing a dilemma. Regardless of specific techniques, MacDonald (2011) warns,

> If team discussion about teaching and learning never moves beyond the culture of nice, individuals may gossip or vent after the meeting about what they really think. This behavior will breed a culture of not-so-nice, which will destroy any steps a team has made toward rigorous collaborative discourse. (p. 47)

Grenny et al. (2013) have found,

> …one of the most potent behaviors for driving change is influencing people to speak up about a previously emotionally or politically risky issue. (p. 58)

Enormous potential can come from planning for and engaging in deliberative dialogue in committee meetings. Senge et al. (2012) assert, "We live in a world of self-generating beliefs that remain largely untested" (p. 101) and that "unexamined mental models limit people's ability to change" (p. 100). In what Senge et al. (2012) refer to as the "ladder of inference" (p. 102), individuals tend to interpret an observation with an immediate analysis that is overly simplistic and usually grossly inaccurate, but finds resonance with their deeply held presumptions and beliefs. After generating their one-way causal analysis, they form a series of related assumptions about the observation that build on one another, resulting in a theoretical lens that serves as truth in their minds no matter how skewed the interpretation.

A scenario might be a person who while speaking in a group interprets a person laughing in the corner of the room as being a condemnation of his/her speaking ability. Consequently, the speaker concludes that he/she looks awkward when presenting, which reinforces his/her insecurity in front of others. Next, he/she is reminded of how much he/she hates public speaking and makes the decision to never speak in front of others again. Through this process, however, he/she never stopped to think of alternative explanations of why the person laughed. He/she has climbed so far up the "ladder of inference" that there is no opportunity to reconsider his/her interpretation of the event.

If he/she hadn't rushed up the mental ladder, he/she would have had more time to contemplate an array of considerations. Maybe someone seated next to the laughing person said something funny about a mutual experience the two had an hour ago. Or perhaps he/she was

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laughing at the speaker, but not because he/she is awkward, but because he/she said something in the presentation that reminder the listener of something funny from last night. Considering this scenario from an outsider's perspective, each of us could provide a host of alternate theories, providing so many that we would likely conclude we cannot know for certain the reason for the laughing unless we were to engage in dialogue with the individual who laughed. The "ladder of inference" is an example of how mental models are sometimes developed and how if left unchallenged, can lead to distorted thinking, crippling opportunities for growth. A culture and environment that welcome rich, deliberative dialogue can help breakdown peoples' current mental models, leading to a more accurate and collective understanding of reality through new, more expansive mental models.

Also, a culture that embraces deliberation through the decision-making process is more equipped to construct a deeper and broader perspective about the vast complexities that exist in a given situation or in a pending decision. When referencing the groundbreaking work of Kegan (1982), Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano (2016) discuss the concept of "subject-object balance" (pp. 38-39). All adults are forging through different developmental stages, making meaning of their unique experiences (Kegan, 1982). Two people at two different developmental stages, both with different personalities and life experiences, may interpret the same event very differently. Each person is "subject" to his/her unconscious mindset and values (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016; Kegan, 1982). Through growth in adult development, a person can become better able to see himself/herself from a distance in a particular situation. From that distance (i.e., perspective), the person can hold situations as "objects" rather than being "subjected" to them (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016; Kegan, 1982). Quoting Carl Jung, this is "[making] the unconscious conscious" (as cited in Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016, p. 39).

Committee meetings that are oriented around deliberation can provide opportunities to enlighten distorted thinking, better examine mental models, and can result in a more objective and broader sense-making capacity. To see more broadly, we must slow down our thinking, examine our "mental models" (i.e., assumptions, perceptions, beliefs), and engage in "meaningful, in-depth conversations" with others that provide the fertile ground for an ever-expanding perspective (Senge et al., 2012, p. 95).

Conclusion

Unless schools rethink and reorganize the teacher workday so that teachers are relieved of teaching nearly all their working hours (a worthy consideration, but not within the scope of this study), then committees are likely to be the primary means for making schoolwide decisions with teacher involvement. This is because there is no other time within the workday for teachers to dialogue, analyze, and problem-solve difficult schoolwide topics. Since school committees seem to be a reality unlikely to go away, further research on their design and operation is paramount.

Unfortunately, decision-making processes in schools (i.e., the structure and operation of school committees) tend to be restricted to only a few employees, run by administrators and/or organizational leaders, and lack rich, meaningful dialogue. A review of the literature suggests resistance to change within organizations is largely based on misunderstanding and confusion, which could be mitigated by a school committee design that is grounded in inclusive deliberation (ID). Through inclusive deliberation (ID), teachers might feel more involved, have more opportunity to pursue their agendas, and benefit from schoolwide decisions that are more carefully considered and more richly analyzed. Based on the literature and my own professional experience, some assumptions of mine are: 1) If teachers aren't included in schoolwide issues and decisions, then they will end up being confused and filled with misunderstandings about school decisions, which will breed resistance toward positive change; 2) If discussions about school decisions aren't deliberative, then situations and decisions will be misunderstood, over-simplified, and will lead to unintended consequences. This case study is an action research journey that explores teachers' experiences with school committee work when inclusive deliberation (ID) is implemented and operationalized.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Setting and Background

The setting for this research study is the high school where I serve as assistant principal. During the 2018-2019 school year, the school had an enrollment that fluctuated between 1,500 to 1,600 students in grades 9-12. The school employs 91 certified teachers, four school counselors, and five administrators. The high school administration consists of a building principal, two assistant principals, a supervisor of special education, and a dean of students. There are

additional classified staff members, such as aides, hall monitors, related service positions, administrative assistants, and custodians.

The high school had been led for nearly 10 years by a principal who retired at the middle of the 2018-2019 school year. Thus, the second semester not only began with the implementation of my research methodology, but with the first day of a new head principal. Fortunately, the new principal had previously been serving as an elementary principal in the district and had been an assistant principal at the high school before that position. Regardless of who became the new principal to begin the second semester, this particular teaching staff was eager for long-awaited change. Previously, the leadership had been more authoritative in nature, group discussion was discouraged, people often felt intimidated, progress was regularly stifled, and as a result, morale was low. Many staff members would say it had been this way for a decade or longer. Consequently, the district leadership often felt the need to micromanage, which created additional complications between the high school teachers and school administration, often manifesting itself as a growing disconnect between the perspectives of each group.

Instructional and operational discussion and decision-making typically occur through a few committee forums, if not directly dictated by building or district administration. Teachers meet monthly at department meetings, which are separated by subject matter. Each department has a teacher (department chair) who provides leadership to the department regarding curriculum, instruction, and building topics. There are nine subject matter departments in the school. The department chairs meet monthly with the administrative team in a committee forum referred to as department leader meetings. This committee mostly focuses on academic issues. The department leader committee had been led by the other assistant principal, but beginning with his arrival at the start of the second semester, the head principal began leading these meetings. Through this committee, the department chairs represent opinions and concerns from the teachers in their respective departments. Also in the committee meetings, department leaders participate in schoolwide decision-making on various topics. Department leaders receive a monetary stipend for their leadership responsibilities.

There is one additional teacher committee at the school, known as the Building Leadership Team (BLT). The BLT consists of a teacher from each of the subject matter departments. These teachers are handpicked by the building principal, although within the past

two years the school administration has begun to ask department chairs for member recommendations. BLT members volunteer to serve on the committee. Like the department leader committee, the BLT meets once a month. Likewise, the school administrative team is included in the committee. As the other assistant principal, I am responsible for leading the BLT. This committee mostly focuses on student behavior items and building culture. BLT members represent their respective departments by discussing department ideas and concerns at committee meetings and by reporting BLT information to their colleagues.

The new head principal, when serving previously as an assistant, started the BLT. Back then, nearly 10 years prior, the BLT was created with the intent to be a place for teachers to discuss instruction – not operational or workplace complaints! Complaints had become the norm for a separate committee previously known as the Building Improvement Team (BIT), or colloquially referred to by many teachers as the "bitching group." Even today, staff have a common memory of the BIT being negative, off-topic, and complaint, not solution, oriented. When recalling BIT, the union president said, "…it was a lot of complaining, but not a lot of problem-solving." The BIT was focused on concerns, not instructional dialogue. In fact, when serving as the high school's assistant principal, our new head principal wanted to start a group focused on instructional discussion in an effort to move away from the tone found in BIT. The result was the birth of the BLT. The BLT began as a book study group. Several years later when a new assistant principal began to lead BIT, the complaining and some other conflict-based nuances led to the termination of BIT. This was an administrative decision, although many staff members were happy to see it end.

It is interesting to note that when I met with our new head principal to hear his historical narrative of the BIT and BLT in the earlier years, he said that there was some controversy among some teachers about who could attend the BLT meetings. He said that some teachers wondered why others couldn't come to the meetings if they wanted to. As a result of a subtle, but growing concern among some teachers, school administration welcomed anyone who wanted to attend. Sometimes, he said, the meetings would have 15-20 teachers. Mostly, however, over time the meetings returned to attendance by those who were hand-selected by building administration.

Sometime after our new head principal left to lead one of the district's elementary schools, as mentioned before, the BIT went away and the BLT became the sole "sister" committee to the department leaders group. However, somehow during that time, the BLT

inherited – whether intentionally or not, I don't know – a BIT-like focus, being mostly centered on building concerns, not instruction. When I took over the leadership of the BLT four years ago, we made a conscious and openly communicated decision that the BLT would focus on school environment, while the department chair meetings would focus more on academic topics. Consequently, the apparent need of staff to voice concerns (and complaints!) in a committee forum – like a bubble needing to burst – began to manifest itself in *both* remaining committees! Yes, one could argue that an element of BIT still exists in committee meetings, despite its infamous termination many years prior.

Therefore, at the beginning of this research project, the school has two joint teacher-administration committees, each with the responsibility to represent the remaining teaching staff from the various departments and to discuss and participate in decision-making with school administration about a wide range of school topics. The two committees are the department leaders group and the BLT.

In addition, there are monthly staff meetings and periodic professional development days throughout the school year. There have been a few times when these meetings have been used to discuss and problem-solve schoolwide issues, but the former is usually informational and the latter is usually focused on the development of teacher instruction and curriculum. And not uncommon in K-12 education, the school has a teacher union, which serves as another avenue for discussion and decision-making. The union president happens to be a teacher at the high school.

Periodically, the district office will create ad hoc committees. These committees exist for a certain amount of time and for certain purposes. Recently, the district office created two ad hoc committees at the high school. One was to select the new high school head principal – a position that began, due to retirement, at the start of the second semester. This committee consisted of the superintendent, assistant superintendent, two district directors, one high school assistant principal, and four high school teachers as chosen by the district office. Another ad hoc committee was created to explore options for a new alternative education program. It consists of two district directors, the entire high school administrative team, and two high school teachers as chosen by the district office. Sometimes, the superintendents would attend this latter ad hoc committee.

Toward the end of the 2016-2017 school year, an interesting phenomenon took place. The union president and two other veteran teachers decided to start a third committee. This committee was different from the other two in many regards. It developed through grassroots concerns from a handful of teachers who felt strongly that the school did not have an avenue or forum for authentic teacher discussion. In essence, such sentiment implied that some teachers felt the other two "official" committees were too bureaucratic, being – for whatever reason – non-conducive to authentic teacher voice. Some would say that this new group was a reinvented BIT – one that welcomed teacher concerns, but would ideally handle them with a solution-oriented, progress-minded focus.

Another difference with this grassroots committee was that it was named, organized, and facilitated by teachers. It was created without permission from administration, although the administration was informed of its creation and purpose. In a spirit of openness, the administration was invited to attend. The founding teachers decided to name it the Building Improvement Group (BIG). It is interesting to note that despite being a catchy acronym, the teachers intentionally referred to it as a *group*, not a *committee*. Was this because they were tired of the bureaucracy that is so often found in committees? Was this because they felt the current committees in place were inept or unfit for authentic teacher discussion? Or, was this because a group cannot garner the prestigious title of "committee" (I say this sarcastically) unless it is created by those in formal leadership? It is also interesting to recognize that they chose the word *improvement* as the primarily purpose. Does this suggest that the other two committees were failing to improve the building? Does it suggest that the business conducted in the other committees is something different – bureaucracy, smoke-screening, hoop-jumping, agenda-driven? If something isn't improving, then it is either stagnant or deteriorating.

A third difference from the other committees was the design and format of the meetings. BIG had no members. No one needed to be invited or selected to attend. Anyone could attend. A teacher could attend once and not go again for several months, or he/she could be there every time. All someone had to do was show up. In theory, a meeting could have two attendees or the entire staff. The decision to design the group in this way suggests that the founding teachers were no longer willing to rely only on teacher representatives. With BIG, everyone could have direct access to schoolwide discussion. Everyone could share his/her voice. It seems that the premise was that the people most affected by decisions in the building should be the ones who

give voice to those very decisions. The design was an open forum for teachers – like a town hall meeting.

A final differentiating component when compared to the other committees was the design of procedures for the meeting. BIG meetings were led and facilitated by a teacher (who happened to be the union president). Typically, at least one administrator would attend, but only as another person in attendance. Sometimes even administrators from the district office would attend. There were no agendas. Teachers could come to the meetings and bring up *any* topic for discussion. The union president was responsible for facilitating the flow of topics so that discourse remained productive. The focus and flow of the meetings were organic. It was common for teachers to express their thoughts and emotions with noticeable passion. Interestingly, there were teachers who were virtually silent when attending a department leader or BLT meeting, yet spoke unabashedly about school concerns at BIG – *even when an administrator was in attendance!* Granted, there was never more than one principal in attendance at a given BIG meeting, whereas all other committee meetings consist of multiple school or district administrators.

In BIG meetings, it was evident that teachers felt free and comfortable with speaking honestly – even when an administrator was present. Somehow, the BIG meetings had a completely different tone than the other two committee meetings, even though it was often some of the same people who were in both kinds of meetings. The purpose, process, and perception of the BIG meetings significantly changed the content and level of passion within the forum. Often, because of the wide array of topics, certain discussion topics were tabled for a future BIG meeting. In a very organic and spontaneous manner, the meetings would usually conclude with the union president facilitating a kind of consensus on action steps for certain topics. However, since there wasn't a formal channel for action, action steps would usually fall back to one of the other two committees, if they went anywhere at all. Many topics from BIG garnered attention beyond BIG, by those in the district office or among high school administration. BIG provided a forum for rich, meaningful discussion and broad stakeholder inclusivity, which often yielded an excitement for various issues that spilled into hallway conversations, union discussions, one-on-one chats with administration, and ultimately found their way to a decision-making committee. Several times, the district office, even without attending a meeting, heard a buzz about a topic from BIG and pursued its consideration at a future administrative meeting.

Since BIG started not too far before Summer Break, there were only two meetings during the 2016-2017 school year. In attendance at each meeting were more staff members than there are on either the department chair committee or the BLT. The type of personalities and interests in attendance were surprisingly eclectic. This was not a "good ol' boys" club. This was a well-represented sample size of the broader staff. It was voluntary and highly collaborative. It was borne not out of procedure, but out of a desire to improve the flexibility, communication, and involvement of staff. BIG continued into the 2017-2018 school year, but around mid-year it had significantly dwindled in attendance. Often, the union president – who still led the group – would lament the decline in teacher interest and involvement. By the start of the 2018-2019 school year, BIG no longer existed.

The story of BIG is very intriguing – its grassroots creation, initial burst in teacher attendance and passionate discourse, then its decline into nonexistence. My theory is that the basic concept of BIG was and still would be hugely popular among teachers. That is, a forum with the sole purpose of authentic discourse; a place where just about anything related to school improvement can be discussed; an expectation that anyone can attend to share their voice; and an environment where administration participates as an equal member, not an agenda-setting leader. BIG had an outstanding *purpose*. However, I wonder if the decline of BIG had to do with a lack of sound structural *design* and the feeling that institutional *change* was not resulting from the meetings. This narrative case study will explore the concept of inclusive deliberation (ID) in a school committee setting, perhaps providing a framework for a "BIG 2.0" in a future school year.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to contribute to research that may help schools to rethink and reshape how they structure and operate committees, especially as they relate to decision-making processes, so that decisions about change are more effective and more widely embraced by staff within a given school building. Perhaps the problem is not that employees resist change, but that leaders go about change the wrong way. Instead of settling for ineffective solutions that are misunderstood and resisted by the individuals who must implement them, schools need a different design for their decision-making committees.

This research is a narrative case study that investigates the phenomenon of how teachers experience the decision-making process for change initiatives within a school committee when the committee design and operation reflect the concept of inclusive deliberation (ID). The result

is an action research journey that may help the school in this case study or other schools make future adjustments to the design and operation of school committees.

The research questions are:

- *How do teachers experience the decision-making process for change initiatives when inclusive deliberation (ID) is used as a framework for school committee design and work?*
- *What impact does the design and operation of school committees have on teacher resistance and feelings of morale?*

Participants

The participants in this study are teachers and staff members at the school where I work. Included as participants are the staff members on the BLT committee (eight teachers and five administrators). Furthermore, I stated at the opening staff meeting on the third day of the second semester – when I introduced my research purpose and methodology – that all teachers were invited to attend BLT meetings. In fact, before every BLT meeting during the second semester, the entire teaching staff was reminded and encouraged through email that the BLT meetings were open to anyone and everyone. The BLT meetings serve as the primary setting for a controlled experiment of my research questions.

Additional participants include high school teachers who serve on a separate school committee, who participated in BIG meetings in the past, and staff members who work within the school, but are not or have not served on committees. Some participants are staff members who participate in voluntary meetings or individuals who engage in informal conversations about committee work. Essentially, all staff members at the high school are potential participants in the study. As an assistant principal in the school, responsible for leading the BLT committee and for attending all other committees, I am a participant observer/researcher with "full membership" in the group being observed (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 140).

Methods

This is a qualitative research project. Therefore, I am not testing a hypothesis in this study. Instead, I am observing and analyzing how teachers experience the decision-making process for change initiatives when inclusive deliberation (ID) is used as a theoretical framework. The methodology of this study is a single instrument, action research case study, expressed in a narrative. The case exists within the high school where I work during the second

semester of the 2018-2019 school year in the setting of a particular school committee (i.e., the BLT) and within the context of teachers' attitudes about school decision-making and committee work.

With this being a case study, I am seeking to describe, understand, and explain the case – how teachers experience inclusive deliberation (ID) in a school committee setting in a particular school and the impact on teacher resistance and feelings of morale. Citing Yin's definition of case study, Bhattacharya (2017) records that it is "empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context" (p. 109). As a participant observer/researcher with full membership in the group being observed, this study is certainly within a real-life context. It is a journey through a lived experiment!

In discussing my positionality in this research, it is important to recognize the significance of having full membership as a participant observer/researcher. Certainly, separating subjectivity from objectivity becomes a challenge when the researcher is so absorbed in the process/object being observed. However, the counter benefit is the rich "outsider-within" component of inquiry mentioned by Collins (1990) that is often missing in more positivist methodologies (as cited in Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007, p. 10). Anderson et al. (2007) remind us that "practitioners/researchers are their own subjects or informants. They are insiders, not outsiders, to the setting under study" (p. 8). In fact, Anderson et al. (2007) cite an interesting critique by fellow researchers of outsider analysis:

> Clandinin and Connelly (1995) have further argued that outsider knowledge is often experienced by teachers as a "rhetoric of conclusions," which enters the practitioners' professional landscape through informational conduits that funnel propositional and theoretical knowledge to them with little understanding that their landscape is personal, contextual, subjective, temporal, historical, and relational among people. (p. 39)

Perhaps this argument is more appropriately aimed at positivism than the debate of insider-outsider inquiry; nonetheless, my intimate role in participating in this research design and the resulting observations should bring desirable depth of understanding to the research questions.

Being an insider to this research study begets the question of my reputation with the teachers in the case study. This is my fourth year working at this school as one of the assistant principals. For the most part, as far is it concerns most staff, I believe I have a reputation of being calm, thoughtful, and open toward candid dialogue. I believe I am seen as truly caring

about the school, the community, and the students. However, nothing can negate the reality that I am one of the "bosses" – for better or worse. It is no secret that I am expected to manage people and situations. Sometimes that means teachers must hear things from me or receive feedback or directives that they disagree with. Certainly, there are some staff who may even resent something I've done or said or how I've made them feel. However, I do lead in a manner that tries to bridge relational conflict when it is known and when it is possible. Lastly, I am passionate about authentic and productive processes that benefit the school environment and ultimately, students. I believe that my views on school committee work have merit and I desire to find solutions to traverse in a path that discovers a more productive model for such work. In interviewing the union president, who is very much in touch with the emotions of the staff and well-trusted by his membership, he said, " …you have done a good job of having your finger on the pulse of what's working and what's not been working in terms of committee work." Thus, with all things considered, I hope there is general trust toward me as a school administrator, and specifically, trust with the integrity of my role and purpose in this research study.

Still, with my positionality I must acknowledge that I will never fully know the extent of a participant's honesty or full disclosure. As is the case with everyone, I have my own biases and unique positionality. I work and exist within the space of an assistant principal and most of the participants in this study are teachers. Although I once was a teacher, no longer can I consider myself as having the same perspective as the educators in this study. Nor was I a teacher at this school, in this case study. This is a bounded case and its nuances are uniquely situated in this environment and nowhere else. Although I am a participant observer/researcher with full membership, I am among rank in management, not among teachers in the classroom. I care deeply about the perspectives of teachers, but I am no longer acting in the role of a teacher. Nonetheless, this study seeks to explore the disconnect between management and teachers in an effort to create a more authentic environment for teacher involvement in decision-making.

It is important to understand that the school is in a state of transition. As previously mentioned, the building principal, who had worked many years in the school, retired after the first semester. It is my informed assumption that many teachers are ready for some change to how things are done at the school. There are teachers who likely know that I have my own frustrations with the way committees are structured and operated in the school. Also, it is widely known among teachers that the remaining administrative team, as well as the district office, are

wanting a more open, communicative professional environment in the school. In general, most staff are eager to embark on a new phase of progress now that there is a new head principal for the first time in nearly a decade.

To further reveal my positionality in this research, I should share that I did apply for the head principal position and did not receive it. The job was given to a principal at one of the elementary schools in the district; a person who had been an assistant principal at the high school for a couple years, several years ago. An ad hoc committee was created by the district office to select the new head principal for the high school. The committee consisted of the superintendent, assistant superintendent, two district directors, the other assistant principal, and four teachers who were chosen by the district office. Despite not getting the job, this work (i.e., improving schools as it relates to organizational processes) and the concept of inclusive deliberation (ID) as a framework for school committee design are important interests of mine and I'm curious about the impact they may have on the school environment. The new head principal and I met to discuss my research and he was very accepting of it and eager to see how it may shape the future design of committee work moving into his first full year as head principal.

Specifically, I began the research by explaining to the participants my focus, purpose, and methods for research. I did this on January 9, 2019, on the third day of the second semester as an agenda item during the staff meeting. Immediately after the staff meeting, I provided all teachers, counselors, and building administrators with a consent or refusal agreement form in compliance with the Research Ethics and Integrity Office at Miami University. The following are the results: 73 of 91 teachers gave consent to participate in the research study, 5 refused, 13 didn't respond; 2 counselors gave consent, 2 didn't respond; 4 administrators (including myself as a participant observer/researcher) gave consent, 1 didn't respond. Thus, 79 of 100 possible participants gave consent to participate in this research study. Only 5 individuals declared a complete refusal for unknown reasons. I was very pleased with the high percentage of consent to participate in this research. I think it reflects teachers' desire to be included. Also, I think it reflects well on the relevance of this study for these teachers in this particular school setting.

Two days after introducing my research study and asking for consent or refusal to participate, I held a voluntary meeting during the two-hour teacher professional development time to further explain my research focus and purpose for anyone who wanted to attend. In holding this meeting and inviting anyone to attend, I was also trying to foster a change in the

BLT for the second semester. An important component of this research is to observe teacher involvement and their attitudes about inclusivity in school committees. This was my first opportunity to highlight and model the change that would be taking place in the BLT for this research project: that during the second semester, everyone is invited to attend BLT meetings, not just predetermined department representatives. Original BLT members (those who had appointed positions during the first semester) most likely felt obligated to attend this meeting despite it being communicated as voluntary. However, the remaining teachers had very little obligatory urge, especially since two-hour delay days were specifically designed for "teacher time" per the negotiated contract between the teachers' union and the district office. In fact, attending such voluntary meetings is not only uncommon, but somewhat taboo. Of the 13 original BLT members (including myself), 10 attended this ad hoc meeting. As for new staff members, 10 attended voluntarily, equaling those in attendance from the original BLT! During this meeting, I shared important concepts from my literature review for this research, reiterated key components of my research methods, and facilitated open discussion among those in attendance.

Before the end of January, we held our first official BLT meeting for the second semester. In the meeting, I explained the research process and methods and introduced the group to the concept of group norms. The latter led to planned discussion about norms, what they are, how they can be used, and possible ones to use moving forward. The examples I provided were meant to facilitate deliberation, which I defined and explained for the group. The following are the norms that I suggested to the group; however, I emphasized that the group would work together to create our own:

- Norm #1: Focus on agenda topics (divergent topics can be submitted for a future meeting).
- Norm #2: Purpose of meeting is deliberation (careful, professional analysis of schoolwide topics), not decision-making – decision-making will come later at a separate time, through the proper channel.
- Norm #3: Consider multiple viewpoints, alternative options, unintended consequences.

- Norm #4: Commit to the process of carefully answering the following essential questions and working through the following deliberation steps – as a group and with authenticity.
- Essential Question #1: How does this relate to or deal with students?
- Essential Question #2: Is the pursuit of this possible? Is it feasible?
- Essential Question #3: Is the pursuit of this worth our time, energy, resources?
- Deliberation Step #1: Talk aloud, talk about topic.
- Deliberation Step #2: Provide potential solutions/ideas.
- Deliberation Step #3: Provide pros/cons, alternative ideas, play "devil's advocate," complications, unintended consequences, means/resources.
- Deliberation Step #4: Re-answer essential questions.
- Deliberation Step #5: Decide if ideas or action steps are recommended for action (through the proper decision-making channel) or topics for future deliberation.

These norms were provided to the entire staff prior to the meeting, although my guess is that few staff members read through them, unless perhaps they planned on attending the BLT meeting.

Surprisingly, though my intent was to agree upon group norms at the second or third BLT meeting, the group reached some consensus on what norms to use during this first meeting. Based on the group's input, I created *The Iceberg Approach* during the weeks following the meeting (see Appendix C). *The Iceberg Approach* was sent to the entire staff to review before the February BLT meeting. All BLT items were sent to every staff member throughout the entire research study, since everyone was encouraged to attend. But again, the likelihood is that few staff members reviewed these items unless they planned on attending BLT meetings.

At the February BLT meeting, the group reviewed and edited *The Iceberg Approach*. Overall, the group was pleased with the document as a format to guide inclusive deliberation (ID) for the remainder of BLT meetings. The group agreed that the document appropriately reflected key components discussed in the previous meeting and that it was consistent with the focus and purpose of inclusive deliberation (ID).

The Iceberg Approach was intended to reflect its name by helping the BLT members problem-solve complex or controversial topics in a manner that explores and identifies underlying dynamics beneath a figurative iceberg. The intent and assumption of the BLT was that inclusive deliberation (ID) would occur when *The Iceberg Approach* was used. In other

words, *The Iceberg Approach* would serve as the tool to practice and experience inclusive deliberation (ID). As the BLT deliberated on a topic, a member would complete *The Iceberg Approach* document by writing down participant comments of analysis. More details about *The Iceberg Approach* will be explained in proceeding chapters of this research project.

It is important, now, to share some background. During the first semester, the topic of student backpacks in the context of school safety had become a very popular and controversial topic among high school teachers. It had started when the School Resource Officer (SRO) suggested that per his professional opinion, the school would be safer if students did not carry backpacks during the school day. He made this comment at a staff meeting and the Superintendent publically responded by saying that he would support any change desired by the high school staff and administration. Prior to any change, students were permitted to carry their backpacks with them throughout the entire school day. In fact, very few students used their assigned school lockers. After hearing the SRO's recommendation and the Superintendent's blessing, many staff members became very passionate and vocal about immediately instituting a "no backpack" rule. This issue became the first hot topic for the new head principal upon his arrival at the start of the second semester.

In navigating this hot topic, the new head principal decided to send staff a Google Form electronic survey to solicit individual and confidential staff opinions about the backpack issue. Both myself and the other assistant principal had discussed with him the benefit – so we believed – of using quick, well-designed Google Form surveys to quickly gauge the pulse and opinions of the staff. This is something that we had wanted to use in the past, but the previous principal's "less is more" approach to communication and leadership had prevented such a practice. The other assistant and I were pleased with the new head principal's willingness to use quick, electronic surveys as a type of dipstick to measure staff opinion. Feeling that such an approach allows for greater inclusivity among staff in sharing opinions and making decisions, the use of this and other surveys has become a major source of data and method for this research study.

The staff responses to the electronic survey about whether to permit the carrying of student backpacks during the school day was overwhelmingly clear. The survey was sent to the "all high school staff" email group. This group consists of 178 individuals, which includes teachers, aides, related service staff, and custodians – all of the individuals who work in the high school regardless of differing responsibilities. A total of 71 individuals responded to the survey.

The results revealed that 83% of the respondents felt that the school would be "significantly safer" or "somewhat safer and therefore worth the additional challenges" if there was a requirement for students to keep their backpacks in assigned lockers during the school day.

For another question, 62% of respondents felt that the level of importance of having students keep their backpacks in lockers was either "extremely important" or "substantially important," while another 20% felt it was "moderately important." Only 18% of respondents felt the topic was "mildly important," "low importance," or "not important." Since all building employees had the opportunity to provide input through the electronic survey and the results yielded such a strong opinion seemingly in favor of changing the policy, the new head principal decided to change the backpack policy for the next school year, requiring all students to keep backpacks in assigned lockers during the school day.

In staff meetings, committee meetings, and in various hallway chatter, it had been widely discussed that a change to the backpack policy would bring with it many unintended consequences. Examples include making sure every student knows how to use their combination; if time between classes is long enough; how to accommodate students who struggle with being organized; how to accommodate the many students with specific health, impairment, or disability needs; what constitutes a backpack; are items such as purses allowed; classroom expectations and rules; consistent enforcement of consequences from administration and teachers; communication to students and families; how to balance a black-and-white policy with the growing demand to accommodate a variety of student needs and preferences.

As a result, the staff agreed to use *The Iceberg Approach* at the March BLT meeting to discuss and work through the unintended consequences of a no backpack policy. This meeting would serve as the first opportunity to observe inclusive deliberation (ID) in real time.

The student dress code is another major "hot topic" that has surfaced year after year. One department in particular has been intent on reviewing the current policy and on finding consistency in the enforcement of the dress code throughout the school. Amazingly, this topic has created much tension between different departments, as a wide divide exists between opinions. Some staff feel that it is presumptuous, even sexist to enforce adult prescriptions for student dress. Other staff feel that loosening the enforcement of a clearly defined dress code is eroding a sense of order, expectations, even safety in the building. In fact, at the first staff meeting during a previous year, two staff members interrupted the meeting to publically argue

the topic, right in front of the entire staff. Emotions were heated, personal judgments toward specific departments were made, and attitudes of whether students are more important than policy were communicated as innuendo.

With the arrival of the new head principal, the topic of dress code resurged as an item to resolve. The other assistant principal commented to me that she felt that the dress code issue – how it is handled and decided – may be the thing that makes or breaks the new head principal in terms of staff approval. A member of one department told me on several occasions that if a clear decision isn't made on the dress code policy before the end of the year, then people in his department have said they may lose hope in the new head principal's leadership. Having already deliberated the backpack policy, the BLT used *The Iceberg Approach* to facilitate inclusive deliberation (ID) on the topic of dress code during the April meeting.

In addition to the four BLT meetings, there were four department leader meetings. Again, these were led by the new head principal. In these meetings, *The Iceberg Approach* was not used, nor was inclusive deliberation (ID) as a specific framework for committee work. Department leader meetings served as a good setting to observe committee work as it has previously been practiced (i.e., member-only, agenda created by administration, no norms for discussion).

Throughout the second semester there were also other types of teacher meetings. Examples include staff meetings (total of five), professional development days (four 2-hour delays, one full day), a meeting with union members to discuss student discipline, and a voluntary team building day for staff during the first day of Summer Break.

Qualitative methodology was used to investigate the various meetings throughout the second semester, as well as different situations, survey responses, and personal conversations with teachers. This study relies on inductive analysis. In this regard, this study is phenomenological in its theoretical framework. This research "accounts for people's understanding of their lived experience of a phenomenon" (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 64). The phenomenon is, of course, teachers' experience with inclusivity and deliberation for change initiatives within a school committee setting. As mentioned before, I am interested in describing, understanding, and explaining the case study, not in testing a pre-established hypothesis. Poetter (2019) clarifies the purpose of action research in explaining,

The goal of the researcher [in action research] is to portray the qualities of the scene and not necessarily to measure something in order to prove some significant, quantifiable change (such as "in response to behavioral prompts, students raised their hands 50% more often"). The point is to actually affect change…and to tell the story of that process. (p. 135)

Bhattacharya's (2017) recommendation for inductive analysis serves as a guide:

Inductive analysis is the process through which a qualitative researcher might look at all the raw data, chunk them into small analytical units of meaning for further analysis (usually called codes), cluster similar analytical units and label them as categories, and identify salient patterns after looking within and across categories (usually called themes). (p. 150)

The different sources of data are used to triangulate codes, categories, and themes to help bring trustworthiness to my interpretations and insights. I am interested to see if and how the research findings relate to the review of literature for this study and how they answer my research questions.

Data Collection

The data was collected in eight different types of settings: BLT meetings, department leader meetings, staff and professional development meetings, ad hoc meetings that are voluntary to attend, informal conversations with staff throughout the second semester, individual interviews with staff, personal thoughts and reflection, and staff feedback through electronic Google Form surveys.

For data collection, I am relying on six sources of qualitative data: personal field notes, reflection check-ins with BLT participants after each meeting using Google Form surveys, electronic surveys to all staff, a formal reflection meeting with a focus group from the BLT, individual interviews with three teachers, and a personal research journal of themes and thoughts.

The first source of data is field notes taken during committee meetings. Taking field notes while attending a meeting as a full participant is challenging, especially during BLT meetings where I was responsible for facilitating the agenda and discussion. It was much easier to take notes during department leader meetings since I was only a participant. For each BLT and department leader meeting, I created and used an "Observation" template to record the date,

start and end time, type of meeting, location, how the meeting was promoted/communicated, participants, and observation notes. Immediately after each meeting, I went to my office and completed a "Summary" form that I created. It detailed each topic of deliberation, how it began, how it ended, who spoke, the type of comment made by each participant (e.g., approximately a single sentence that was general or off-topic, a single sentence that was on-topic, and extended comments), and the number of each type of comment for anyone who spoke. Also, in this form I recorded key observations and reflections from the meeting.

Another source of data for this study is reflection check-ins. After BLT meetings and at a few other general, yet appropriate times, I emailed participants reflection prompts about their experience with inclusive deliberation (ID) from the committee meetings and various research situations. I used Google Forms to send and collect participant responses. For some check-ins, I collected names, while for others it was anonymous. All check-ins were kept confidential. Responding to the reflection prompts was voluntary. The email prompts included open-ended questions and measureable survey questions using a 5-Point Likert Scale. Most email prompts were short, some with only one open-ended question, others with two open-ended questions and one quantitative question using a 5-Point Likert Scale. One email prompt consisted of eight questions using a 5-Point Likert Scale.

A third source of data is electronic surveys, using Google Forms, sent to the entire staff. I sent the initial consent or refusal agreement to teachers, which provides data related to the concept of inclusivity. The new head principal sent several electronic surveys, using Google Forms, to all staff. I was given access to the results as part of the research study. The first survey asked teachers to share if they would want to serve in a focus group for the next school year and if so, which area would they be most interest in (e.g., instruction, school environment, community). Another survey asked for staff to provide feedback on the backpack policy. A final survey asked staff to provide feedback on the dress code policy. Lastly, I distributed a survey to the entire staff that asked for feedback on this research project and for opinions about a preferred design for committee work.

A fourth source of data for this narrative case study is a formal reflection meeting with a focus group of BLT participants. I selected four teachers to attend this meeting. One person has served on the BLT for many years, another person since last year, one new this school year, and a final person who voluntarily attended BLT meetings during this research study. In the

reflection session, I asked open-ended questions and allowed the participants to talk freely without relying on a specified amount of questions. The session was audio recorded. We discussed and reflected on the work of inclusive deliberation (ID), not the work on committee topics. We discussed our experiences with inclusive deliberation (ID) and teachers' feelings about resistance and morale.

A fifth source of data is individual interviews. I selected three teachers to interview. The interviews were audio recorded. I began by having the same list of questions for each participant, but explicitly communicated that it was okay to venture into one topic over another if the discussion went in such a direction. I interviewed a teacher who has served many years on the BLT. In fact, she was one of the first teachers to be asked to serve on the committee back when the group started as a "book club" to discuss instruction. As an original BLT member, she attended every BLT meeting during this research study. She is a very positive, well-regarded teacher in the school. She is great at developing and maintaining positive relationships with a wide-range of staff and with administration.

Another person I interviewed is a teacher who has worked in the school for many years. She is considered a veteran teacher, who is influential among many other veteran teachers. She is one of the three teachers who started BIG during its grassroots movement. She is involved in the teachers' union and has been selected by the district office for some quasi-leadership projects. This teacher voluntarily attended every BLT meeting during the second semester, despite not being an "official" member prior to the termination of formal membership. Also, she serves as a department leader. Therefore, she provides interesting insight in that she has attended BLT, department leader, and BIG meetings. She proudly describes herself as a blunt, no "B.S." kind of person. She has many staunch opinions and isn't afraid to speak her mind no matter the audience. She and I have good rapport. In fact, although all three people interviewed have very different personalities and represent different opinions, I am fortunate to have a good relationship with all of them.

The third person I interviewed is the president of the teachers' union. He is very well-regarded by district teachers and by district administration. Despite his political position as the union president, he is very authentic and unafraid to speak his mind. He is widely considered a progressive person who cares deeply about the school and about students. He also is a veteran teacher and is the primary person who started the BIG movement. He is trusted by many people,

is an excellent venting source for a wide-range of employees' frustrations, and is skilled at facilitating collaboration among camps with differing opinions. Often side-tracked with an array of union controversies to help manage, he did not serve or participate in the BLT or department leader meetings. However, he did voluntarily participate in a couple of the ad hoc meetings throughout the second semester. Even though he doesn't attend regular committee meetings, he is often the employee who is most "in the know" because of his frequent and trusted communication with nearly the entire staff – and district! I selected him because he has perhaps the best pulse on what staff is thinking, saying, and wanting.

A sixth and final source of data for this study is my daily interaction with staff in the school, outside of committee meetings, which I have diligently recorded in my personal research journal of thoughts and reflection. Many of the topics from the meetings became hallway talk, side discussions, and spilled over into a variety of regular work situations and conversations. Weick (1976) suggests, "Leaders…have to move around, meet people face-to-face and to do their influencing by interaction rather than by rules and regulations" (as cited in Sergiovanni, 1996, p. 160). "The most effective way to find out how the change is going for your colleagues is to have a short, informal conversation with each individual [employee]" (Murphy, 2016, p. 69). With this in mind, I have kept a separate journal that records information related to these kinds of informal conversations and exchanges – things that happen outside of committee meetings. Many of my observations include not only concrete comments or events that took place, but also my thoughts, insights, questions, and even theories. This research journal has allowed me to stay in tune with the codes, categories, and themes of inductive analysis *throughout* the data story of this lived experiment.

Chapter 4: Results

Research Question #1

How do teachers experience the decision-making process for change initiatives when inclusive deliberation (ID) is used as a framework for school committee design and work?

Inclusivity.

During the second semester, when the BLT meetings were open for anyone to attend throughout the four monthly meetings, 17 of 100 teachers/counselors/administrators attended at least one of the meetings (12 of 13 original BLT members and 5 of the remaining 87 teachers/counselors/administrators). Eight individuals (six original BLT members and two new

teachers) attended all four BLT meetings during the second semester. With exception of two teachers, the remaining BLT participants attended three of the four BLT meetings. The two teachers who attended less, each only came to one meeting. They were both two of the five unoriginal BLT members.

Two days after introducing this research study to the entire staff, I held a voluntary BLT meeting. It was attended by 10 of the original 13 BLT members. Also, 10 additional teachers came to the meeting to hear about the changes to the BLT for the second semester. Soon after the meeting, I sent a reflection prompt through Google Forms to everyone in attendance. I asked for their initial thoughts, reactions, and concerns about the meeting and the plan to practice inclusive deliberation (ID) at BLT meetings during the second semester. Below are some responses:

- My initial thoughts are that there appear to be some positive ideas for a process to move forward and change the state of morale in the building.
- Refreshing – I feel we all have an excellent opportunity to build something very strong.
- I believe the focus and structure will drastically improve morale.
- I felt there were several common themes that everyone was focusing on – communication, low morale, trust issues. I enjoy the idea of the BLT being an open forum instead of invite only.
- I think this is a good place to start change. Maybe, once everyone feels that their voice is being heard they will move past their past grudges and stop using meeting times as bitch sessions. Once that happens, then maybe positive change can occur.
- I liked the open conversation instead of a BLT agenda like what has been done in the past. I also like the new direction that the BLT is taking as far as allowing anyone to come instead of a representative from each department.
- It was good that newer and veteran staff felt comfortable participating.
- I liked the open forum style of sharing thoughts, perspectives, and opinions.
- I felt it was safe to express my thoughts and concerns; I sometimes feel like teachers and administration are not on the same team (I know we are but

sometimes it can "feel" like we're not); a great start to what I hope is a very
productive process for building-wide change.

- A good first step. It is very apparent the culture/attitudes of building staff stems
from repeated denials after giving input, especially without reasonable
explanation.
- I think the change of format will be positive.

After the first official BLT meeting during the second semester, I again asked for
reflection from willing participants. Below are some comments about inclusivity:

- …it is very positive to take the inclusive approach of allowing any staff member
to attend.
- I think opening up the committee to all interested parties is a great idea.
- It was informative. I hadn't attended the meetings before, so I feel like I was able
to get a better understanding of the direction the committee was headed.
- In the end, I'm glad I went and am curious to see if the idea will take off. I've
taught for over two decades but never attended a BLT.
- I attended the first, but not the second meeting. I still felt welcome and as a part
of the team.
- To create the meeting environment [you] described…, we need staff members in
attendance who genuinely WANT to be there (rather than being in attendance
because "somebody's got to do it").

When asking a department leader why she voluntarily attended all of the BLT meetings during
the research study – was it because the invitation was made? – she said, "Yeah. Because I didn't
feel like I could go before. Yeah, it was because it was open to everybody."

After the third BLT meeting, when we used *The Iceberg Approach* to practice inclusive
deliberation (ID), I sent and received reflection prompts rating various aspects of the meeting.
One question asked participants to rate the effectiveness of facilitating authentic comments from
group participants using a 5-Point Likert Scale. With 9 of the 15 individuals in attendance
responding to the reflection prompt, each selected either a four or five for saying that they
"strongly agree" that the meeting exhibited authentic dialogue.

Deliberation.

During the research study, the BLT was able to deliberate on two major school policy decisions – the backpack policy and dress code. I consider them to be major because of how dominant they were in the regular discourse among teachers, especially when discussing changes for the school. I wish the main concerns were instructional in nature, but unfortunately, it seems auxiliary topics, such as how students dress, garner disproportionate concern in many hallway discussions.

School administration decided to gather staff input about each topic through quick, easy-to-complete electronic surveys before bringing the items to a committee. The purpose behind soliciting input through electronic surveys was to provide everyone the opportunity to be heard and to share their thoughts. The use of regular, easy-to-complete electronic surveys became an important and strategic component of the administration's effort to improve teacher inclusivity. Besides providing the opportunity for everyone to feel included, another benefit of using surveys is that they provided the decision-making process with a clear pulse on the staff's current stance and leanings – a type of dipstick to measure the cultural landscape.

Without collecting data in this way, staff often do what they have done in the past, which is to fall victim to the popular opinion of the loud minority. With many school issues and decisions, it has been difficult to know what the whole staff is truly thinking. For example, administration kept hearing about the importance of banning backpacks in the name of school safety. Yet, when a meeting was held by the union president to discuss the matter with the SRO, only a few teachers showed up. And yes, they were the few teachers who have been continually talking about their concerns, contacting the Superintendent, and so forth. As administration talked with teachers through casual, daily interactions, we kept hearing teachers say they just don't care about the topic. We kept hearing teachers say they were annoyed that some teachers care about such petty things. We kept getting a sense that most teachers think the backpack decision should just be ignored. We even received this same perception when briefly discussing the topic in an early BLT meeting, prior to using *The Iceberg Approach* to practice inclusive deliberation (ID).

Yet, by sending teachers an electronic survey about the backpack policy, administration was shocked to find out that changing the policy to require students to keep their backpacks in assigned lockers during the school day was clearly the preferred choice of staff. Of the 71 staff

respondents, 83% felt that the school would be either "somewhat safer than otherwise and therefore worth the additional challenges associated with doing so" or "significantly safer." With these results, administration decided to move forward with the change in policy for the next school year – decision made!

However, the purpose of this research study is to explore committee work and the use of inclusive deliberation (ID) as a new framework. Therefore, despite the fact that a decision had already been made, the BLT still took time to deliberate the backpack topic. It began with the BLT using its first meeting to venture into the purpose of the research journey, the anticipated process for the semester, and then the discussion of group norms. I was surprised by how unfamiliar teachers were with the concept of group norms. I asked who had experience with norms. Only 2 of the 15 individuals in attendance raised their hands, one only halfway. They were both administrators. I then asked who was comfortable with the concept of norms. No one raised their hands and no one gave any affirming nods, "maybe's," or body language to signal comfort with the topic. I was shocked. Clearly, group norms as a guide for inclusive deliberation (ID) needed to be explained and tried! Next, I explained group norms, gave further explanation from the research literature, provided examples, and asked the two other administrators to share examples from their past experiences. After this initial introduction to norms, the group appeared to be comfortable. Once group discussion occurred, everyone in attendance made at least one comment, which is quite uncanny in committee meetings!

The concept of group norms was beginning to look promising. It appeared important and necessary. After I provided possible norms listed in the methods of this research study, the group began to brainstorm a set of norms – something that I hadn't intended to get to until at least the next BLT meeting. We took advantage of this momentum and based on everyone's participation, we left the meeting with a good sense of what our norms might be for inclusive deliberation (ID). I was pleased that the norms we developed were in line with what I was thinking despite the initial unfamiliarity with the concept.

After the meeting, the idea of using a tool or a template came into my mind. Perhaps this is because I noticed that even through the authentic, active discussion in the BLT meeting, there were still an array of different sense-making and interpretations among participants. It revealed to me that no matter how high in quality a conversation might appear to be, some level of misunderstanding is inevitable, and this can be compounded when the size of the group exceeds

two individuals. This isn't good or bad, it's just the way communication, dialogue, and sense-making are. But, if a tool were created – some kind of template – then perhaps participants could be guided through deliberation in a more structured manner. Also, such a tool could help indoctrinate new participants who haven't been part of this initial creation of the inclusive deliberation (ID) framework.

The experience from this first BLT meeting led to the creation of *The Iceberg Approach (TIA)*. I created it to serve multiple purposes. It reminds the group of the meeting norms. It serves as a worksheet to guide deliberative dialogue and problem-solving. It has a specific intent to "look below the surface" of an issue, like looking below an iceberg, eventually realizing and recognizing the significant size and importance of underlying realities. Often, these realities create unintended consequences. Another administrator said to me, "The whole point [of the iceberg] is to remind people to go deeper." The process asks participants to consider and list the pros and cons of a topic (i.e., plus/delta), the impact on students, unintended consequences, and cost-benefit. With *The Iceberg Approach* projected on a screen that is linked to a computer, the group can fill in thoughts and ideas in clearly labeled charts. The charts also facilitate and record "next step" items that coincide with particular thoughts. These charts, and the worksheet as a whole, also become a record of minutes for the meeting. "Parking lot" items (i.e., things off-topic, but important to address at a later time) are listed at the end, as well as a summary of what was accomplished and any decision made during the meeting. Afterwards, the form can be sent to the entire staff, allowing everyone to see the details of what came from inclusive deliberation (ID) on a particular topic. The last part of *TIA* helps accomplish the advice of Patrick Lencioni, referring to two questions leaders ought to ask at the end of every meeting:

> What did we just agree on at this meeting? What should we all go back and
> communicate to our direct reports over the next twenty-four hours? (as cited in
> Habecker, 2018, p. 57)

I emailed *TIA* to participants, asking for feedback on the form prior to the next BLT meeting. Also, I asked if *TIA* was an accurate representation of what the group discussed and brainstormed during the previous meeting. After receiving very positive responses, I brought the form to the second BLT meeting during the semester. At the meeting, the group discussed *TIA* and focused on necessary changes. Through this process, we finalized and agreed upon *TIA* (see Appendix C). The BLT agreed on the following norms for committee work: 1) Stay on topic,

2) consider and listen to every comment, 3) the future is the focus, NOT the past, 4) everyone provides his/her best, most thoughtful self. After the meeting, *TIA* was sent to the entire staff with the communication that it would be used as the tool to practice inclusive deliberation (ID) in BLT meetings, beginning with the backpack topic for the next meeting. Below is feedback from participants on creating *TIA* during the second BLT meeting. These responses were solicited from a reflection prompt after the meeting:

- …the "Iceberg" provided a useful scaffold that helped organize my thoughts during the meeting.

- I thought it went well. I liked the concept of using a format for each meeting. It is too easy to get sidetracked in meetings like that, in my opinion. Having one stated goal, whether it is informational or for decision making, seems like a good way to keep everyone on task.

- I like that we are working to change the culture and dynamics of our meetings. I think that we had a good discussion yesterday and are headed in the right direction with meeting norms.

- I think it was necessary to discuss norms and a format for discussing future building concerns. Someone mentioned "something (some format, some norms) is better than nothing" and I agree. However, I would like to see us USE the norms and new format to discuss a building concern at the next meeting, THEN to adjust the norms/format if need be.

- The committee as it stands, seems to have the prerequisite [of] open mindedness. It also has a great deal of good chemistry between members. These things will be useful enablers when pursuing the kind of discourse you envision.

During the third BLT meeting for the semester, the group used *TIA* to practice inclusive deliberation (ID) on the backpack policy. Afterwards, *TIA* from the meeting was sent to the entire staff (see Appendix D for the results of the completed *TIA* from this meeting). After the third BLT meeting, when the group used *TIA* to practice inclusive deliberation (ID) on the backpack policy, a reflection prompt was sent to participants after the meeting to gather feedback. For this reflection prompt, various questions were asked using a 5-Point Likert Scale. I received responses from 9 of the 15 participants. Below are the questions and results:

- The Iceberg Approach template was effective at facilitating authentic comments from group participants: *Everyone responded with a 4 or 5 for "strongly agree."*

- The Iceberg Approach template was effective at generating quality input and considerations from group participants: *Everyone responded with a 4 or 5 for "strongly agree."*

- The Iceberg Approach template was effective at helping the group to dig more deeply into a topic, recognizing unforeseen information that otherwise might be overlooked or ignored: *Seven participants responded with a 4 or 5 for "strongly agree," while two selected a rating of 3 for feeling neutral.*

- The group norms in The Iceberg Approach guided the meeting deliberation in a more productive manner than would have otherwise been the case without such norms: *Seven participants responded with a 4 or 5 for "strongly agree," while one selected a rating of 3 and another selected a 2 for "strongly disagree."*

- I would like to continue using The Iceberg Approach template for future BLT meetings: *Everyone responded with a 4 or 5 for "strongly agree.*

- I would like to use The Iceberg Approach template for other types of building-wide meetings (e.g., Department Chairs, some staff meetings, other committee meetings): *One participant responded with a 5 for "strongly agree," five responded with a 4 for "agree," two were neutral with a rating of 3, and one person selected a 2 for "disagree."*

- I would like to use The Iceberg Approach template for some – not all – Department meetings: *Five participants responded with a 4 or 5 for "strongly agree," three were neutral with a rating of 3, and one provided a 1 for "strongly disagree."*

- A discussion of the backpack/locker topic probably would have been just as productive without using The Iceberg Approach template: *One participant responded with a 1 for "strongly disagree," three selected 2 for "disagree," four were neutral, one participant selected 4 for "agree."*

Below are some responses to an open-ended question in the same reflection prompt:
- I think the Iceberg template was an excellent tool to guide the discussion.
- Discussion was natural…

- I also liked how the template kept us on track time-wise, so that our meeting could be an efficient, productive use of our time.
- I think the method helped guide the conversations in an effective way. Great points were brought up and I think we were able to really look at most barriers that may occur because of this change.
- It seems like the norms are still being established and it will be interesting to see if more can be accomplished once the norms become a bit more set.

In the open-ended portion of this reflection prompt, no one who responded articulated anything negative about the process of inclusive deliberation using *TIA*. Previously, during the ad hoc BLT meeting that took place two days after the introduction of this research study, one participant wrote in a reflection prompt:

I enjoyed other people sitting in the meeting with more opinions, but it was frustrating to have so many people bring back that ONE memory and keep complaining. Once is enough to realize what happened and to try to avoid it again. It's tough to sit in a meeting when there is a bunch of circle talk and the conversations aren't progressing.

Interestingly, the person who wrote this attended the remaining BLT meetings and never again provided a comment of similar frustration. Perhaps group norms and inclusive deliberation (ID) made a difference!

After a staff meeting that consisted of teachers working in discussion groups, a teacher stopped me in the hallway and communicated the following:

Um, will we be with the same [teacher] groups every time? ...because if we are, I might need to make a request to change (she laughed).

After explaining her frustration with the comments and negative attitude of another teacher, she said,

Ugh, I don't know if I can be in that group – I hate leaving staff meetings feeling like I'm all stressed.

Unfortunately, this teacher never attended a BLT meeting, but perhaps she would have found hope in the use of group norms and inclusive deliberation (ID) to curtail the negative and unproductive type of attitude that she despised in her colleague.

At a student and teacher team meeting near the end of the school year, prior to the arrival of the students and parents, three teachers and I were talking about a recent district-wide union

meeting with district administration. One of the teachers made a comment about how the meeting with the middle school teachers was over two hours in length. Another teacher sitting with us – who attended most of the BLT meetings as a volunteer participant – said, "They need to use The Iceberg Approach!"

I asked about *TIA* when interviewing the department leader who voluntarily attended every BLT meeting during the second semester. She said the following:

> I thought [The Iceberg Approach] was incredibly valuable when we were talking about major change kinds of things…I think The Iceberg Approach allowed genuine discussion, genuine perspectives to come out – just realism in terms of what are the benefits. So, I could be against [a perspective], but I'd have to acknowledge that there could be some benefits to it. Or, to make us think through all of the steps, rather than rushing. And, we are too good in education at rushing a new thing because, you know, we just read something or somebody told us that it worked there, so hey, we got to do this right now. So, The Iceberg Approach kind of made us pause a little bit, I think, to think through all of the elements of [an issue].

This same teacher added,

> I could see [The Iceberg Approach's] value in being used in bigger topic things. I don't think that it maybe necessarily needs to be used in its full value for smaller decisions because then I think we might be spinning our wheels – because it's time-consuming. But, for big issues I think it's time worth spending.

Research Question #2

What impact does the design and operation of school committees have on teacher resistance and feelings of morale? Below is data on low involvement among teachers in committee meetings and in responding to electronic surveys during the research study:

- Low attendance at voluntary BLT meetings:
    - January had 11 of 13 original BLT members in attendance and 3 of the remaining 87 staff members (i.e., teachers/counselors/administrators).
    - February had 11 of 13 original BLT members in attendance and 5 of the remaining 87 staff members.
    - March was a highly anticipated, highly promoted meeting as it was the first meeting using *The Iceberg Approach* and the focus was to deliberate

the unintended consequences of the high-interest topic of backpacks. This was the first practiced use of inclusive deliberation (ID). The meeting was even moved to a large classroom to accommodate more attendees, under the recommendation of two individuals who said that the original location might be discouraging attendance because of its smaller size. Nonetheless, the meeting had 12 of 13 original BLT members in attendance and only 3 of the remaining 87 staff members. Only three!

- o April had another topic of much popularity, interest, and controversy. We used *The Iceberg Approach* to deliberate the dress code policy. Unlike the backpack policy, this was a policy that hadn't yet been decided. Still, only 8 of 13 original BLT members attended and only 3 of the remaining 87 staff members showed up.

- o A new participant at the first BLT meeting of the second semester wrote the following in a reflection response: "I was taken aback that I seemed to be the only outsider present at the meeting. Of course I could be mistaken but I did ask [an administrator] what normal attendance looked like and he told me that what I saw was usually all who came."

- Low attendance at voluntary ad hoc meetings, some of which were requested by staff:
    - o The voluntary BLT meeting that came two days after I introduced this research study yielded 10 of 13 original BLT members and a record 10 of the remaining staff members – still only 12% of the remaining non-BLT staff.

    - o The voluntary meeting between the teachers' union and high school administration had a total of 15 staff members in attendance.

    - o The Superintendent began to have a monthly meeting at each school in the district to entertain any staff questions, concerns, or comments. The attendance at the high school was so low that the meetings became pointless – something that could have occurred over the phone or in an individual sit down meeting.

    - o At the start of the second semester, staff were so passionate about the backpack topic and its impact on school safety, that the union president

decided to hold a voluntary meeting between staff and the SRO so that comments could be shared and questions answered. Three teachers showed up! The union president later said that it was embarrassing to have even held the meeting with such low attendance. I was informed that most of the meeting centered on gossip and complaints about a student situation, which was neither relevant nor appropriate.

- Attendance at department leader meetings is difficult to interpret since each member is required to attend and receives a paid stipend for their responsibilities. However, in one department meeting toward the end of the school year, the agenda was thrown off course over a discussion by some department members about whether meetings could occur during professional development time instead of after school. Despite this request being the desire of several department leaders, it is currently not permissible because they are receiving additional payment for work beyond the school day.

- Lower than expected number of respondents to short, hot topic, electronic surveys:
    - Shared leadership survey asking if teachers are interested in collaborating in a focus group for the next school year: 45 respondents out of 95 teachers/counselors – 47%.
    - Backpack policy survey: 71 respondents out of 178 total school employees (which includes teachers/counselors/administrators and all other employees in the school, such as aides, related services, custodians) – 40%.
    - Dress code policy survey: 71 respondents out of 178 total school employees – 40%.
    - Preferred decision-making and attitudes about committee work survey: 25 respondents out of 79 total individuals consenting to participation in the research study – 32%.

Near the end of the research project, I created a survey that asked questions about teachers' preferred type of decision-making approach. Unfortunately, only 25 individuals responded to the survey. Let's explore the results. In this survey, in addition to other questions, respondents were asked the following question with the following choices to select. Next to each selection choice is the number of individuals who selected it as the preferred method:

- Given that your workday is filled with courses to teach, lessons to plan, and assignments to grade, what is your MOST PREFERRED way for staff to be involved in building decisions for most situations?
    - Well-designed committees that meet on a regular basis where joint decision making takes place between administration and staff. (*6*)
    - Regular meetings that have more of a Town Hall style (i.e., show up, everyone can speak). (*4*)
    - Administrative decision-making based on staff input through electronic (Google) surveys. (*5*)
    - Teacher-Based Teams that are formed for specific purposes/tasks. (*4*)
    - Laissez-faire approach (i.e., just focus on teaching and let things happen as they naturally happen). (*0*)
    - Top-down decision-making (i.e., let administration make the decisions without much staff input). (*0*)
    - Administrative decision-making based on individual discussions with staff and departments. (*1*)
    - Other (write-in suggestions):
        - Well-designed committees *and* Town Hall style. (*1*)
        - Well-designed committees *and* Teacher-Based Teams. (*2*)
        - Town Hall style *and* administrative decision-making based on staff input through electronic (Google) surveys. (*1*)
        - A mixture of many (Well-designed committees, Teacher-Based Teams, *and* administrative decision-making based on staff input through electronic, Google surveys). (*1*)

The results reveal that as a single option, administrative decision-making based on staff input through electronic surveys is popular. At the last staff meeting of the school year, I asked a teacher if he liked the use of surveys this semester. He said, "I have liked them; they have been really easy to use for feedback." After the staff meeting, I talked with a veteran teacher in the department who had dictated an ultimatum of hope for the new head principal based on if a decision is made before Summer Break, not knowing if this individual held that view or not. He and I were talking in the context of committee work and the value, instead, of doing meaningful

work with the little bit of time teachers have. He said, "It's been good using the surveys to get feedback; it's so easy to do. Been great!" It should be noted that this teacher is one of the main teachers, easily in the top three in my opinion, who both represents and can influence the pulse of the staff. A respondent who selected administrative decision-making based on staff input through electronic surveys as his/her preferred type of decision-making explained,

> I appreciate being asked for input. Decisions must be made and, at times, they will NOT
> be in alignment with what the majority of staff feels is correct. However, when I'm
> asked on a google questionnaire, I feel like data is being collected. When I'm asked in
> person and it doesn't go "my way" or the way of the majority, it feels almost like I'm
> being lied to. Like I'm being TOLD "we appreciate your input" but like it's being
> DONE against what I'm asking.

One person wrote in a survey, "I do appreciate when we get to provide feedback via surveys, discussions, etc."

However, this survey reveals that well-designed committees are still quite popular. In fact, if committee work is framed broadly to include different styles, such as a Town Hall format or teacher-based teams, then 19 of the 25 respondents selected some form of a committee, per se, as their preferred method of decision-making in the school. Yet, 20 of the 25 respondents to this survey did *not* attend a BLT meeting or attended only one!

Why then did so few staff members attend BLT meetings and other voluntary ad hoc meetings? The 25 respondents who answered this survey were asked that very question. They were asked to explain why they attended BLT meetings and if they didn't attend or attended only one or two, to explain why. The main reason for low attendance (answer from 10 of the 20 who attended one or none): other commitments after school. Several cited childcare responsibilities, while others simply wrote "other commitments." For unknown reasons, 3 of the 20 didn't provide an explanation. Two referenced the past, saying either they still didn't feel welcome or "past history (topics can be discussed to death and decisions are never made)." One person admitted that he/she doesn't "tend to care much about the same things often being discussed (examples: dress code, hat policy, bookbags)." Another person said, "I often feel like a lot of the meetings do not pertain to my students." One individual wrote, "I did not attend a meeting this year. I have heard good things about the way meetings are conducted." But, this person added, "I feel that few decisions are made in a timely fashion." Unfortunately, timeliness –

especially if by timeliness someone really means "quick" – is often at odds with effective deliberation. Two respondents specifically wrote about their disdain for Town Hall style meetings. One simply stated, "Town hall meetings are the WORST." Another person wrote,

> Town hall style meetings aren't bad, but you run the risk of having people show up and ranting about things. This is a time killer and could make others eventually just not want to come anymore.

A separate respondent admitted,

> I attended one BLT meeting because I was genuinely interested in how they ran and what information was discussed at the meetings. I am a department chair so I felt the information was repetitive so I stopped going. There also seemed to be weird tension between prior BLT chairs and them feeling like others were stepping on their toes.

Three respondents didn't provide explanations. One final person declared, "I did not attend because I need to be with my family. Meetings sap my strength." Not surprisingly, that person prefers surveys for making decisions! While answering another question in this survey, many respondents complained about meetings being a waste of time, "a box to check," a façade for teacher involvement, while decisions are made "behind closed doors."

Chapter 5: Discussion

Research Questions

Again, the purpose of this study is to contribute to research that may help schools to rethink and reshape how they structure and operate committees, especially as they relate to decision-making processes, so that decisions about change are more effective and more widely embraced by staff within a given school building. Perhaps the problem is not that employees resist change, but that leaders go about change the wrong way. Instead of settling for ineffective solutions that are misunderstood and resisted by the individuals who must implement them, schools need a different design for their decision-making committees.

This research is a narrative case study that investigates the phenomenon of how teachers experience the decision-making process for change initiatives within a school committee when the committee design and operation reflect the concept of inclusive deliberation (ID). The result is an action research journey that may help the school in this case study or other schools make future adjustments to the design and operation of school committees.

The research questions are:

- *How do teachers experience the decision-making process for change initiatives when inclusive deliberation (ID) is used as a framework for school committee design and work?*
- *What impact does the design and operation of school committees have on teacher resistance and feelings of morale?*

Summary

Let's revisit the concept of inclusive deliberation (ID). The inclusive component is concerned with a genuine desire and path for teachers to participate in school decision-making processes. As a major theme of the literature review, there often is a major disconnect between management and employees in many, if not most, organizations (think "Dilbert" cartoon). This is no less true in schools. An inclusive approach welcomes those most affected by change initiatives – the teachers – into the important process of decision-making. It obliterates most "member-only" formats. Everyone should be welcome to attend. Inclusivity seeks to rectify "Problem #1" of committee work.

In addition, the meetings need to have a clear structure and approach so that deliberation, as McCutcheon (1995) defines it, can occur. A major prerequisite and continual guide for deliberation are group norms. Norms assist the group in thinking deeper so that "a bigger and broader perspective" about a topic can be discovered (Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano, 2016, p. 9). Let's remember, "We live in a world of self-generating beliefs that remain largely untested," which limit people's ability to change (Senge et al., 2012, p. 101). A deliberative approach to committee work helps alleviate "Problem #2" (i.e., administrator-driven, inauthentic discussion) and "Problem #3" (i.e., surface-level thinking and problem-solving), which were written about in the literature review.

Research Question #1

How do teachers experience the decision-making process for change initiatives when inclusive deliberation (ID) is used as a framework for school committee design and work?

Inclusivity.

Apart from the original members, very few teachers voluntarily attended BLT meetings – only five, and only three teachers attended more than once! However, attending any committee voluntarily, when not an "official" member, is nearly unheard of at the school. BIG was an

exception, of course. Two of the teachers who weren't originally on the BLT came to all four meetings during the second semester. One additional teacher came to three of the meetings. One of the two non-members who came to only one meeting admitted in a survey that she wanted to continue coming, but felt uncomfortable with original members possibly feeling that she, as a department leader, was "stepping on their toes." However, such a perception among original members was not found anywhere in the data collection.

Two days after introducing this research study to the entire staff, I held a voluntary BLT meeting. It was attended by 10 of the original 13 BLT members. Interestingly, 10 additional teachers came to the meeting to hear about the changes to the BLT for the second semester! Again, that is a large number at the school when it comes to voluntary attendance at meetings. However, I should note that this meeting was held during a two-hour delay when teachers had to be at the school for professional development. Nonetheless, each of them could have chosen to do anything else that morning other than sit in a "committee" meeting.

Therefore, more teachers voluntarily came to BLT meetings (the first ad hoc one and the four official meetings) than has ever been the case in past years; however, that is only a total of 15 non-original BLT members. Only three attended more than one BLT meeting! That's 3 of 87 non-original members choosing to attend more than one BLT meeting! A discussion on this low attendance will be explored when answering the second research question.

As for the 12 original members of the BLT and the five teachers who voluntarily attended (three individuals more than once, two individuals only once) the official BLT meetings, their attitudes about being and feeling included were very positive. The same is true with the 10 teachers who attended the first ad hoc BLT meeting. Each time, the reflection responses revealed that being included in meetings, despite official membership, bodes well with those teachers who decided to participate. Their responses reflected a change in culture, a hope for the start of something new and good; to one it was "refreshing." One influential teacher, who is well-connected to several cohorts of staff in the school, said, "You're not going to have good morale if there's not an opportunity for people to be involved."

However, as will be explained when answering the second research question, it was discovered that teachers may not want to actually *be* included, but rather *feel* included. Nonetheless, perhaps *feelings* of inclusivity had positively impacted teacher morale even for the teachers who never attended a BLT meeting. For every BLT meeting, every teacher was invited

and encouraged to attend. Therefore, as a teacher left school, never once actually intending to stay for the meeting, is it possible that he/she left still *feeling* included, knowing he/she could attend the BLT deliberation if he/she wanted to? Despite actual attendance, isn't this still a form of inclusion, especially if it impacts morale? If this is true, then the implications are quite interesting.

Furthermore, every teacher received a copy of the completed *TIA* after the BLT meeting. Thus, if teachers read through the completed *TIA*, then they participated in, to an extent, the experience of inclusive deliberation (ID). Also, if teachers continued to discuss the content in *TIA* with other colleagues, then their experience with inclusive deliberation (ID) would expand even more. As a result, it can be said that inclusion occurred beyond the walls of BLT meetings.

Deliberation.

When using *TIA* to practice inclusive deliberation (ID) in a committee setting, as was the case with the BLT, it appears that teachers recognize the benefits of "going deeper" – looking below the iceberg. It appears that *TIA* helps guide deliberative dialogue, while keeping participants on-track and within time constraints. Perhaps more than anything, *TIA* helps foster a productive environment for rich, respectful dialogue, especially when following agreed upon, group norms. The reflection prompts reveal a positive experience with inclusive deliberation (ID).

I was amazed at how quickly the BLT moved from unfamiliarity with group norms to an eager commitment toward creating them. Perhaps this was because many teachers recognize the waywardness of comments that can hijack a typical meeting, or the negativity that can ensnare a group's attitude toward being productive. Maybe norms help relieve some of the social pressures, awkwardness, and intimidation that can implicitly complicate the flow of a meeting. Group norms combined with a specific tool (e.g., *TIA*) created an organized approach to committee work that allowed the group to not only carry on orderly conversation, but to truly dig deeper into the underlying elements of an issue.

I realized pretty soon – actually, at the first official BLT meeting – that peoples' sense-making was so varied. It wasn't a matter of right versus wrong, or better versus worse. It was just a simple fact that people interpret things differently. Comments are construed in different ways by different people. And especially concepts! Concepts and deep reflection are very difficult to relay in simple terms. However, once we used a tool (i.e., *TIA*), it helped carry us

along. As we filled in *TIA*, group norms took place, particular areas to reflect upon were not forgotten, a multitude of people provided input and ideas, and we were able to identify and contemplate complex perspectives without much confusion or social conflict. The result was a thorough, rich document that served as minutes for the remaining staff to read, as well as a resource for future planning and school decision-making.

Having worked in three different districts and four different schools, I have never participated in or observed a committee meeting that produced the kind of careful analysis we experienced when using *TIA* to discuss the backpack topic. Also, we were able to complete the deliberation form (i.e., *TIA*) within the duration of one meeting, which is important when considering the challenge of having teachers stay after school for additional unpaid responsibilities. We successfully identified pros and cons related to the backpack policy, important elements that may impact students, and a variety of potential unintended consequences of making a change to the current school rule. For many of the identified items, we also were able to agree upon the necessary next steps the school should take to accommodate the newly recognized dynamics that reside below the surface of "the iceberg" (see Appendix D for the results of the completed *TIA* from this meeting). The group norms combined with *TIA* as a tool to facilitate ID led to a committee meeting unlike any other in my professional career. Inclusive deliberation (ID) had seemed to work!

However, as was mentioned by several teachers, it's probably easier to do committee work without such a tool that fosters inclusive deliberation (ID), and for smaller issues it might be unnecessary; but for bigger issues, it might be essential. A teacher-leader commented,

> I think that people have to recognize that when there is collaboration and you're genuinely seeking peoples' perspectives, it's going to take longer than if it's just top-down, "here's the decision, now go implement it."

Using *TIA* to practice inclusive deliberation (ID) is a commitment that requires participants to follow group norms and to dig deeper when thinking about an issue and school decisions. And yes, it is probably not needed for every meeting or every issue. But for controversial topics, complex issues, and decisions that can have unintended consequences worthy of regret, such a tool and process is profoundly important and necessary.

One teacher said that she thinks administration would have to "force" (or mandate) the use of *TIA* for all types of meetings, but that once a culture of its use is established, that teachers

would like it. This is because people are not used to it. They are used to casual meetings, where things are quick and predictable. However, as warned by Radzicki and Taylor (1997), the "symptoms of a problem are often separated from the actual problem by time and space" (p. 15). Rather than mandate it, I would recommend a strategy of promotion and positive expectations for its use at meetings. The use of *TIA* to practice inclusive deliberation could help teachers better explore underlying issues and identify unintended consequences before they happen.

Research Question #2

What impact does the design and operation of school committees have on teacher resistance and feelings of morale? Well, the qualitative data I collected and analyzed, from a variety of sources, suggests that it doesn't matter – that the design and operation of school committees don't have a notable impact on teacher resistance and feelings of morale. In fact, the data from this research study suggests that most teachers may not want committees in the first place. They may not want to meet at all. Survey data and some observational data suggest that a host of teachers *say* they want committees to facilitate teachers' involvement in school decisions, but attendance data reveals a different story – that very few teachers attend committee meetings, even when everyone is invited and encouraged to attend. What if meetings are more inclusive and deliberative? The data suggests that such meetings may contribute to positive morale – or at least not hurt morale – but that it doesn't have much of an impact. Why? Because most teachers don't seem to attend even when the conditions for inclusion and deliberation are carefully emphasized and put in place. As Anderson et al. (2007) remind,

> An important point to remember about observations, regardless of where you are observing, is that if an event is truly significant, it will reoccur. (p. 187)

Well, the phenomenon of teachers wanting to feel included, even to warrant a variety of avenues to do so, yet finding in return little turnout at meetings or in surveys, definitely reoccurred throughout this research project. I'd like to believe otherwise: that meetings are valuable and especially so when inclusive deliberation (ID) is practiced. However, Anderson et al. (2007) also assert,

> In observational research, researchers become the research tool and must constantly analyze their own feelings and subjective reactions to this role. (p. 191)

In this regard, despite my personal interest in the potential of inclusive deliberation (ID) at committee meetings to change the culture of teacher morale, I must admit that something else is

happening. Again, it appears that most teachers don't necessarily want to actually *be* involved, but rather may merely want to *feel* involved.

As mentioned before, it is an understatement to say that the backpack topic and the dress code issue are controversial. They are very controversial in this school! Some people believe that one side of the coin is the most ridiculous view imaginable – almost offensive. Others believe the other side of the coin is jeopardizing everything we stand for in education – almost a principle to die on. Yet, how did we settle these two hot topics, with the dress code having been an issue for many years prior? We practiced inclusive deliberation (ID) using *The Iceberg Approach* for both topics at separate BLT meetings. The backpack topic was incredibly deliberative and effective. The dress code topic, quite the opposite! Yet, both topics were decided upon with very little resistance from teachers thereafter, even among the minority for each topic. I specifically asked the union president if there was much of an upheaval or individual frustration after each decision. He said there wasn't much at all. A few people in disagreement with the dress code decision vented to him, but were willing to move forward.

How did two teachers go from screaming at each other at an opening day staff meeting over the dress code to now so much acceptance? I'd like to say it is because of inclusive deliberation (ID), but the data doesn't seem to support this. Instead, the commonality between both hot topics is that with both, staff were given the *opportunity* to give input through a short, easy-to-complete electronic survey. Even if the majority didn't respond to the surveys, perhaps having an *avenue* to share input if they would have wanted to is enough to keep resistance aside. And still, with both hot topics, 71 individuals did provide their input. The union president admitted, "short surveys…they are effective." He continued,

> If you can demonstrate to people, "here's what the survey results said and here's how these survey results were used," then I think you're going to get a better response rate from people.

Referring to the use of surveys during the second semester, he said,

> I think your surveys this year have been followed up fairly quickly, um, with sharing the results with staff as well as, "here's the results or impact of that survey data."

What do they want? It appears that what they want – the thing that may in fact have a major impact on teacher resistance and feelings of morale – is not a committee or meeting, but rather *avenues* (plural) to be heard if they ever *felt* the need to be heard. In many ways, this is

the major discovery from this research study. Again and again, the data suggests that most teachers may not want to participate in decision-making or deliberation forums – at least ones that require a meeting or require attendance in flesh and bone. The data suggests that teachers want to *feel* invited, even if they never plan on attending a meeting. Teachers may not actually want to *be* included, but rather *feel* included. It's a feeling thing!

What about BIG? Why did it develop and catch so much interest among staff, albeit for a little while? In conducting interviews with two of its founders and in informal dialogue with other teachers throughout the research project, they shared their own realization that maybe BIG developed as a statement, or as one person said, as a "surge." Each one of these people said that BIG was probably more of a reflection of teachers' angst at that point in time. It was a way – an *avenue* – for them to speak since they *felt* at the time that no other *avenues* existed. When explaining why BIG was created, one if its founders told me,

> We were hearing a lot of the same things and a lot of the same frustrations from people, and it's like, "what the heck do we do about this?"

As a result, she and two other veteran teachers created BIG. In her interview, she shared,

> …you're not going to have good morale if there's not an opportunity for people to be involved. And that's where BIG came from, [we] are sitting here saying like, "We've been here too long and we have too long yet to go, to just have this environment continue. Like, there has to be some *avenue* [emphasis added] for people to be heard"…There has to be some opportunity for people to feel comfortable and valued in bringing forth an idea.

Being heard wasn't even what mattered. Quality deliberation didn't matter, either. What mattered was *feeling* included. What mattered was having a place, an *avenue*, to *feel* heard. The union president, who was essentially the primary founder of BIG, said in his interview that BIG "began a motivation, perhaps, for changing the way in which we functioned as a committee…It provided ideas about where to go." Additionally, he said that BIG started because "there was a breaking point for teachers in terms of feeling empowerment and the morale being where it was." With BIG, he said that "people felt empowered to discuss items." Much of it was a *feeling* thing. Teachers didn't feel empowered. Teachers didn't feel included. Thus, and perhaps for other reasons, morale was low.

This same phenomenon seemed to happen at the end of the second semester. The union, district-wide, met with district administration to discuss their frustrations with student discipline issues. The high school came from that meeting with a positive, proactive attitude. Some high school teachers who are actively involved in the union and attended the meeting with the district office asked to meet with the high school administration afterwards. This occurred at the very end of the school year. In the meeting, veteran teachers began talking about Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), behavior level matrices, and the desire for a PBIS committee. A *committee!* The people who talked about the need for a committee hadn't even attended the voluntary BLT meetings during the second semester! PBIS has been a major, if not the major, focus of the last three school years, yet people who hadn't attended one meeting were now excited about meeting and excited about a topic that should not have been new at all to them.

Or, this excitement was just a "surge." The data suggests that if this surge is ignored, then the desire for committee work might increase – but only short term. However, if the surge is handled with care, making teachers *feel* listened to and that they have *avenues* for input if they were to need them, then the surge will go away. So, in other words, these surges are like sign posts. They are like sign posts saying, people don't *feel* valued. People don't *feel* there are effective *avenues* to share their voice. A founding member of BIG confirmed this in saying,

> I don't think that BIG would be necessary if these committees do what I think they're
> going to do – allow people to have that *avenue* [emphasis added] to express their ideas,
> suggestions, frustrations.

These surges, may in fact, reveal teachers' *feelings* at a moment in time rather than a request for actual involvement; rather than a desire for committee work.

Despite a significant emphasis through this research on increasing staff inclusion, regular communication that encouraged large and broad staff participation, a new head principal that truly embraces an open-door approach to leadership, and an invitation for all staff members to join BLT meetings as the group deliberated and decided important school policy, and large consent to this research study, the data on teachers attending meetings or committees is dismal. So, also, are the number of respondents to quick, easy-to-complete email surveys.

Yet, staff morale seems higher than in over a decade and teacher resistance seems low. Remember, one staff member made it clear that his department would lose hope in the new head principal if a couple of decisions weren't made by the end of the school year. Well, the top two

hot topics (i.e., backpacks and dress code) were decided on. Do these department members now have hope? Is a decision or two all it took to bring them a sense of high morale? As a member of a focus group that reflected upon this research journey, this same teacher said the following when referring to his department: "…I have seen [morale] go up." Along with the other three members of the focus group, he said that morale is mostly affected by how teachers *feel* about *results*. In other words, it may seem that people are okay with decisions being made by a few administrators – actually, some may prefer this – as long as they *feel* that they had *avenues* to share their input if they would have felt the need to do so.

When asking the focus group, "So, if morale is going up, what do you think that is a result of?" one participant said,

> I think it's a combination of things, but one of the things in particular is – speaking for my department – *feeling* [emphasis added] like someone is actually listening to them, and there's some follow through.

Referring to the use of electronic surveys, she continued,

> [People] said, "You know, a lot of what I had written in the survey clearly was taken into account and put in [the new policy]." So, they *felt* [emphasis added] like they were a part of it, and *felt* [emphasis added] like they were heard and those changes were made.

While providing a short, easy-to-complete electronic survey fosters inclusivity, it certainly is not deliberative. It doesn't explore underlying issues. It's really the casting of a vote; a statement of one's opinion. In doing so, however, people likely feel free to say what they truly think, whereas committee meetings, especially when void of group norms that promote effective deliberation, seem to intimidate the average person.

This intimidation existed when *trying* to use inclusive deliberation (ID) to work through the dress code issue. Several members – the few who attended! – noticeably clammed up when opinions became heated, yet showed a sigh of relief in their body language when one BLT participant suggested we just do another survey. This was a perfect example of the recognition from Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano (2016) when discussing how some threatening contexts can prevent us from "trying on or trying out our fullest selves." However, with both policy surveys, the results led to what seem to be timely decisions that have garnered acceptance by staff – even by those who didn't get what they wanted. One teacher wrote in a survey, "Code of conduct decisions – I believe we were all asked for input and a new policy was created from

that group input." A teacher who was interviewed said,

A lot of people have enjoyed the surveys. That's been an easy way for some people whose lives don't allow them to be here before or after school to give their input…The surveys are a good way of gauging where people are as a whole.

Responses to the survey asking about a preferred method of decision-making reveal that some teachers still value and prefer some kind of committee approach, several wanting a mixture of types, yet frustration about committee work and design still abound when one reads other comments they provided to different questions in the survey. Would these individuals have their desire for, yet pessimism with committees reconciled if they were to experience inclusive deliberation (ID) as a committee design? Unfortunately, we don't know because nearly all of them never attended a meeting, or only one, to participate in such an experiment! Moreover, why did the remaining 54 staff members not even respond to this survey?

Nonetheless, this research study does not seek to answer this question. However, it has been discovered that it's important to have multiple *avenues*. A theme in the data collection was the recognition that there are different types of people. As mentioned in the literature review, each person is "subject" to his/her unconscious mindset and values (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016; Kegan, 1982). Also, all adults are forging through different developmental stages, making meaning of their unique experiences (Kegan, 1982). People are ready at different times and in different ways (Piderit, 2000). Therefore, providing multiple *avenues* for teachers to be involved if they ever were to want to is paramount. Not doing so risks a negative impact on teacher morale and an increase in resistance to change. Doing so makes teachers *feel* involved, and such feelings seem to have a positive impact on teacher morale, leading to less resistance toward change.

I would like to make a few things clear. In saying that teachers may not actually want to *be* included, but rather *feel* included, in no way am I suggesting that teachers are opposed to participatory forums. Nor am I suggesting that teachers *never* want to be included. Nor am I trying to represent teachers as being complacent or easy to pacify with mere feelings of inclusion. Quite the opposite. The purpose of this study is to explore teacher inclusivity within a system that often ignores teacher involvement. Instead, I am referring to the many committee meetings and extra opportunities that are presented to teachers. It is with these types of opportunities that teachers seem to forgo their involvement, as long as they *feel* they have

avenues to be heard along the way. All of this is especially the case when referring to operational and policy-based discussions and decisions. Likewise, this is often the case when teachers have very little, if any, time in their compensated workday to partake in such opportunities. The research revealed very little involvement among teachers in an array of participatory experiences, at least as it relates to operational and policy-based decision-making. Yet, morale seems to be on the rise. However, the findings of this study suggest that if teachers don't *feel* included and don't have authentic *avenues* to express their voice, then *surges* may appear (e.g., BIG) – surges that demand their voice to be heard, even if by way of a committee. If the school day were designed differently to allow for more time to participate in inclusive deliberation (ID), then would teachers *be* more involved? I would think so; however, I cannot say with any trustworthiness either way since the exploration of this question is not the purpose of this study. Within this bounded case, the results suggest that teachers may not actually want to *be* included, but rather *feel* included.

Conclusion

The qualitative data from this research study, triangulating it from six different sources and eight types of settings within the school, suggest two findings that create somewhat of an oxymoron. First, most teachers do not want or have the time to participate in decision-making meetings on school policy or school operations. This seems to be evidenced most by the dismal levels of participation in voluntary committee meetings and especially in responding to quick, easy-to-complete electronic surveys that solicit input on major policy decisions. All teachers were invited. Very few participated. All staff members received the policy surveys. A minority responded. However, as I will soon discuss, whether the reason is a lack of desire or a lack of time creates a new kind of question.

On the other hand, if teachers aren't invited or *avenues* for participation aren't offered, then morale might fall and resistance might abound. Regardless of whether desire or time is the primary factor, what do most teachers want as it relates to this inquiry? Even though they might not want to *be* involved in school-wide decision-making, teachers want to *feel* involved and *know* that there are *avenues* to provide input if they ever were to want to do so. A teacher captured this oxymoron when saying,

You're never going to be able to get everybody, in a building this size, to want to roll their sleeves up and dig in. But, I think that if you don't allow the opportunity for that, then you're never going to have good morale.

Near the conclusion of the research project, the four participants in the focus group and the three teachers who were interviewed were asked if they agreed with the following conclusion:

Maybe it's not that people want to be included or to have these perfectly designed committees or whatever it might be, but maybe all they want is to know that there are avenues to be heard if they ever were to want to be heard. Is that really all it is?

All seven teachers agreed! However, they all emphasized that since there are different types of people, different teachers might prefer different types of avenues.

Perhaps this is because most teachers are not all that interested in building-wide policy decisions. Their focus is teaching students, not organizational decision-making. The union president provided the following perspective:

As a building administrator, your job is to administrate the building. Right? As a classroom teacher, my job is to instruct students. But we both have an interest in how the building's run – the policies, expectations, programs, things like that. You have the responsibility of administering the building, but you have some flexibility in your schedule…Teachers are bound by periods to X amount of time per day and they're highly focused on that and don't necessarily have the time to think about building-wide things.

Another teacher wrote,

I think it is up to administration to make the final decision. I think as teachers it is sometimes hard to see the big picture.

Gardner (1986) reminds us that a dualism between follower and leader may actually exist:

Followers do like being treated with consideration, do like to have their say, do like a chance to exercise their own initiative – and participation does increase acceptance of decisions. But there are times when followers welcome rather than reject authority, want prompt and clear decisions from the leader, want to close ranks around the leader. (as cited in Habecker, 2018, p. 194)

As legendary coach, John Wooden, once eloquently wrote,

A person in a position of leadership must make decisions. Making decisions is a tough job. Those under a leader can make suggestions. Making suggestions is an easy job.

Everybody has a suggestion. Not everybody has a decision. Perhaps that's why there are so few leaders – at least, good leaders. (Wooden & Jamison, p. 114)

Maybe teachers are focused on making tough *instructional* decisions, while administrators are focused on making tough *operational* decisions. The union president continued,

But, if we built [schoolwide decision-making] into the day in some way, occasionally, I think that you might get more involvement and more investment from people. [Then administration can say], we don't want it [just] from those who can stay after school; we want it from those people during your work day.

Nontheless, Habecker (2018) reminds leaders,

Trust is the gift given to those in authority, that the best interests of those not present in the room will be attended by those who are. (p. 140)

Some teachers might want to be involved in operational decision-making, but can't afford the time to do so. Teaching is a unique profession in that 100% of the workday is spent doing one task: the art of teaching. Teachers are hired and paid to teach students and to execute tasks related to this endeavor (e.g., plan lessons, provide feedback, administer and evaluate assessments, supervise and guide behavior). Therefore, when do teachers have the time to work in committees or teacher-based teams? Solutions include extending the school day, which affects families and necessitates a discussion of increasing teacher salaries; reducing teachers' class load, which either reduces curricular options for students or requires more funding to hire more teachers; expect teachers to come early or stay after hours without contractual agreement, which many already do for the purpose of planning lessons, tutoring students, or grading assessments; institute built-in professional development time without students on a more regular basis, which decreases students' time in class and creates logistical challenges for families with childcare arrangements.

Without a significant increase in school funding to hire more teachers or compensate more work hours, there doesn't seem to be a viable option with the current structure and mindset of American schools. Yet, we implicitly expect teachers to stay after working hours to do additional committee work, yet without financial compensation. Maybe this is a reason why so few teachers attend committee meetings. The union president commented, "…time pressures create anxiety among staff." Another person said, "I think people in this building are just tired, just worn out and not willing to stay after school to do yet one more thing."

Therefore, we have learned that despite dismal turnout at after-school meetings or in responding to easy-to-complete, electronic surveys, teachers do want to *know* that there are multiple *avenues* for sharing their input *if* they ever felt the need to do so. Since there are different types of people with different levels of readiness and a variety of perspectives, it is wise for a school to offer a multitude of avenues to *feel* included. Electronic surveys provide an easy opportunity for everyone to share their voice. It provides decision-makers with an instant pulse of the building. Everyone knows they had an opportunity to contribute to the final decision. Some people really value committee work. Some people need meetings. Some teachers want to be at meetings, but because of other commitments, can't attend. But, they feel included because they know a trusted teacher-representative is working on their behalf on whichever committee. Some teachers like Town Hall style meetings, others despise them. Some teachers just want to be left alone. Others want to focus on nothing other than their own classroom (i.e., just let me teach!). The union president argued for the differences in staff, saying,

> …that person wants to shut [his/her] door and teach and they want to feel supported in the classroom, in terms of their teaching. These people have a building-wide approach in terms of what they'd like to see holistically…and then you kind of narrow that down. You don't ever deny "Group One" the opportunity to participate, um, but you don't push as much, as much as "Group Two."

When asked, "What do teachers need to have high morale and not be resistant of change?" a teacher said,

> I can only speak for myself. I need to understand the change. I need to understand why we're doing what we're doing.

Another teacher commented,

> I think that the more input we have, I think the better the morale is. And I think through this – the BLT – we've been able to give more input.

Having a variety of *avenues* allows for teachers who want to participate in school decision-making to participate (e.g., committees). It allows for those who want to share easy input to do so (e.g., electronic surveys). It allows for *everyone* to *feel* included because they *know* that they could participate if they ever were to want to. Reminded of Fibkins (2015), the "no" of resistance "can be changed," if teachers are "guaranteed a place to offer their ideas and

be at the center of implementing the project" (p. xvi). True, some may never attend a meeting, but they are still guaranteed the opportunity.

What about for those who sit on or participate in committees? This leads to the third finding from this study: Committees that practice inclusive deliberation (ID) may benefit schools, boost teacher morale, and reduce resistance to change because the teachers who want to participate in school decision-making are given an approach (e.g., *The Iceberg Approach*) that reduces problematic committee phenomena that teachers despise (e.g., ranting and rambling, group intimidation, subjective decision-making, rash decisions, off-topic discussion, administrative agendas, lobbying, wasting time, feeling unwelcome). A teacher who voluntarily attended all the BLT meetings during the research study said,

> …some people were frustrated in the beginning with the amount of time that was spent
> on establishing norms…I think that was time well spent because I think that you can't
> just, boom, change the culture of a committee like that…It can't be rushed; it can't be
> forced…I think it was really good when we were finally able to use The Iceberg
> Approach on the backpacks and work that through.

This teacher continued,

> I think the different categories of [The Iceberg Approach] really helped to bring out some
> of the things that needed to be addressed that might not have been brought up in any
> other format. So, I think it was really solid in that regard.

While a remnant of teachers may actually participate in committee work, those who do can benefit from using inclusive deliberation (ID) as a framework for committee design and operation. Serving as a good summary of the findings from this research study, a teacher wrote the following in a survey response:

> I've been in another building and a previous administration from several years ago would
> always "sit on the fence" about decisions and it was really bothersome. "That's
> something we can talk about," "I'm not saying no but I need to think about it." "That's
> something to think about." These types of sayings give teachers hope that their ideas will
> be discussed but in reality they are fence sitting remarks meant with no intention of
> finalizing a decision. I appreciate the decision making process at this moment currently.
> I *feel* [emphasis added] like voices are heard and then the decision is made by the
> administration/department chairs. I like that decisions seem to be objective and finalized.

Teachers want to be heard when they feel the need to speak about school issues. They want to know that there is a place, or avenues, where they can be heard. For most teachers, more than anything else, it's a feeling thing. They want to feel included, even if they end up not ultimately participating in school decisions. Often, an invitation is all that is needed – a genuine invitation.

In conclusion, schools should offer a variety of *avenues* for teacher involvement, knowing that many – perhaps most – won't participate. But, in providing avenues of opportunity to be included in school decisions, teachers will *feel* included. Also, those who want to participate or make their voice heard will have access to a variety of avenues to do so. All of this can positively impact teacher morale and reduce resistance to change when change is necessary. And for those who do participate in committee-style meetings, a tool such as *TIA* to practice inclusive deliberation (ID) could help participants stay on-track, while exploring important underlying elements below the surface of an iceberg!

Next Steps

This research study was accepted with wide-open arms from the new building principal, the school administrative staff, the district office, and most importantly, the high school teachers. I am grateful to the teachers who participated in the BLT meetings throughout this research project. I feel that they respected the purpose and practice of my research, while aligning the work with the actual aims relevant to the school, its teachers, and its students. This was also my ultimate commitment; that is, to do research while keeping it genuine and in tune with the current needs and culture of the high school. I am certain that this study was apropos of the current school climate and the attitude of its teachers. School committee work is currently a manifesting element of staff involvement, morale, and feelings about the future at the high school in this research study. The union president, whom I respect as a friend and revere as a committed representative of his members, did say, " …you have done a good job of having your finger on the pulse of what's working and what's not been working in terms of committee work."

Therefore, I ask, what will come from this research at this particular high school? Of course, at this point I cannot fully know. I thought it would lead to a redesign of the BLT for next year (2019-2020), creating a type of "BIG 2.0." Instead, the new head principal came into the position with the plan of instituting three focus groups for the next school year (one focusing on instruction, one on school environment, and one on community). These focus groups will replace the BLT and will become the "committee design" for the school. They will be the main

avenue for teacher involvement in decision-making. Teachers were given a chance to respond to a survey, sharing if they wanted to serve in a focus group, if they have anyone to recommend, and if interested, what area would they like to serve in. From this survey, the new head principal selected 5 to 10 teachers to serve in each focus group. No one was forced to participate. Every department chair will serve in one of the focus groups. There will still be department leader meetings.

Will *TIA* be used to practice inclusive deliberation (ID)? I don't know. Honestly, I'm skeptical because the intent behind the focus groups seems to be on teacher involvement and shared leadership, but I fear the deliberative element may be ignored. However, I do think that the use of *TIA* to practice inclusive deliberation (ID) gained a positive reputation. It has been said to me that it will be used in different ways at the school in the future. Will it become a part of the culture of teacher collaboration and decision-making? I don't know.

What has definitely come from this research study is the realization that teachers need to have multiple *avenues* to be included, so that they *feel* included regardless of whether they ever choose to participate. This rang true again and again throughout the research study and became a topic of conversation among the administrative team on many occasions. It was also echoed multiple times by several staff as I asked questions, collected reflection prompts, and talked to teachers. It helps explain the low participation at meetings and in survey responses, yet the optimism of staff as morale improves with a changing of the guard in leadership and new paths that encourage communication, idea-sharing, and authentic feedback. Quick, carefully designed electronic surveys will surely become a major method within the array of avenues. As I've mentioned before, unfortunately, deliberation is unlikely to characterize such an approach.

For other schools, teachers, and school leaders, I hope this research study opens new conversations about school committee design, teacher involvement, deliberative practices, and teacher morale. I hope *The Iceberg Approach* is utilized or adapted. I hope inclusive deliberation (ID) catches some wind. Let's no longer play the bureaucratic games when doing committee work. Let's no longer run meetings or make school decisions with an autocratic hand that ignores teacher input or intimidates open discussion. Let's no longer box out certain people from committee work or school decisions because we already have our "yes men" in place as committee members (not to say this is always the case, of course!). Let's not rush through tough topics or conversations because it's quicker and easier, in the end sabotaging what's important to

us because we didn't take the time to "examine our mental models" (Senge et al., 2012) or stop to realize that the "symptoms of a problem are often separated from the actual problem by time and space" (Radzicki & Taylor, 1997, p. 15). Let's not accept that the school day, class schedules, and the creative use of school personnel can't be redesigned so that time can be freed up during working hours to allow more teacher collaboration and collective problem-solving. If nothing else, let's no longer do what we've always done, just because it's what we've always done! Our schools deserve better. Our teachers are more than capable. And, our students are too important!

Limitations

Most of the reflection prompts in this study were anonymous, helping to preserve trustworthiness in the responses. Teachers certainly must not have felt coerced to participate in BLT meetings – as evidenced by the low attendance! However, as expressed when discussing my positionality, a limitation of this study is that it was conducted by a member of school management. Ironically, it's a research project that explores the divide between management and employees, yet is conducted by a member of management. Therefore, there is always the possibility that certain teachers said or did certain things because of my position of leadership and this influence on our relationship can't be parceled out. However, as I've argued in the methods section of this study, this limitation has also been a benefit in that I have been an insider to this research project – not someone far away, working hard to look within. I'm a part of it all. I'm a part of this school, this culture, the problems with committees, and this study. Hopefully, in some instances, my interest in this topic despite my position of leadership has given me credibility with the participants, adding to the study's trustworthiness.

Another limitation is the duration of the study and the amount of observable meetings to practice inclusive deliberation (ID). It would have been great to conduct twice as many meetings, or even many more, but unfortunately, that is just not the nature of schools. Schools are on a regimented bell schedule. Teachers are paid to teach all day, except one hour, which is spent planning future teaching or assessing past instruction. Teacher meetings outside of class obligations are often a negotiated item between teachers and administration. In schools, we can't just add twice as many staff meetings or committee meetings. Typically, schools operate in a semester-based schedule, with four quarters. At the school in this study, I only had four BLT meetings to work with – one each month of the second semester. Fortunately, however, I was

able to broaden the data collection to include additional meetings and received consent to include everyday observations and conversations. Committee work, teacher inclusivity, and staff morale are major topics in the current school culture, so there were many situations and conversations that provided valuable information for this project.

Related to the constraints of the school workday and schedule, low participation of teachers is another possible limitation. There are many things left unanswered, even beyond the research questions in this study, because the voice of so many teachers was left mute. However, data is data, and the reality of low participation helped to provide one of the most important findings in this study – that many teachers may not want to *be* included, but rather *feel* included. Also, this data led to the finding that teachers have differences in what type of decision-making or inclusion approach they prefer. With this, multiple *avenues* for teacher involvement need to be offered. This, more than committee design and operation, has a likely impact on teacher morale and resistance toward change.

Another limitation could be my positionality in this research study, especially as it relates to my personal assumptions and beliefs. In doing this research, it was my belief that teachers would want to feel included in school decisions. In fact, I thought they would crave it. Never did I underestimate the reality that teachers prefer not to stay after school hours to meet. However, in meeting just once a month, I thought (and hoped) that this research project would resemble the swell of participation and excitement that had existed in the past with BIG. It didn't! However, this limitation ironically led to some of the most significant findings in this project. For example, the gap between my hope and the results led to a realization about these "surges" that seem to manifest in schools, specifically when morale is low and teachers feel they aren't being heard. Also, this gap contributed to my realization that teachers may not actually want to *be* included, but *feel* included. Therefore, this limitation perhaps became the driving force behind the research, and when confronted with the reality of the research setting and dynamics, led to some explanation of the phenomenon in question.

A final limitation to acknowledge relates to the type of research that has transpired. The findings from this study are not generalizable, nor were they ever intended to be. This is a bounded case and its nuances are uniquely situated in this environment and nowhere else. The findings are trustworthy in this particular case within the established research methods. A phenomenon has been explored (i.e., teachers experience with ID and the impact of school

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committee design on teacher resistance and feelings of morale), which has provided results worthy of discussion. Hopefully, the findings from this study can be transferable to other schools, providing important implications as it relates to the scope of this research. However, the findings shouldn't be applied *directly* to any other case. To reiterate: the findings in this research are trustworthy for the particular school in this study, all within a bounded case.

Recommendations for Future Research

Akin to this research study would be a project that explores teachers' experience with and attitudes toward the *mandated* use, or perhaps rather the *systematic* use, of *TIA* as a tool to practice inclusive deliberation (ID). A study with this intent would provide a larger data pool of participants, responses, and observations. It would explore *TIA* and inclusive deliberation (ID) with more intensity. Also, it would create questions about mandated practices or system-wide practices within a school environment. It could explore Grenny et al.'s (2013) belief that:

> Compulsion first replaces then erases motivation. You can never hope to engage people's commitment if they don't have permission to say no. (p. 84)

Another related topic worthy of further study is teachers' acceptance or resistance to deliberation. The research study that I conducted considered this and found an interest among teachers, a level of success with it, and an acknowledgement of its value. There was data suggesting that it isn't always efficient or necessary. Also, data exists to show that some people can become frustrated with its practice. We discovered that a tool, such as *TIA,* and the practice of group norms can improve the quality and use of deliberation. However, if deliberation becomes a part of a school culture, how would teachers respond? Is it too frustrating? Does it try patience too much? It has been said, ignorance is bliss. Is the practice of deliberation too exploratory, revealing too many skeletons within certain issues that particular stakeholders prefer to be ignored, or hidden? Are people compatible with a deliberative approach – as a way of culture – or at odds with it? I hope it's not what Habecker (2018) sadly suggests:

> …many [employees] sometimes simply check out from giving the organization their best effort. They remain, but their focus becomes "polishing their invisibility" within the organization rather than full pursuit and enhancement of its mission. (p. 192)

As previously mentioned, many of these questions and ones in this research study raise a new inquiry: Would teachers become more involved and engage more readily in deliberative practices if they had more time to do so? One might want to investigate the design and nature of

the school workday in light of limited time for teacher collaboration and participation in collective problem-solving. This study provided the assumption that schools often form committees because it is the easiest way to get teachers together for discussion and decisions. It also found data to support the notion that teachers sometimes feel too tired from the workday to engage in before or after school meetings, or simply don't have the luxury to do so with other personal commitments. Can the school workday be redesigned to meet this end? What would it look like? Would it increase teacher participation? Would participation increase only because it is required as part of the paid workday? Still, why did so many teachers forgo their opportunity to respond to a quick, easy-to-complete electronic survey about seemingly important school issues? Perhaps to the average teacher, such school operational or cultural issues aren't really all that important to them. Does low participation in schoolwide decision-making stem from a lack of desire or a lack of time? Perhaps it is a profession that is truly preoccupied with the art of the profession – teaching and learning.

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Appendices

Figure 18: Causal Loop Diagram of a Model

Examining Profitability in the Paper and Pulp Industry

"In system dynamics modeling, causal loop diagrams are often used to display 'nests' of interacting positive and negative feedback loops. This is usually done when a system dynamicist is attempting to present the basic ideas embodied in a model in a manner that is easily understood, without having to discuss in detail. As Figure 18…show[s], when causal loop diagrams are used in this fashion, things can get rather complicated. Figure 18 is a causal loop diagram of a system dynamics model created to examine issues related to profitability in the paper and pulp industry" (Radzicki & Taylor, 1997, p. 15).
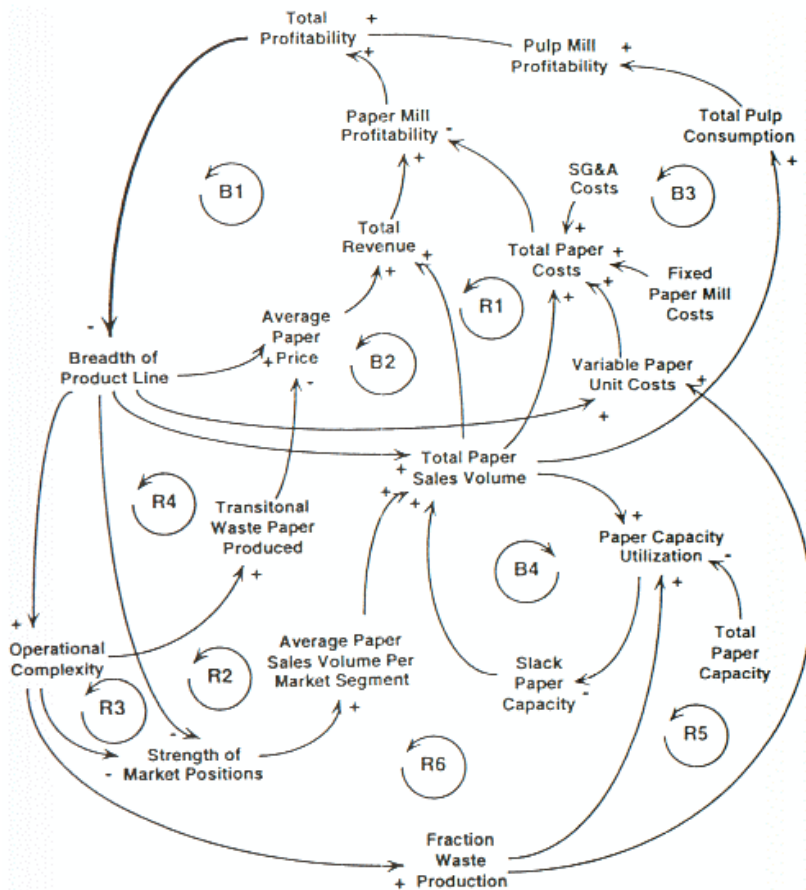
Figure 20: Ignoring the Long Run Effects of Feedback

Can Lead to Unintended Consequences

"Another characteristic of complex feedback systems is that policy changes can frequently make them better before making them worse, or worse before making them better. Again, this is due to the long run effects of feedback. Ignoring a system's long run feedback effects can lead to policies that yield unintended consequences (see Figure 20 below)" (Radzicki & Taylor, 1997, p. 20).
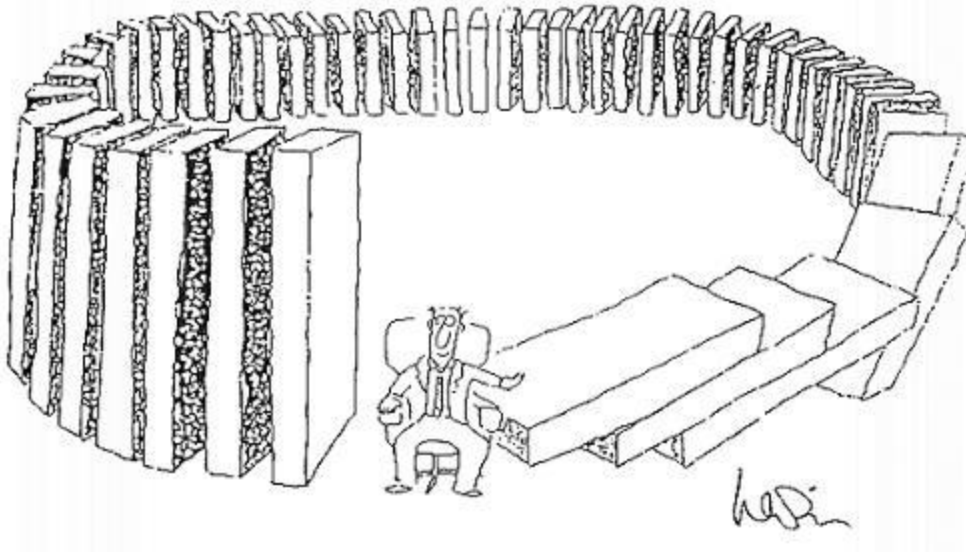
<u>The Iceberg Approach</u> - *Looking Below the Surface*

Meeting Name:
Date:
Participants:
Meeting Type (highlight):   Information / Deliberation / Proposal / Decision
Topic:
Objective:
Norms: (1) Stay on topic.
          (2) Consider and listen to every comment.
          (3) The future is the focus, NOT the past.
          (4) Everyone provides his/her best, most thoughtful self.

Plus	Delta

Impact on Students	
Identify	**Next Steps**

Unintended Consequences	
Identify	**Next Steps**

Cost-Benefit	
What is Lost?	**What is Gained?**

"Parking Lot" Items:

Summary (what was accomplished?):

Decision (if applicable):

Appendix D

The Iceberg Approach Completed During March B.L.T. Meeting

<u>The Iceberg Approach</u> - *Looking Below the Surface*

Meeting Name: BLT
Date: 3/12/19
Participants: 15 participants (names omitted for confidentiality).

Meeting Type (highlight):   Information / *<u>Deliberation</u>* / Proposal / *<u>Decision</u>*
Topic: Backpack/Locker Policy for 2019-2020
Objective: To analyze the new policy, finding important details to consider and resolve.
Norms: (1) Stay on topic.
　　　　(2) Consider and listen to every comment.
　　　　(3) The future is the focus, NOT the past.
　　　　(4) Everyone provides his/her best, most thoughtful self.

Plus	Delta
Safety	Equity with gender roles, purses/bags
Less clutter in classrooms	Disruption of class because of forgetting materials
Better use of time between bells	More bathroom requests during class

Impact on Students	
Identify	**Next Steps**
New policy - reaction of students/community AND reaction from percentage of staff	- With stud./comm., [the principal] take care of communication, letter, e-publications. - Provide families with "supply list" for locker organization and related "tips." - With staff, consistent enforcement of policy.
How to assign locker assignments to students/grades?	- [The principal] discuss with Stud. Advisory Council. - Assign area of build. to specific grade-level?
Learning to use locker combinations (maybe have practice combo's in Acad.Per.).	- Obtain mobile locks to practice in Acad.Per. - Keys for Admin., Hall Monitors, Custodians.

	- Use non-combo lockers for certain students.
504s, special needs, unique accommodations	

Unintended Consequences	
Identify	**Next Steps**
Airport-like regulations on types of bags?	
Traffic flow between bells; different type of horseplay	
What are the procedures/discipline/expectations when a student brings a backpack to class	**- Building-wide consequence steps/procedure.** **- Every teacher finalize a classroom plan related to locker policy - What do I need to differently as a result of this policy?**
Locker cleanout times; sanitary issues	
Helping students with organizational skills	**- Having extra supplies in classrooms.** **- Using Acad.Per. to teach organization skills related to lockers/materials.**
How to handle dismissal and needing to go to locker at end of day? Do we revise end of day Hallway Restriction?	
How are we handling coats and other similar items?	

Cost-Benefit	
What is Lost?	**What is Gained?**
Preparedness/organizational challenges	**Safety and security**

Logistical challenges	

"Parking Lot" Items: None

Summary (what was accomplished?): Group deliberated backpack/locker topic and identified future logistics/considerations.

Decision (if applicable):

(1) Students will be expected to keep backpacks in their assigned lockers beginning with the 19-20 school year. [The principal] will inform students/community of this new policy toward the end of the current school year.

(2) For now, miscellaneous Department concerns/questions should be submitted to [the principal] via email until a decision is made about the exact process/forum for submitted concerns. How and where Department concerns/questions are handled for the future is TBD, with the goal of having a clearer protocol in place for the 19-20 school year.