

EMAIL COMMUNICATION AND ITS IMPACT ON HIGH SCHOOL
PRINCIPAL AND TEACHER RELATIONS

By

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study is to provide further insight into how email has impacted communication and relationships between high school principals and their respective teaching staffs. Organizational systems theory offered a theoretical framework for this study. I used the rational and natural systems theory perspectives exclusively. The rational and natural systems perspectives presented a research framework for narrowing down the focus on each email communication by considering the content and tone of communication between principals and teachers.

Assessing how individuals communicate within an organization is vital due to its complexities and the potential impact on the working environment. The communication between principals and teachers is a critical dynamic in a school's culture and climate. I set out to answer the primary research question: How has email affected communication and relationships between high school principals and teachers? Four subset questions followed the primary research question, which addressed the volume, content, tone and principals' and teachers' views on their email communications as changing the nature of their relationships. To address the research questions, I conducted a qualitative case study on three high schools.

The three case studies provided several findings of discovery that were consistent with how email has affected the communication and relations amongst principals and teachers. The first and second patterns were that email provides an *efficient* way to communicate between both levels but at a cost of an increase in *volume* of communication. The *decision-making* process of

who to send the email to, along with the content and tone of the communication, was the third pattern derived from the data. The content and tone of an email is the area that exceeded all others that had the potential to impact communication and relationships for both principals and teachers. The fourth pattern developed were the *drawbacks* of email, which included time consumption and possible misinterpretation of email. The fifth pattern was the idea that face-to-face conversations still had a greater impact on the *relationship* building between and amongst principals and teachers.

There are implications for practice in schools and other organizations. The *first recommendation* involves any individual who writes emails and advises that they be conscious of the content and tone of the communication. The *second recommendation* involves principals, CEO's, supervisors, or directors, whose email communications have the potential to impact the culture and climate of the respective work environments. The *third recommendation* involves high school principals' awareness that some issues are better face-to-face rather than communicating it through email. The *fourth recommendation* involves more training and education for current and future educators in the area of communications, particularly email.

The use of email has changed the dynamics of the twenty-first century organization, including those within education. It is influencing how high school principals communicate with various stakeholders, including their teachers. Furthermore, the communication between principals and teachers is a critical dynamic in a school's culture and climate. Therefore, developing a greater understanding on the significance of email in education and its role in the ever-changing landscape of organizational communications is worthy of scholarly research.

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A wise man once told me there is a **Reason**, **Season**, or **Lifetime** why someone or something comes into your life. Through this process I won and lost. I have found the love of my life Nadene, with whom I have two beautiful and healthy daughters that I thank her for, Autumn and Charli. And I have lost, including my father Richard Berthiaume and an uncle who was like a father to me, Mark Nimer.

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I will look back fondly at this process, I consider it a **Lifetime** and I will never forget what I have won and lost during this time period. It has truly changed my life, I have no regrets because I did it my way!

PROLOGUE

As a former high school principal and current superintendent, I know firsthand the daily pressures of the job. With the technological advances in communication, it has created an elevated sense of accessibility and immediacy. More specifically, email has transformed the role of organizational communication within schools. I noticed a trend in my own communication patterns, I started to rely more on email rather than face-to-face conversations with various stakeholders. A year after becoming a school administrator, I started to wonder if it was the nature of the profession or the position of why I was communicating more through email than what I had done previously in my career. I felt that I had become addicted to email and disconnected from my job other responsibilities as the instructional leader of the school. I was spending more time emailing in my office rather than having a casual conversation with a student or staff member because I was too busy on my email!

I became curious about how much of my actual workday was taken up due to email. Reading, crafting, responding to every communication that crossed my computer screen. I began to feel frustrated with the volume and the amount of time I was spending daily on email. Then I began to wonder if my frustrations had spilled over to how individuals were perceiving the content and tone of my emails. I was to the point where it was easier to pick up a phone or set up a meeting to have a discussion rather than emailing someone back. Then I had the opportunity to move to a new district and continue in the same role as high school principal. I worked with a superintendent and elementary principal that communicated primarily through email. I started to ask fellow colleagues from other districts on how they perceived email and if it was overwhelming to them as well. All agreed, even my superintendent who said he could not wait

to read my dissertation one day because of the disdain he had for email and the time it took away from developing deeper relationships with staff, students, parents and the community as a whole. In my head I thought to myself about the irony of his disgust along with my other colleagues who continued to keep emailing.

When I started brainstorming my topic of interest for my dissertation, I continually came back to email and how it had taken over my primary means of communication. At the beginning stages of developing my research topic I could not get over the negative feelings I had about email. What I thought was supposed to be revolutionary to workplace communication; email had really turned into more of a hindrance for me. My professors and advisor had to remind me to conduct proper research and scholarly writing, I would have to let these biases go and let the findings speak for themselves. It was not until I finally conducted my first principal interview and teacher focus group to understand how other educators felt about email. I was excited to hear the participants' enthusiasm about the topic and the insight that was brought forth in each of the discussions. Several of the participants requested a copy of my dissertation once completed since they were interested in the findings. At that point I knew the topic would bring interest to perspective readers and hopefully an understanding of how email is impacting communication and relations between high school principals and their teachers. I believe this study will not only to help serve educators but other professionals who use email for their work. Each author of an email needs to be cognizant of whether they should send an email or not, and if so, how might the content and tone of their communication be perceived. Educators and other professionals should have an understanding and awareness that email communications could potentially have an impact on relationships, which in turn affects the culture and climate of an organization and the stakeholders they serve.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Technology is everywhere. From our homes to our workplaces, people are constantly connected. This phenomenon of being digitally connected is not isolated to the United States; it is a global sensation. From the private sector to public education, the world has become more dependent on email. The need for technology takes on various shapes and sizes in order to keep everyone connected. Ninety-three percent of all Americans own a cell phone and more than fifty-three percent of adults have a social media account (Baule & Lewis, 2012). Electronic communication and social media are uniting all aspects of modern life. The electronic age is transforming how people work and live.

Electronic communication has helped reshape organizations, and over the last three decades, we have witnessed a technological revolution to help aide this change. As Mantovani (1994) explained, electronic communication is deeply situated with the power to influence interactions of organizational members. The global economy has pushed organizations to become dependent on technology to save time and increase productivity. Byron (2008) asserted, "Electronic communication has increased information sharing in organizations and has improved productivity among employees separated in time and place" (p. 309). Electronic communication, with its ever-changing form, has allowed an influx of communication that crosses internal and external boundaries of organizations. The wide range of electronic communication has made it possible to communicate with other individuals in a variety of forms, including email, Twitter, Facebook, and other interactive websites, which provides us with seemingly limitless connectivity to others in both our professional and personal lives. Having greater access to individuals, both within and outside our work organizations, creates a new frontier for

organizational operations and communication. Electronic communication, no matter the form, continues to change the face of organizational communication (Sarbaugh-Thomson & Feldman, 1998). Education is no different with how electronic communication has broadened the accessibility of the individual to the organization as a whole.

This study will focus on email as the form of electronic communication and develop an understanding of how it has impacted high school principals and teachers. Educational organizations have followed similar footsteps as other organizations, taking the necessary steps to communicate with their stakeholders through different forms of electronic communication anywhere, anytime. The term stakeholder refers to individuals or groups who have a vested interest in the success of a school and its students. Stakeholders can be teachers, district and building administrators, parents, students, community members, business owners, textbook and curriculum vendors as well as local, state, and federal government agencies. The accessibility and immediacy of email has changed the expectations of stakeholders in today's educational organizations. Questions have begun to arise, such as: What is appropriate to send through email? As professionals, are we becoming inundated with the volume of these communications we receive on a daily basis? Communicating through email can be more efficient, but how do different stakeholders perceive these communications? How does the content and tone of an email impact relationships within an organization? The purpose of this study is to address these questions and provide further insight on email within education and how it has impacted the relationship between high school principals and teachers using systems theory, a subdivision of organizational theory, as a framework.

As a former high school principal, I have had frequent conversations with my professional colleagues about email. The conversations revolved around the volume of email we

receive and send on a daily basis. During my time as a principal from 2005 to 2014, I observed email become the most popular mode of communication for principals and their school stakeholders. Renaud and colleagues (2006) acknowledged, “In the last two decades email has caught up with the telephone as an everyday mode of communication, both in business and personal life” (p. 317). In my time as a principal and now as a superintendent, I spend a majority of my workday reading and responding to email. During the course of this study, I realized that many other people feel overwhelmed by email. In 2005 and 2007, America Online and Opinion Research Corporation conducted a survey about emails. Over 4,000 people responded with staggering results. The survey estimated:

- 77% of respondents had more than one email account
- 41% checked email first thing in the morning’ on average people checked their email 5 times a day and checked it around the clock
- 25% cannot go without email for more than 3 days
- 62% of people check work email on the weekends
- 19% choose vacation spots with access to email
- 83% checked their email once a day on a holiday
- 55% of mobile email users upgraded to a new phone just to get email
- 15% of respondents described themselves as addicted to email

Taylor, Fieldman, and Altman (2008) consider email to be the most important change in communication media in the workplace since the telephone. Email has presented another media forum to expand an individual's opportunity to ask questions, air concerns, or request certain tasks for people to complete. Hu and colleagues (2009) found that “employees spend 23% of their time dealing with emails” (p. 623). Each email has its own set of priorities, which adds to the “to do” list for each individual. Research conducted by Gillespie and colleagues (2001) on occupational stress in universities identified perceived expectations of immediate responses to emails as one of more significant sources of stress. Emails can add up on an hourly and daily basis and the expectations of immediately answering add undue pressure to the job function of

the workforce. Gupta and colleagues (2011) suggested the greatest impact of email interruptions is likely to be felt by the receiver and not the sender, because the email usually originates when it is convenient for the sender. Due to increased volumes, workers are spending more time on email compared to previous generations of the workforce. In 2004, the American Management Association surveyed 840 organizations and found that 47% of workers spent 1-2 hours on email and an additional 34% spend more than 2 hours on any given workday processing email. Several years later, research indicated up to two to four hours each day was spent on handling emails (Weber & Horn, 2011). The increased amount of time spent on email has the potential to overload workers and create a feeling of limitless connection to an organization's various stakeholders.

The volume of email is just one aspect of this communication tool. The content of the message is another area of analysis that should be explored. The content and tone of emails play a pivotal role in the communication of organizations. Sarbaugh-Thompson and Feldman (1998) surmised that it is not surprising that most studies report the impact of email has increased organizational communication. The functionality of email has also changed since its advent. One benefit of email is its flexibility or ability to view and respond to messages whenever it is convenient. Gupta and colleagues argue, we now use email much like any synchronous communication tool such as face-to-face or telephone conversations (2011). Using email as a means of having conversation takes away its attractiveness of checking when convenient for the user. It also brings to the forefront the other benefits or what some may consider as the drawbacks when using email. Hastings and Payne (2013) explained, using email has two rules attached to it: be careful what is committed to writing and maintain an appropriate, professional communication style. Hence, in addition to the volume of email communications, tone is

another factor that users and organizations must be mindful of when communicating through email.

The tone of an email can serve as a primary or secondary attribute to the reader's perception of an electronic communication. Within the content of an email is the tone of the author's writing. An author of an email can create a tone in the message by using greetings, salutations, symbols and capitalization of letters. Sproull and Keisler (1986) concluded, electronic communication, such as email provides fewer cues than face-to-face communication. Email has the potential for the overall message to be lost due to its tone. Facial expressions, body language, gestures, vocal tones are several personalized cues that are lost in email. Sarbaugh-Thompson and Feldman (1998) explained, the lack of cues tends to have two effects: first, the range of communication may be limited, such as sarcasm or appreciation. Additionally, email has the possibility of the equalizing effect, which means individuals lose sight of the organizational hierarchy and may be more susceptible to assume equality. As with content, how the receiver perceives the tone of an email plays a pivotal role in the overall effectiveness of the communication.

The content of an email refers to what is contained in the body of the communication. What the actual content is, along with the detail and length, are several dynamics the author should consider. Email, along with other forms of communication technologies has a more prominent role in how we conduct business regardless of the sensitivity of the topic (Ducheneaut & Watts, 2005). The reviewed literature pertains to the workplace and how email has impacted communication, along with individual workloads. Depending on the time spent reading and responding to the content of email, there is a potential loss in employee productivity (Renaud et al., 2006; Chase & Clegg, 2011). Furthermore, the length of an email can impact the reader's

opinion of the communication as well. The longer the email, the more likely the details in the communication may get lost or lose its original purpose of the message.

The decision making process on what to include in an email, or for that matter, if email is the correct venue to communicate with an individual is worthy of exploration. Hastings and Payne (2013) researched the role and suitability of email for specific content. Understanding the role of email in content can provide employees and supervisors with information critical to using the channel to promote constrictive dissent, leading to greater levels of input into decision making and more collaborative work processes (Hastings & Payne, 2013, p. 310). Hastings and Payne (2013) referred to constrictive dissent as a way for employees and supervisors to communicate with one another through email to discuss concerns and work collaboratively with each other to develop solutions to resolve issues in the workplace. Similarly, email allows educators to communicate information that is significant to the daily operations of a school.

The reviewed literature thus far illustrates the importance in the decision-making process of deciding whether or not email is the appropriate forum to communicate certain information. The author should consider the sensitivity of the content and decide if it is appropriate to use email to communicate with the respective party. Markus (1994) believed with more emerging technological advances in organizational communication and greater personal communication technologies, email is seldom treated as an inappropriate option for communicating sensitive or equivocal information. Unfortunately, in this day and age the author of an email needs to be cognizant of the content and what is included in an email. This thought process is reaffirmed in the Hastings and Payne (2013) study, "email creates a written record or building a file is something that can later be used to protect one's position in the organization or as potential legal documents" (p. 326). The functionality of email provides versatility as a communication tool

and a way to document electronic conversations. Additionally, email has provided employees with a way to track, retrieve, and document electronic conversations between employees and their supervisors (Gimenez, 2006). Email is a communication tool that has the potential to allow organizations to function more efficiently, but also has the possibility to create more work for the employees.

As electronic communication expands, so does the role of twenty-first century high school principal. An examination of the impact of email on school culture and climate is appropriate because it has the potential to affect the student-learning environment. Lunenburg and Ornstein (2000) defined the culture and climate of a school as “shared philosophies, ideologies, beliefs, feelings, assumptions, expectations, attitudes, norms and values” (p. 60). Utilizing two different strands of systems theory as a framework lens to analyze the nature and organizational impacts of email helps current high school principals reflect on their email communications to teaching staffs. How the receiver – in this study, teachers – perceives email is an important element of effective communication and leadership within a school. In the three case studies conducted for this study, email had the potential to affect high school principal and teacher communications and relationships, which could have positively or negatively shaped the culture and climate of each school.

The Purpose of the Study

Initially, my study set out to analyze the amount of emails principals received on a daily basis. However, through the process, it became evident that there was limited research and time to conduct a thorough analysis on the volume and time principals spent on emails. Furthermore, after conducting research on how emails have impacted organizations outside of education, I felt compelled to analyze its effects on schools. The focus continued to narrow to how email

communications have impacted principal and teacher relations. Still in keeping with the original premise about volume of email, a more holistic approach to the study developed, including the content and tone of principal emails to his or her teachers. I used the rational and natural systems perspectives of organizational theory as framework to analyze the content and tone of principal emails. I wanted to get perspectives from both principals and teachers on how email has impacted their relationships. I conducted three case studies of principals' use of email by visiting three Michigan high schools to collect examples of email communications and to interview both the principal of the building and a focus group of teachers. My hope is that other high school principals will be interested in the study's findings because it places their own work experience in a broader context when examining the decision making process of crafting email communications between themselves and their respective teaching staffs.

There is very limited literature on email and its impact on education. This research could lead to several implications on how to blend the rational and natural perspectives when principals communicate with teachers to create a more effective and collaborative learning environment within a school. Additionally, the method of this study provides an opportunity for readers to analyze email communication and review the perceptions of email from both a principal and teacher standpoint. Furthermore, the research could impact the decision making process of principals when they communicate with their teachers using the distinguishing features of the rational and natural systems theory perspectives. I argue high school principals can be both rational and natural system theorists, depending on their communication styles. Finding a balance between both perspectives could lead to more effective email communications between principals and their teachers. Principals may opt to use different forms of communication, add or delete content, or use a different tone in their emails with their teaching staffs.

Research Questions

1. How has email affected communication and relationships between high school principals and teachers?

To answer this question, I collected data to directly address the following sub-questions:

- a. What are the volume and subject of email communication between principals and teachers?
- b. What is the content and tone of email communication between principals and teachers?
- c. How do principals view their email communications as changing the nature of their relationships with teachers?
- d. How do teachers view their email communications with their principal as changing the nature of their relationship?

Outline of the Chapters

In Chapter 2, the literature review is organized as follows. First, I define email and review the available empirical evidence on the use of email in the workplace. Second, I define systems theory with an emphasis on the rational and natural systems perspectives and explain the role of communication in each theory. Third, I apply systems theory to the high school setting, focusing in particular on the impact of email communications between high school principals and teachers. Lastly, I explain how principal and teacher relations are built through leadership and communication. Each section of the literature review lends itself to the importance of understanding how email has impacted communication and the relationships between high school principals and teachers.

In the third chapter, I discuss the methods used to select the research sites and participants, collect multiple forms of data, and analyze the data during the study. The recruitment process was pivotal to the study due to the time constraints with both the principals' and teachers' contractual obligations. Each school's principal and teacher focus group is described and an overview of the interview settings is highlighted. To answer the primary and sub-set of research questions, I collected three sets of data, including sent and received principal emails from a predetermined date, principal interviews, and teacher focus group interviews. My analysis centered on each individual school, followed by a triangulation of the data to highlight any patterns and irregularities.

Chapter 4 answers the primary research question, along with the sub-questions. The data collected emphasizes sent and received principal emails and principal/teacher interviews from three rural high schools. First, the volume and content of principal emails are analyzed from a predetermined date. Second, from those emails, I selected three sent principal emails that drew my curiosity due to content for further analysis in a conceptually clustered matrix. Each sent email was reviewed from a basic exchange between principal and teacher and provided an interpretation from an organizational standpoint. The coding of each email considered the content of each communication from the characteristics of the rational and natural systems perspectives. Finally, I coded the three principal and teacher focus group interviews. Coding patterns developed from each school, including email efficiency, decision-making of content and tone, and drawbacks. The findings answered my research questions, along with developing a discussion on how my study impacts acting practitioners in the field and beyond from an organizational communication standpoint.

Chapters 5 and 6 present a discussion of the implications and conclusion of this work as it relates to email and its effect on principal and teacher communications and relationships. In addition, I relate the synchronous nature of crafting an email's content and tone from the rational and natural systems theory perspectives. How an email communication is perceived can affect the culture and climate of any organization, including schools. Finally, I propose that this research reaches beyond principal and teachers email communications. Organizations' systemic natures and functionality are based around communication. It does not matter if you are a chief operating officer of a company, superintendent of a school district, or a high school principal. The way in which emails are perceived has an effect on an organization, whether positive or negative. The decision-making process of crafting an email should become more purposeful for the author, no matter what the author's role is in an organization, to communicate effectively with the various stakeholders he or she serves.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Email in the Workplace

Lunenburg and Ornstein (2000) viewed communication as “the lifeblood of every school organization.... a process that links the individual, the group, and the organization” (p. 180).

The types of communication have changed drastically for principals from one generation to the next. Consequently, so has the role of internal communication between principals and teachers. Accessibility, immediacy and accountability are three terms that describe today’s technological advances in communication. Corresponding with different stakeholders, including teachers, has never been easier and vice versa; receiving messages is just a click away. The forms of media, content, tone of the messages, and style of communication have the potential to impact the culture and climate of schools. How principals communicate with their teachers can have an effect on the relationships they build within a school.

Email has transformed both business and personal communication. Renaud and colleagues (2006) argue, “The name email, however, is a misnomer” (p. 313). Email started out as a hegemonic form of communication in the early 1970’s, such as postal service mail and the telephone, formally known as electronic memo sending. Email messaging has exploded in workplaces everywhere. It acts as a to-do-list, supports task management, and reminds users of important tasks, meetings, and deadlines. Email sustains lengthy and extended conversations with two or more participants and acts as an address book (Bellotti et al., 2005). Workers conduct much of their business, even with co-workers in close proximity, by email, because it is perceived to be less time-consuming, more reliable, and efficient than phoning or meeting face-to-face (Berghel, 1997). From the advent of email, communication has increased exponentially

along with accessibility of educators, including high school principals. Email lends itself to an anywhere/anytime workplace.

Renaud and colleagues (2006) considered the nature of email from the recipient's perspective and how this free and easy communication really costs the recipient. Renaud and colleagues explained, "Despite increasingly usable user interfaces, the way in which one manages one's time and attention in relation to email related tasks is still vulnerable to mismanagement" (p. 314). The two central questions of the study were: 1) To what extent did email use intersperse and interfere with other computer-related activity? And 2) how did email users perceive their email experience, and how aware were they of their behavior?

The methods of the study were to track six users over three months to capture the user's actions involving raw usage data organized into sequences of usage sessions. It is important to point out that all users were working in an academic environment, including researchers and some support staff. The following usage behaviors were tracked for each user: (a) time spent interacting with non-email applications and (b) time spent interacting with email applications. Overall, the six users logged just over 320 hours during the three-month observation time, 23.7% was spent on email, which accumulated to around 76 hours. The time spent on each email session shows 56.5% of email sessions lasted less than 15 seconds, whereas only 3.7% lasted more than five minutes (p. 320). Renaud et al. observed no relationship between length of time between email sessions and the length on an email session (Pearson's correlation coefficient = 0.062). "In this study the frequent checking of email clearly had consequences for other applications throughout the working day" (p. 321). The majority of the subjects, 84%, kept email running in the background. Almost 49% of respondents used alerts to notify them of an

email arrival. Notably, 34.3% reported that they checked email every fifteen minutes or less, and 49.3% reported they checked emails more than once an hour.

Renaud and his colleagues (2006) reached several conclusions. First, email has tremendous benefits to the workplace; however, there are some increased costs to the workloads of the recipient. In addition, the subjects in this study were unaware of the disruptive effect that email had on them in the workplace. Also, the research concluded that individuals prefer to send email rather than receive it. Implications of the study include the notion that email usage continues to be emergent because people have not learned the etiquette of the Internet and its usage. Second, email is a multifaceted tool used not only for communication but also task management, calendar, contact lists, and conversation thread management. Finally, the researchers had a concern with email being available on a twenty-four hour basis, sending emails instead of using other resources to answer questions, and neglecting other work responsibilities to respond to emails within an expected time span.

Chase and Clegg (2011) had a similar study investigating the work habits related to email usage – enabling organizations to examine issues affecting performance, productivity, and well-being of employees. The purpose of the study was to analyze the use of email as primary communication upon the work behaviors of higher education professionals who support university administrative functions. By design, this qualitative study focused on the staff professionals within the academic support areas rather than the perceptions of students, faculty, and other non-administrative professionals. Only twenty-three individuals chose to participate due to the time commitment that other supervisors were unwilling to permit. Over a three-month period, data was collected through informal observations and interviews by separating participants into two groups. This enabled both researchers to observe and interview half of the

participants in any given week. Data analysis involved examination and coding of participants for reoccurring patterns, which help categorize the information for further review.

The research findings consisted of impact on productivity, social interactions, and well-being. Chase and Clegg's findings were similar to the Renaud et al. (2006) study. Participants of both studies found the instant communication of email to be beneficial and a source of irritation and frustration at the same time. Immediacy was a vital characteristic in the strengths and weaknesses of email. This included the efficiency of email to gather information, but immediacy also created additional stress and anxiety due to the expectations of an immediate response. Fourteen of the twenty-three participants strongly agreed that email often distracted them from important work. As one participant stated, "We don't get out of our holes" (p. 38). The social impacts of email in this study provided two primary themes, the avoidance of face-to-face conversation and the isolation of individual workers. The impact on participants' well-being included added job stress and anxiety. Seventy percent strongly agreed they had experienced tension with the increased use of email in their jobs. The findings strongly suggest that people believe email is imperative to the overall effectiveness of their jobs but that it comes at a cost (Chase & Clegg, 2011). Participants went to the extent of stating that they felt enslaved because of email communications.

Several findings emerged from the Chase and Clegg (2011) study that are worth noting. First, the constant checking of email demonstrates the addictive nature of email. This type of behavior has the potential to disrupt an employee's productivity in other tasks. This issue of productivity is similar to the Renaud et al. (2006) finding. Second, participants of the Chase and Clegg study reported that responding to difficult or complex situations via email requires time and formality to craft an appropriate and professional response. Third, this study confirms the

avoidance of professional social interactions due to the increased use of email instead of face-to-face communication. Furthermore, the participants in the study felt as though, at the university level, email should be used with higher respect and formality. Participants reported that individuals used email to communicate informally and demonstrated a lack of respect for the recipient and university in their communication.

As Gimenez (2006) explained, “Over the last decade we have witnessed an increase in the interest of email communication along with their emerging textual and communicative complexities in international business” (p. 154). His study focused on the dynamic nature of the global markets requiring business communications to become more flexible and collaborate more efficiently. Gimenez identified two central questions: 1) How are changes in international business communication represented in the textual features of emails? And 2) what do these emerging textual features respond to? Data was collected from thirteen participants who worked for a satellite communications corporation, all of whom used English as their primary language. The data collection process was divided into three phases, first each email donor was asked to provide 30 random email messages that were routine communication amongst their colleagues. The second phase of the data collection procedure consisted of doubling the amount of emails for submission for further analysis. The third step in the collection process consisted of the donor being given precise instructions as to what to submit in the next 30 emails. The nature and the data of the emails collected for this study raised confidentiality issues that the researcher had to address. In this particular study the researcher had to obtain written consent from all parties involved, including the donor and all parties involved through the donor. So not only the sender of the email had to give their consent but the receiver and anyone who was CC’ed (carbon copied) to the email as well. This also had practical consequences to the study including

extended time and denial of certain materials from being analyzed due to the nature of the content.

The conclusion of this study examined some of the most prominent textual features that document the evolution of email communication to keep up with the demands of the global economy. The analysis showed that email provides an easy and quick reference and retrieval resource, along with the demands of accountability and reliability, which has impacted the structure, and functions of emails. Gimenez concluded, “Message embeddedness shows how emails have evolved to meet these needs, turning the whole chain of messages into an internal record that can easily be stored, referenced and retrieved” (p. 167). Emails are records of activity; they have evolved to reflect the sociopolitical realities of the organizations that produce them. In addition, Gimenez implicated that one of the difficulties of this study was making generalizations across business contexts, especially given the context-specific nature and corporate culture-based nature of email communication.

The emergence of email allows researchers to seek generalizations about its influences on the performance outcomes and its impact on the workplace. Gimenez’s (2006) study focused on the evolution of the contextual features of email, and Renaud et al. (2006) completed a study that emphasized the perceptions of email recipients, which was supported by Chase and Clegg’s (2011) findings. Renaud et al. summarized, “The email phenomenon is something of a puzzle – everyone is aware of its potential for enhancing and facilitating communication, but the evidence for its dark side is emerging as email becomes more widespread” (p. 318). The limited historical perspective of research relating to email and its effects on the workplace highlights the need for additional investigation to address email’s impact on, and implications for, the workplace. Given this far-reaching phenomenon of communication in today’s world, research conducted on the

influence of email in schools can add to the body of knowledge of how it potentially enhances or hinders work within an ever-wider variety of workplaces. Gaining a better understanding of the issues related to utilizing email in the public sector, including schools, could positively impact the effectiveness and productivity of such organizations, as well as the work/life balance for individuals within those organizations (Chase & Clegg, 2011).

Systems Theory

In order to understand how email impacts organizations, we must also understand the nature of those organizations. Organizations are created for a purpose. The institutional hierarchy of an organization adheres to certain goals and objectives. Organizational environments are created by technical components, including electronic communication. *Environments* consist of formal structures, social structures, and individuals who, in theory, collaborate to accomplish a pre-determined objective (Scott & Davis, 2007). Environments play a pivotal role in creating strategies, goals, and outputs in an organization. Systems theory is the interdisciplinary study of organizations, with the objective of discovering patterns and explaining principles that can be differentiated from, and applied to, all types of systems in the fields of research (Scott & Davis, 2007; Thompson, 2003). Systems theory is considered a specialization of systems thinking or as the goal output with an emphasis on generalization useful across a broad range of systems versus specific models of individual organizations (Thompson, 2003).

Systems theory has three distinct perspectives: rational, natural, and open systems (Scott & Davis, 2007). Each perspective has its own distinguishing features to explain organizations. Theorists utilize the different perspectives due to the various complexities that shape organizations, which include formal and informal structures. Formal structures include reaching goals through greater productivity through increased efficiency. The informal structures deal

with the social aspects of the organization, including the motivation and behavioral aspects of individuals. Thompson (2003) explained, “It appears that each approach leads to some truth, but neither alone affords an adequate understanding of complex organizations” (p. 8). I will be using the rational and natural perspectives of systems theory to analyze how twenty-first century high school principals communicate through email with their teachers. Because my focus is on internal communications between principals and teachers, I have chosen to exclude open systems theory, which focuses on interactions between organizations and outside entities.

Rational System Perspective

The rational system perspective views the behaviors of an organization and its expected outcomes as being completed with purpose and coordination. Scott and Davis (2007) explain, “Rational system theorists stress goal specificity and formalization because each of these elements makes an important contribution to the rationality of organizational action” (p. 36). Rational systems establish specific goals and exhibit highly formalized social structures driven by goal attainment. Rational systems attempt to create formalized and predictable behavior (Scott & Davis, 2007). The main goal when considering organizations from a rational system perspective is to identify how the organization shapes and uses individuals as a collective to become a more effective organization. Thompson (2003) interpreted, “The rational model of an organization results in everything being functional-making a positive, indeed optimum, contribution to the overall result” (p. 6). The perspective seeks to understand how organizations manipulate actors to achieve set goals in the most efficient manner.

Several examples illustrate how scholars and practitioners have used the rational system perspective to study and improve organizations throughout time. These include the scientific management model and administrative theory. After the Industrial Revolution, Fredrick Taylor

introduced the scientific management model (Scott & Davis, 2007). Taylor and his followers took the management approach to re-organize from the bottom-up, which emphasized coordination and specialization. With the advent of technology, email has become the primary tool for that coordination and specialization. Through the use of email, relationships at work have become reliant on electronic communication to achieve organizational goals. The adage “work smarter, not harder” applies to this analysis. Sending emails have eliminated the need to have face-to-face conversations with fellow colleagues. Another school of thought garnered from the rational system perspectives was Henri Fayol’s administrative theory. It was based on a top-down management style that emphasized coordination and specialization. The coordination of activities emphasizes a hierarchy in which all employees are managed by one supervisor whose specialization is to delegate responsibilities to his subordinates in the most efficient manner for maximum output. All actions and resources are appropriate, and their allocation fits a master plan with predictable outcomes (Thompson, 2003). Individuals who are using administrative theory in today’s society rely heavily on electronic communication to achieve organizational goals. However, both models are rational system perspectives.

Natural System Perspective

The natural system perspective views an organization as a collection of individuals working towards a common goal using informal structures to motivate people to meet organizational goals. Every organization has some form of structure, but the natural system perspective sees those structures as being shaped by actors' behaviors, goals, and interpersonal dynamics. Thompson (2003) explained, “The complex organization is a set of interdependent parts which together make up a whole because each contributes something and receives something from the whole, which in turn is interdependent with some larger environment” (p. 6).

Natural system theorists pay attention to the actors' behavior and how it affects an organization as a whole. The main premise of the natural system perspective is that organizations are social groups adapting and thriving under set circumstances (Scott & Davis, 2007).

Selected schools of thought that support the natural system perspective include Hawthorne Studies, interpreted by Elton Mayo and Chester Barnard's Cooperative Systems theory (Scott & Davis, p. 64, 70). Mayo studied individual factors that affected the Hawthorne plant of the Western Electric Company outside of Chicago in the 1920s. He focused on the physical and psychological effects to determine peak performance for maximizing production. Changing various conditions of the plant, like lighting and room temperature, the researchers saw increased production. When asked why the workers were in a better mood and why production had increased, the answer was simple: the environment of a workplace can affect an employee's behavior.

Barnard's Cooperative Systems "focused on organizations being cooperative systems, integrating the contributions of their individual participants" (Scott & Davis, p. 70). This approach was built on the preface of rational system features but emphasized that organizations rely on the cooperation of employees to work productively. The review of research on email use presented above suggests that email is likely to have enhanced communication and cooperation within organizations. Barnard attempted to merge two opposing management philosophies: goals are produced and imposed from a top-down method but with the understanding that to reach the goals, organizations must have the cooperation of their participants. He argued that authority depended ultimately on its endorsement from the response of those subject to it (Scott & Davis, 2007). Electronic communication has allowed blurred boundaries between management and subordinates. Instead of a "work for" approach, there is a "work with" attitude.

Survival of the organization is the goal, and the parts and their relationships presumably are determined through the evolutionary processes (Thompson, 2003). This theory of survival has created more authority for the individual, which can be intrinsically motivating. The shift in attitude demonstrates that the natural system perspective is individualistic in nature and considers intrinsic motivation to be determined by the individual, not the organization.

Integrating Systems Theory to Understand Communication between Principals and Teachers

How does electronic communication relate to systems theory? This study examines the principals' use of email and their decision-making process for how and why they communicate with teachers to accomplish a task. Systems theory opens the door to using different perspectives to understand the form, differentiated content, and tone of high school principals' communication with various teachers. In addition, relationships can be developed through communication, which can affect the culture and climate of a school building. The rational and natural perspectives within systems theory provide two frameworks for examining principals' email communication with his or her respective teachers.

Communication is an essential aspect of systems theory (Almaney, 1974). Rational and natural system perspectives can provide two different frameworks for interpreting the nature of communication between high school principals and teachers. The form, context, and tone of communication between principals and teachers potentially have a direct correlation to the relationships that are formed within a school. Internal communication is a daily occurrence within an educational organization. As a result, how communication is perceived can impact the relationships that are built within a school, which may ultimately affect the working environment. In the process of communicating with teachers, high school principals might be best to develop an understanding of email communication from both the rational and natural

system perspectives. Utilizing organizational theory to analyze how high school principals communicate with teachers through email may help explain ways in which this communication impacts the overall climate, culture, and function of a school.

Within organizational theory, there are communication systems that help shape and create structures within the organization. Orlikowski (2000) argues that individuals are the central aspects of organizations, and as a result, they shape the organization in critical ways that are relevant to both the rational and natural system perspectives. Additionally, people influence how technology is used within an organization. Daily communication, including electronic, is a central component in schools. Rational and natural system perspectives provide a lens for high school principals to understand how they communicate with teachers.

Using the rational system perspective, communication within an organization would be focused on maximum efficiency and driven by goal attainment. This perspective could illuminate a top-down management approach where decisions are based on the emphasis of productivity through increased efficiency. Upper level managements make decisions and communicate the goals to the staff. According to Almaney (1974), decision making and communication rely heavily on one another. Individuals who make decisions within this perspective in mind might concentrate on the goals of the organization, and not the individuals' feelings. The organization becomes a machine through its actions and communications. The individuals in an organization are portrayed as parts within the machine with no emotion. Roberts and his colleagues (1974) explained, "Both the human relations and classical approaches are closed systems views of organizations in which all individuals have essentially the same needs" (p. 506). This type of organizational approach conveys to the individual the need to assimilate to meet the goals of the organization. From the rational system perspective,

organizations can control their subordinates and subsystems through a number of variables, communication being one of them.

Email provides an avenue for efficiency, structure and specialization in ways consistent with the rational system perspective on organizations. Internal communication is a central element to a school's success: it can promote a consistent flow of communication either by top-down or bottom-up management. These relationships can promote an effective relationship among the actors in an organization. The rational systems perspective enables us to see how internal communication provides structure and a way to delegate responsibilities from a principal to his or her teachers.

Staying connected as a high school principal can be a crucial feature in shaping the culture and climate of a school. Internal communications amongst teachers and principals can produce a sense of efficiency and connectivity. Effective internal communication is vital to high school principals; it helps create formalized structures, such as school improvement goals, policies, procedures, and staff and students' handbooks to provide guidelines for teachers to adhere to. Depending on the situation, principals may take a rational system perspective on their own work and focus on email as a tool for communicating these types of objectives to their teachers. In that case, the communication would be a directive of information, in which the principal is not mindful of the particular tone of the message and how the message could impact individual motivation and interpersonal relationships. Principals make decisions about the tone of their emails on a continuous basis, even if they are not aware that they are doing so. Principals decide the content of the message and the overall tone of each email they send to their teachers. Straight-to-the-point communication between principals and teachers are consistent with the email authors holding a rational system perspective.

By contrast, actors who hold a natural system perspective on their own work in the organization would take into account the power of informal structures and the influence of individuals' behavior and motivation while trying to obtain a goal. Roberts and colleagues (1974) explained, "The relationships among communication, organizational efficiency, and the quality of human life variables also seem important" (p. 520). The tone of the email can influence an individual's motivation and behavior within an organization, thus affecting its efficiency. Communication within an organization promotes stability and a cohesiveness to reach the goals it set out to achieve. Almaney (1974) acknowledged that communication lends stability to the total system by integrating all subsystems. The natural system perspective acknowledges that in order for organizations to survive, actors must understand that organizations are composed of individuals with various behaviors and motivations. A principal who tends to be more of a natural system theorist recognizes that communicating in a top-down or formalized manner could hinder the efficiency of an organization by negatively impacting individual motivations or their relationships with others. Actors operating with a natural system perspective on their own work attempt to understand human behavior and strive to unite people to accomplish a common goal.

Seung-Won and Kuchinke (2005) explained that adopting both rational and natural system perspectives can be useful to reduce uncertainty within an organization and to enhance the institution's efficiency. A goal from the natural systems perspectives is to promote buy-in from participants to make sure the organization survives and improves. Clear and concise emails can increase buy-in from staff. From this perspective, principals would benefit from embracing the variety of behavior and motivations that influence the culture and climate of a school. When high school principals use email to discuss school improvement goals, teacher evaluations,

student issues, and other critical concerns, they could have a more positive impact if they are cognizant of their audience. How a message is written and perceived will likely have an impact on principal and teacher relations. The fact that the natural system perspective puts an emphasis on the feelings of the stakeholders, including teachers, makes it important to include this perspective when communicating.

System theory could provide high school principals with multiple perspectives on how they communicate with their teachers. The characteristics of each perspective lend themselves to analyzing the form, content, and tone of the communication that is being sent from the principal to his or her teachers. Internal communication, from rational and natural system perspectives, plays a pivotal role in the functioning of day-to-day operations between principals and teachers. How teachers perceive the communication can ultimately have an impact on the relationships and overall culture and climate of a building. With the increased use of email, teachers internally have greater access and immediacy to the principal. As Seung-Won and Kuchinke (2005) stated, it is useful to have both perspectives in an organization to reduce uncertainty, but creating a balance between rational and natural system perspectives could be the most effective approach in running a school.

Communication is an element of functionality and creates accessibility within organizations. High School Principals are the heads of school organizations, which more often than not are communicating through email with their teachers due to the efficiency purposes. How a principal communicates through email is likely to have an impact on communication and relationships with their teachers. The rational and natural system theory perspectives provide a framework lens to use when analyzing communications between principals and teachers. After defining the rational and natural system theory perspectives and reviewing the literature, I am

proposing that high school principals unknowingly are both rational and natural system theorists in their organizations through his or her communications. Using the distinguishing features of the rational and natural system theory perspectives one could claim that principals tend to see their own organizations primarily through one of these lenses. Depending on the situation and leadership style of the principal, he or she may communicate with either the rational or natural system theory perspective.

One could argue, this interdependency of communicating using one perspective or the other creates an unbalance with communication and relationships between a principal and his or her teachers. Organizations are in fact both rational and natural systems, which poses a potential danger if principals fail to see their work and their organization from both perspectives. That is, if principals focus on the logistics and efficiencies of email, they may inadvertently have a negative impact on the climatic, social aspects of the school or vice versa. Finding a balance between the rational and natural system theory perspectives when communicating through email, is imperative for principals to be mindful of when communicating with their teachers to promote positive relationships, which in turn could create a positive culture and climate within the school. This balance might be particularly important for shaping principal-teacher relationships, a facet of school organizations that we know to be particularly critical.

Principal-Teacher Relations Built through Leadership and Communication

Relationships likely dictate the form, content, and tone principals use to communicate with teachers. Gilbert (2004) argues that the most effective means of communication for principals is the one that conveys a message understood by others in the manner intended. This is a basic leadership skill that principals must develop to create effective relationships with their teachers. In schools looking to generate higher levels of satisfaction and cohesion around school

goals, researchers have identified principal-staff relationships and interpersonal interactions to be key factors affecting trust, cooperation, and commitment (Hoy et al., 2002). The leadership principals provide and how they communicate internally with their teaching staffs are central elements to developing relationships, which hopefully leads to school success.

Valentine and Prater (2011) explained, “Leadership primarily manifests itself during times of change, and the nature of change is a critical determinant of the most helpful forms of leadership” (p. 8). In this day and age of technological changes and advancements, principals need to adapt to the speed of information. Case-in-point: a lockdown drill occurs during the school day, the staff goes un-informed throughout the day that it was just a drill. By the end of the day, conversations over email create distorted information, which is then leaked to parents via their students. Had the principal used the mindset of a natural system perspective in communicating, he or she could have avoided any misinformation from making its way to the community. For principals, producing an organization of transparency is a two-way street. An effective approach to developing transparency is to facilitate open communication with staff. As teachers must play an active role in the daily operations of a school, creating transparency pays huge dividends towards effective communication and the development of trust.

During the 1980s, in education the focus of high school principals shifted from high school leaders to instructional leaders. Valentine & Prater (2011) suggested, “Instructional leadership should focus on establishing goals, defining a vision, providing resources, supervising and evaluating teachers, coordinate professional development, and creating collegial relationships with and amongst teachers” (p. 7). Advocates for such leadership have urged districts to realign practices, responsibilities, duties, and delegation of nonacademic duties to assistant principals or other staff. Yet, instructional leadership is pivotal to the success of

schools. Chorpa (1994) explained, "When principals think, behave, and act as instructional leaders and communicators, they make a positive difference for their staff members and students" (p. 37). Technology—more specifically, email—has changed the nature of being an instructional leader. Communicating electronically with teachers has become a priority on a daily basis for principals. Examples of such daily interactions include student, parent, and teacher issues, curriculum needs, teacher evaluations and state reporting. Consequently, the responsibilities of a principal have been redirected by email, and the impact on the other responsibilities such as instructional leadership is undervalued and underappreciated.

In the current era of school change, reform and restructuring is inevitable. Instructional leaders must sift through the curriculum needs of a building and pass on information that is pertinent to teachers' success in the classroom. Supporting and encouraging teachers rather than directing them goes a long way in developing solid staff relations between the two. According to Valentine and Prater (2011), "Researchers have found that principals in effective schools are more active in simply distributing materials in an organized manner and more supportive of special projects" (p. 6). Filtering email is imperative between principals and teachers, how a school leader filters these communications go hand-in-hand with their leadership style.

The use of email has changed the dynamics of the twenty-first century organization, including education. Email provides accessibility and immediacy to both principals and teachers. This type of access is likely to create further complexities and compound educators' job responsibilities. Valentine and Prater (2011) claim, "The high school principal's role has become increasingly complex as the nature of society, political expectations, and school organizations have changed" (p. 5). As such, the communication between principals and teachers can create and shape a school's culture and climate. Each teacher has a unique need that

must be met, and high school principal must address by forging relationships that encourage information exchanges within a variety of forms and context. Internal communication between principals and teachers play an integral role in shaping the perceptions of a school.

The amount of email communication that flows in and out of a high school principal's office on a daily basis can be overwhelming. Student issues, discipline, parent concerns, staff concerns, curriculum and instructional needs and federal and state reporting are a few examples of the plethora of communications that a high principal deals with on a consistent basis. How a principal crafts and responds to various emails they receive from teachers may affect relations.

Internal communication can be characterized as the skeleton of an organization. Communication with teachers is a fundamental element for an educational organization's success. Once a principal has developed a shared vision with his or her teachers, they are brought in to make it reality (Chorpa, 1994). Email can potentially serve as a platform to produce a coherent vision for a school. As is the case with all technological advances, email increases the amount and methods for delivering messages to teachers. Baule and Lewis explained, "Social media is changing the way that all strata of people communicate" (p. 25). Educational organizations are not immune to these changes. Communications and public relations are two aspects of a sound public relations network, but they are among the most important for a school to embrace in order to be effective communicators in today's society (Baule & Lewis, 2012).

A vision of a school needs to be shared internally; thus, it is essential for high school principals to keep teachers involved the education process of a school. Davies (2004) argued, "In education, leadership makes use of personal relationships to facilitate not only change in the purpose and resources of those involved in the relationship, but an evaluation of both – a change

'for the better' ” (as cited in Valentine & Prater, 2011, p. 8). High school principals’ typically use internal communication as a means of connecting, sharing, and publishing. Effective educational leaders focus on communication, different sources of influence, and respect for the individual, all of which support a blueprint of the effort needed from each group of stakeholders in an educational venture (Gilbert, 2004). In addition, communication plays a pivotal role in developing those relationships. Daily communication is needed and achieved through a variety of media and interactions with personnel, an idea heralded by Halawah (2005), who asserted, “Creating a collaborative environment and open communication has been described as the single most important factor for successful school improvement initiatives” (p. 335). A principal’s effectiveness when communicating with his or her teachers – over email or otherwise – has the potential to affect the overall culture and climate of a school. Given the increasing prevalence of email communication in schools, it is critical to understand the unique impact of this specific form of communication on the organization overall and on principal-teacher relationships in particular.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

I sought to answer the following research question: *How has email affected communication and relationships between high school principals and teachers?* To answer this question, I collected data to directly address the following sub-questions:

- a. What are the volume and subject of email communication between principals and teachers?
- b. What is the content and tone of email communication between principals and teachers?
- c. How do principals view their email communications as changing the nature of their relationships with teachers?
- d. How do teachers view their email communications with their principal as changing the nature of their relationship?

I conducted three case studies of principals' email communications to analyze the use of email and how it has changed the nature of the high school principals' relationships with teachers. The research design of the study was qualitative, drawing on analysis of emails transmitted from principals to teachers, 3 principal interviews, and 3 focus group interviews of 5 teachers for each of the three high schools in which those principals worked.

Research Sites

Each of the three case studies focused on a principal in a Michigan high school (information on schools and communities was retrieved from City-Data.com (<http://www.city-data.com>) and MI School Data portal (<https://www.mischooldata.org>)). The first case study was conducted at Oak High School. The high school is on the outskirts of a rural community with

approximately 15,000 residents with an estimated median household income of \$32,087. The community has witnessed a decrease of 5.9% in population since 2000. The decline in population can be contributed to the loss of jobs and Michigan's struggling economy during the last fifteen years. Oak High School is a 9th - 12th grade building with approximately 975 students, which is considered a Class A high school due to student enrollment in the state of Michigan. The student body is 53% male and 47% female. Additionally, the ethnicity of the building's students is primarily Caucasian at 92% and the next highest ethnicity being Hispanic/Latino at 4%. Oak High School boasted a 92% four-year cohort graduation rate for the 2013-2014 school year, compared to the state average of 78%. As far as student achievement, the average mean composite score for juniors who took the ACT in the 2013-2014 school year was 18.9. The ninth graders who took the social studies MEAP test in the fall of 2013 had an 18.6% proficiency rate. Oak High School has emphasized college readiness through their international baccalaureate program and hosts a number of career and technical education programs within the building.

The second case study site was Crest High School. The school is located within a rural farming community. The village has approximately 2,350 residents and an estimated median household income of \$32,337. The village has witnessed an 8.2% decrease in population since 2000. Crest High School is a 9th - 12th grade building with approximately 539 students, which is considered a Class B high school. The students are 52% male and 48% female. The ethnicities of the students are primarily Caucasian at 91%, and the next highest race would be Hispanic/Latino at 7%. Crest High School fell 2% below the State average (78%) during the 2013-2014 school year for their four-year graduation cohort rate. The student achievement rates for Crest High School juniors taking the ACT in 2013-2014 school year was a 20.1 mean

average composite score. The ninth graders who took the social studies MEAP test in the fall of 2013 had a 25.8% proficiency rate. Crest High School is an AdvancED accredited school which offers college preparation courses to their students.

The third site was Ace High School. The high school is north of the city's boundaries in a heavily rural area. The total population of the city is 1,615, with only a net decrease of .2% of its population since 2000. The estimated median household income is \$36,000. Ace High School is a 9th - 12th grade building with approximately 396 students, which is considered a Class C high school. The students are 54% male and 46% female. The ethnicities of students are primarily Caucasian at 92%, African American at 4% and Hispanic/Latino at 3%. Ace High School had a 97% four-year cohort graduation rate for the 2013-2014 school year compared to the State average of 78%. The student achievement rates for Ace High School juniors taking the ACT in the 2013-2014 school year was a 19.1 mean average composite score. The ninth graders who took the social studies MEAP test in the fall of 2013 had a 30.4% proficiency rate. Ace High School promotes professional learning communities and an emphasis on school improvement goals focused on their increasing at-risk student population.

Sample

I purposefully recruited three Michigan high school principals who were designated as 9th through 12th grade building principals in public school districts. These criteria were important because of consistency purposes for comparing experiences amongst each participant. During the selection process, I considered the location and student enrollment size of the high schools. I sought a sample of three schools that had relatively similar community and student demographics. For the recruitment process, I used my professional network with superintendents and high school principals to enlist participants. Prior to conducting my research, I called each

prospective superintendent and principal to gauge their interest in allowing me to conduct a case study of their district's high school.

After I identified three schools that were willing to participate, I contacted each high school principal again via telephone to discuss in more detail his or her responsibilities as a participant in the study. I provided an overview of the study and asked if they were willing to forward me all of the emails they had sent to teachers and had received from on a particular date. Also during the phone conversation, I asked the participating principals if they would recruit 5 teachers on their staff who would be willing to participate in a focus group for my study. I emailed each principal a consent form for the superintendent of their district, their teachers, and themselves. The email and consent forms gave a description and purpose of the study, participant and researcher responsibilities, and a confidentiality agreement to legally cover the participants and myself (Appendix D & Appendix E. 1 – 3). I was explicit in my explanation that participation for principals and teachers would be voluntary and anonymous.

High School Principal Participants

The background information obtained about each high school principal is based on my professional relationship with each individual. Tim Jennings, the Oak High School principal, had held the position for five years at the time of the study. He had worked in the same high school for almost 20 years and was the school's athletic director prior to becoming the high school principal. In addition, Tim had participated in teacher contract negotiations as one of the lead negotiators for the district for nearly 10 years. Interestingly, Tim never taught, but he does have his teacher certification, which was issued from the state of California. Tim has lived and raised his family in the community for most of his life. Tim is also a graduate from Oak High

School. He has been a steady presence in the community and a mentor to many of the administrators who have been a part of the district while he has been there.

Kia Long was a first year principal at Crest High School when the case study was conducted. She graduated from a neighboring school district and was very familiar with the Crest School District prior to her applying and accepting the job. Before Kia came to Crest High School, she was an alternative education teacher for 10 years. She taught high school English and social studies. Kia was promoted to principal of the same alternative education program and spent 5 years in the position.

Joe Hobson was in his second year of being the Ace High School Principal and at the same time oversaw the district's alternative education program. Joe had risen from within the Ace School District starting as an English teacher and coach, to being promoted to Middle School Principal and High School Athletic Director within the first five years of working in the district. He grew up in the community and graduated from Ace High School. He went on to play Division I football and after college moved back to the community to raise his family and pursue his career interests in education.

Teacher Focus Group Participants

The teacher focus group participants for Oak, Crest, and Ace High Schools were all fairly balanced in regards to gender, subject area, and years of experience. Table 1 identifies the 15 teachers' school, gender, total years of teaching, how long they have been teaching and the subject area they each teach.

Table 1: Demographics of Teacher Participants

School	Teacher	Gender	Total Years Teaching	Years with District	Subject Area
Oak High School	Olivia	F	12	12	English
	Oliver	M	13	13	Chemistry
	Oprah	F	11	4	Special Education
	Odessa	F	15	15	Spanish
	Oscar	M	9	6	Social Studies
Crest High School	Christy	F	14	14	Social Studies
	Crystal	F	21	16	Special Education
	Charli	F	17	16	Art
	Chris	M	19	15	Science
	Cathy	F	12	2	Special Education
Ace High School	Autumn	F	10	10	English
	Aaron	M	16	16	Math & Physics
	Adam	M	11	11	History
	Austin	M	23	23	History & Physical Education
	Alex	M	27	27	History & Social Studies

Oak High School has 55 certified teachers on staff; 5 of those teachers participated in the case study's focus group. Oak High School teacher focus group was comprised of three female and two male teachers. The teachers averaged 12 years of experience amongst the five participants, and only two of them had taught at a previous district. The staff at Oak High School is large enough that teachers can be assigned to their core subject areas and not split between departments.

Crest High School has 29 total certified teachers on staff; 5 of those teachers participated in the case study's focus group interview. There were four female teachers and one male teacher who participated in the focus group interview at Crest. All but one of the teachers had taught at a previous district prior to teaching at Crest. The average amount of teaching experience amongst the group was approximately 17 years. Crest is smaller compared to Oak High School, but their teachers have the same luxury of teaching within their majors without being shared between other departments.

Ace High School has 26 total certified teachers on staff, 5 of those teachers participated in the case study's focus group interview. Four of the five participants were male and all five teachers had spent their entire teacher career at Ace. The average years of teaching experience with this group was approximately 17.5 years. Ace High School is small enough to where teachers share time teaching different subject areas other than their teaching majors. Two of the male teachers had over twenty years of teaching experience.

Data Collection Procedures

Once I selected my participants, I asked each principal to forward me every email they had sent to a teacher or their teaching staffs on a pre-determined date that I had selected. I asked the principals to forward each email from a typical workday between 7:30 a.m. and 5p.m. First, I used the emails to analyze the volume and content of the emails. I was strategic with each principal by selecting a different day of the week during the school year, in an attempt get a more representative sample of the volume of emails a principal may have sent or received in a day. However, there was an issue with Kia's total emails. She reported in her interview a total of 20 emails (13 received and 7 sent). However, she forwarded only 15 to me on her predetermined date. The data is missing 5 emails from Kia. I did reach out to her a second time to ask her to resend me her emails from the specified date. Again, I received only 15 total emails from her to review as document analysis. Second, I chose 3 emails during the data collection process to help generate conversation with the principals during the interviews. The selection process for choosing the three emails was based on reviewing the content of each message. If the email was in-depth or struck my curiosity I chose it to garner more information from the principals. Furthermore, I developed several more questions relating to the content and tone of the 3 selected emails for the principal interviews.

I interviewed each principal and their teachers on the same day at the school site. I arrived to each school at 2 p.m. so I could interview the principals in their offices first. Then I met with the teachers' right after school in the designated area that had been set aside for the focus groups (e.g., conference room, library). For each focus group, I handed out the teacher interview questions and a sample email that we would be discussing during the interview. The focus group interviews lasted 20-25 minutes. As an acknowledgement to the teachers who participated in the study and stayed past their contractual time, I gave them each a \$10 gift card to Meijer. I asked permission of each participant, principals and teachers, to use an audiotape for transcription and recollection purposes prior to the start of each interview. I estimated that the interviews took anywhere from 30-35 minutes for the principals and 20-25 minutes for the teacher focus groups. The interviews were voluntary and anonymous to protect the identity of each participant.

Instruments

I used a self-created set of questions for both the principal interviews and the teacher focus groups. I started the principal interviews with a focus on the volume of emails they received and sent to their teachers in a day. After adding the total volume of emails, I proceeded to ask the principals to analyze three emails from the same day to discuss the content and tone of the selected communications during the interview. The questions for the interview concentrated on the principals' decision-making process of communicating through email and examined the content and tone of their messages. I asked each principal how email has affected the nature of their communication with their teaching staffs. Finally, I asked several questions about the principal's perception of email. The principal interview questions are included in Appendix A.

I started the teacher focus groups with the teachers' perception of email and how it has affected their relationship with the building principal. I referenced a generic sample email (Appendix B) that a principal could have sent to a teaching staff and asked questions surrounding the email. The teachers were asked to consider the tone, style, their reaction, and if they considered the email an appropriate communication. Lastly, I inquired how email has impacted the culture and climate of their building. The teacher focus group questions are included in Appendix C. The questions that I posed to teachers were similar to the ones I asked of the principals. It was important to be consistent with the questions with both principals and teacher focus groups, so I worded the questions similarly to get different perspectives on the exact same issues.

Data Analysis

I conducted three case studies of principals' email communication to examine how email has affected communication and relationships between high school principals and teachers. To answer this overarching research question, I answered four sub-questions. The first sub-question focused on the total volume and subject of emails sent and received from each principal to a teacher or their teachers. Using the sent and received email communications between each principal and his or her teachers on a given date, I categorized each email using an analytic matrix; in each row denoting the number of emails both sent and received. I tallied the total number of emails that addressed various subjects (e.g., school policies/procedures, student and parent issues, curriculum/instruction/assessment, student achievement, professional development, safety, public relations and other), and the total number of sent and received emails. When analyzing the subjects, emails were only considered for one category. In the Figure 4.1, the total numbers of emails under each category, both sent and received, are

displayed vertically with each principal's emails denoted by an assigned color. This data provided a visual chart and a snapshot of email communications that take place between principals and teachers in a workday.

The second sub-question examined the content and tone of email communication between principals and teachers. To answer this question, I purposefully selected 3 of the emails shared by each principal to serve as focal emails that I could analyze closely from the rational and natural systems perspectives. I chose 9 total focal emails based on the depth of the email or my curiosity in its content. The hope was to bring a potential richness to each principal conversation with the focal emails that were selected. I reviewed each of the 9 focal emails to assess the basic nature of the exchange between principal and teacher and to provide an interpretation from an organizational standpoint. I used a conceptually clustered matrix to organize the data to analyze the content and tone of each email from a rational and natural systems perspective (Miles & Huberman, 1994) (Appendix F). To analyze the focal emails from the rational and natural perspectives, I reviewed the content, tone, and how the email could affect daily operations. I also included a separate column labeled "other" to aide further analysis. For coding purposes, terms of the rational systems perspective included a reference to scheduling meetings, logistics of the school day, efficiency in terms of deadlines, and completion of reports. From the natural systems perspective, I examined the emails for overall content and tone including: greetings/friendly gestures, symbols, punctuations, references to social or community events, personal items, salutations, and signatures. I created tables as a cross-case synthesis analytic technique to analyze the data across all 9 of the emails. The tables displayed the data from each individual principal, which provided a visually consistent framework (Yin, 2003). The rows are labeled as *rational*, *natural*, and *other* for each of the three emails, and the columns

include notes on the basic exchange and organizational interpretation. The matrix has rows and columns arranged to bring together information collected from the document analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Building displays, such as a conceptual table, provided an opportunity to create a cross-case analysis for this multi-case study. As Yin (2003) explained, cross-case synthesis, “is likely to be easier and the findings likely to be more robust than having a single case” (p.133), hence the reason for conducting three case studies.

In addition, I used the forwarded principal emails to analyze the content length, emotion, formality, and use of symbols as it relates to the tone of emails. I reviewed both the sent principal emails and the emails they had received from their teachers on the predetermined date. I categorized each email using an analytic matrix; in each row denoting the number of emails both sent and received. I tallied the total number of emails by length and tone. The operational definition of each code and coding definitions used in the study’s analysis can be found in Table 2.

For the third and fourth sub-questions, I sought to identify teachers’ and principals’ views on how email had impacted their relationships through analysis of the transcripts from the 3 principal interviews and the 3 teacher focus groups. I used similar coding techniques for examining both sets of transcripts. I read and coded the data by focusing on the perception and impact email had on principal/teacher relations. I identified seven prevalent categories to code the data while reading the interview transcripts. These categories were: volume, decision-making, content, tone, efficiency, face-to-face versus email, and other drawbacks when using email. I developed a case description as an analytic strategy to organize data from each of the three high schools and triangulated the evidence from each data point in each case (Yin, 2003). Once developed, the three case study descriptions illustrated both the principal and teacher

groups' similarities and differences as a cross-case pattern analysis. When examining the data, I sought to identify patterns that coincided across the three case studies so as to strengthen the study's internal validity (Yin, 2003). After I reviewed each case study individually and triangulated the data, the patterns across the three cases became my findings on how email communication has impacted relationships between principals and teachers. I used a table containing all of my research sub-questions to detail the findings in my data and make sure I had addressed each question (see Appendix G.)

Using the sent and received email communications between each principal and his or her teachers on the predetermined date, Table 2 explains the research questions, data source, how the data was coded and operational definitions.

Table 2: Research Questions and Data Sources

Research Questions	Data Sources	Coding	Coding Operational Definitions
Volume of email: What are the volume and subject of email communication between principals and teachers? The number of emails	Emails sent to and received from teachers	Counted emails	Number of emails received or sent on predetermined date
Subject of email: The subject of an email is its heading, this is located directly below the To/From lines	Emails sent to and received from teachers	School Policies & Procedures	Operational standards including student handbook
		Student & Parent Issues	Related to concerns with either a student or parent
		Curriculum Instruction & Assessment	Any topics related to student learning
		Student Achievement	Student grades, student performance, or test scores
		Professional Development	Teachers seeking educational opportunities outside of the classroom
		Safety	Student or staff endangerment or facility concerns
		Public Relations	Media and school events
		Other	Any email correspondence that did not fall under the previous seven defined codes
Content of email: What is the content and tone of email communication between principals and teachers? The body of the text in an email. This category focused on the length of an email's content.	Emails sent to and received from teachers	Succinct	Contained 3 lines or less
		Slightly Wordy	Contained 4-6 lines
		Needlessly Wordy	Contained 7 lines or greater

Table 2: (cont'd)

Tone of email: The amount of emotion and feeling we put into our voices & writing which changes our speech & writing and greatly affects other people's perception of what we are trying to communicate (Townsend, 1988).	Emails sent to and received from teachers	Emotion	Positive	Use of greetings & salutations, words & symbols, and bold, italicized, & underline
			Neutral	Utilized greetings & salutations, but no text characterization
			Negative	Used all CAPS of words, no greetings, no salutations
		Formality	Polite & Appropriate	Called person by name, used greetings & salutations, descriptive, inquiry based wording
			Somewhat Appropriate	Modest use of naming, greetings or salutations, less descriptive, straight to business
			Inappropriate	No use of greetings, salutations, or referred to by name, directive wording
		Effectiveness	High	Used 3 or more text character features
			Medium	Used 2 text character features
			Low	Used 0-1 character features
How do principals view their email communications with their teachers?	Three interviews conducted	Efficiency	Mass communication & daily operations	
		Content	Length of emails	
		Tone	Symbols; capitalized, bolded, & italicized; punctuations, greeting & salutations	
		Decision-making	Face-to-face versus email	
		Documentation	Public records and retrieval purposes	
		Drawbacks	Time consumption and misinterpretation	
How do teachers view their email communications with their principals?	Three focus groups held	Efficiency	Mass communication and daily operations	
		Content	Length of emails	
		Tone	Symbols; capitalized, bolded, & italicized; punctuations, greeting & salutations	
		Decision-making	Face-to-face versus email	
		Documentation	Public records and retrieval purposes	
		Drawbacks	Time consumption and misinterpretation	

Validity and Reliability

As with any study, there were some validity and reliability issues that I had to address.

The first issue of validity was the number of days I had asked the principals to review pertaining to the volume of emails they received and sent on average during a school day. A one-day window was minimal compared to the number of schools days in an academic calendar. I understand the time constraints of a high school principal's job responsibilities, so asking to view one day of emails was manageable for the participants. Also, by selecting different days of the

week during the school year, I attempted to include a more representative sample of the volume of emails a principal may have sent or received in day. Further limitations of the study included the sample size and making generalizations from the data collected (Rudestam & Newton, 2007). Including, comparing across the principals to say, for example, one principal receives more emails than the other. Due to time constraints there simply is not enough data to make these kind of claims. Although the study's small sample size was desirable for understanding the in-depth perspectives of participating principals and teacher, the size did limit the generalizability of these findings. Understanding and balancing the time commitment for the principals and teachers was an important element so that participants would be willing to participate in the study; that was why I set a 40-45 minute time limit on principal interviews and a 20-25 minute cap on the teacher focus groups.

The reliability of an interview depends in part on the thoroughness of the researcher who asks the questions and listens to the responses at the same time. For this reason, I made a point of being prepared and reviewed the interview and focus group questions multiple times before beginning data collection. Knowing the protocols well enabled me to focus on body language, facial expressions, and tone of the interviewees, which helped me to more fully understand their perspectives. Prior to the formal interviews, I conducted a pilot interview with my district's high school principal and teachers. This practice was pivotal for my preparedness before conducting the formal interviews because it helped me rework several of my interview questions and provided interview practice on live participants. I did not scribe during the interview; instead I used two tape recorders, just in case there was a malfunction. Recording the interviews was important for the transcription and recovery of information that could have been lost during the interview. Also, there were concerns with the structure of the interviews. For example, the

questions that were posed by the interviewer may have been leading, which could create a bias in the data that would have threatened the validity of the findings. To address this concern, I had my questions peer-reviewed for biases by several colleagues, my advisor, and my guidance committee. Once the data was collected from all of the interviews, I created an unbiased coding structure that would allow me to adhere to ethical practices when deciphering the data that had been collected.

Rudestam and Newton (2007) explained that the fidelity of the participant(s) could also be a potential validity threat depending on the mental and emotional state of the participant at the time of the interview. High school principals and teachers have job responsibilities that go beyond their contractual hours, which can cause stress and tension that might have interfered with my data collection and findings. Therefore, I conducted the interviews and focus groups in their school buildings in an effort to ease any undue anxiety and stress that could have compromised the validity of the interviews and focus groups. By addressing each of these limitations, I am confident as a researcher that my data and findings are as valid and reliable as can reasonably be expected.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

After interviewing three high school principals and fifteen high school teachers, it is apparent that in today's society, email plays a pivotal role in the daily operations of a school. From both ends of the spectrum, high school principals and teachers rely on email to provide various opportunities to communicate with one another. This chapter provides documentation and analysis of findings to answer my primary research question: *How has email affected communication and relationships between high school principals and teachers?* Furthermore, I will answer a subset of research questions that accompany my primary question. These questions and this data will provide further insight into how email has impacted principal and teacher relations. The findings will include the volume and subject of principal emails in a typical workday, results from the content and tone analysis of principal-to-teacher emails, and lastly, findings from the principal interviews and teacher focus groups that illuminate the impact of email on relationships between these two groups of educators.

From the data collected in these three case studies, overarching themes developed with the principals and teacher groups. Furthermore, after reviewing the data of the principals and teacher groups, I noticed patterns highlighting the pros and cons of the use of email in day-to-day operations of a school. There are subsections throughout the chapter that outline the findings of the research, including: volume, subject, decision-making in regards to content and tone, and principals' and teachers' perceptions of email. Throughout these analyses, I draw on my theoretical framework regarding rational and natural systems perspectives to provide insight into how email has impacted communication and relationships between high school principals and teachers.

Volume of Email Communications

What are the volume and subject of email communication between principals and teachers?

Across the three principals, the volume of email communication in a single day varied slightly. Tim Jennings, the principal from Oak High School, who has the highest number of teachers and largest student population among the three schools, estimated that he received 8 to 12 teacher emails per day and would respond to each of them, for a total of 16 to 24 emails daily. Joe Hobson from Ace High School had a similar estimate of 20 to 24 emails daily, despite having the smallest number of teachers and students of the three high schools. Kia Long, the principal from Crest High School, estimated anywhere from 20 to 30 emails received and sent on a daily basis. It is important to note that each principal acknowledged that when they are not in the building, the volume of email goes up due to teachers not being able to contact them either by phone or in-person. These estimates were just for the emails that principals received from teachers and sent to teacher. The full daily volume of emails each principal must attend to either by reading or responding has the potential to take a considerable amount of time away from other job responsibilities, such as instruction, evaluation, and supervision.

The daily estimates the principals gave me fell within or close to the exact number of emails on the predetermined date that I had asked them to review. The predetermined date for each principal's forwarded emails were as follows: Kia's was Wednesday, December 3, 2014, Tim's was Thursday, December 4, 2014, and Joe's was Tuesday, December 16, 2014. Tim and Kia fell within their estimated range, while Joe had a slightly higher total with 27 emails from his teachers that particular day. In commenting on the number of emails he received, Tim stated, "Eighty percent of my communications with my teachers are through email." His reasoning was due to the fact he believed email created less of an interruption to a classroom. Kia

acknowledged that she never relied exclusively on email for communication, but instead used it as one piece in part of a larger conversation that typically also involved face-to-face communication. Kia stated, "I use email as more of a conversation starter or follow-up with my teachers." Joe estimated on a daily basis that he communicates in-person with his teachers 75% of time compared to sending an email. Joe and Kia mentioned several times that they made a conscientious effort to meet with their teachers face-to-face. Although all three principals stated that they tried to have as many face-to-face conversations with their teachers as possible, the volume of their email communication with teachers suggested that email still played a central role in their communication with teachers. Conversely, all three principals admitted that it was not always feasible to have face-to-face conversations with their teachers throughout the school day.

During interviews and focus groups, it became clear that the volume of received emails was something of which both the principals and teachers were acutely aware. Tim was cautious not to send his teachers too many emails and noted that there was "a delicate balance" between sending information and overwhelming a staff with emails. He stated, "I don't send hundreds (of emails) to them because I don't want them to be inundated, and they know when they get one it's something pretty important for them to read." Tim and Joe believed that less is better when it comes to communicating through email. With the volume, time, and anytime/anywhere mentality of email, the principals believed they were infinitely accessible, as demonstrated by Joe's comment, "Because I'm never off." As Tim explained, "There needs to be a balance and recognition from both sides about the volume of email that is distributed in a school on a daily basis."

Coincidentally, a majority of the teachers recognized the amount of emails their principals' received on a daily basis. Charli from Crest assumed her principal was inundated with anywhere from 100 to 200 emails daily. Aaron from Ace reached the same conclusion, "There's one of him and twenty of us," in relation to the amount of communication Joe received daily. Teachers' awareness and understanding of the volume of email was apparent. Odessa remarked, "Teachers should to be cognizant of the fact that Tim must get multiple emails from staff a day with various requests." Olivia followed up on that comment with the statement, "I imagine he gets overwhelmed at times." As one can surmise, email is a communication tool that has the potential to overwhelm both principals and teachers. Figure 4.1 represents a snapshot of emails received or sent on Wednesday, December 3, 2014 for Kia, Thursday, December 4, 2014 for Tim, and Tuesday, December 16, 2014 for Joe. As noted in the research methods chapter, Kia did not submit all of her emails from the predetermined date.

Subject of Email Communications

Figure 4.1 also demonstrates the variety of email subjects these three principals reviewed and sent on Wednesday, December 3, 2014, Thursday, December 4, 2014, and Tuesday, December 16, 2014. The subject of an email is typically placed in the header, which is usually one of the first items to appear when an email is sent. The subject gives a description of the email content to follow. The chart documents the number of received and sent emails in eight subject areas, including policies/procedures, student/parent issues, curriculum/instruction/assessment, student achievement, professional development, safety, public relations, and other (emails that did not fall under the 7 other categories, such as technology issues, recommendation letter requests, graduation cap and gown orders, etc.).

The highest frequencies for the subjects of received emails were (in order of frequency):

public relations, student/parent issues, curriculum, instruction and assessment, policies and procedures, safety, other, student achievement and professional development. The highest frequency of sent emails was for the subject of curriculum, instruction and assessment. The other categories of sent emails were tied with 3 emails each, except for professional development, which had 1. Four of the eight categories had neither a sent nor received email to at least one of the principals that particular day. This shows that depending on any given day that the principal is not addressing some of these topics. Tim had 2 categories, policies and procedures and safety, for which that he did not receive or send an email on that particular day. Tim and Kia did not send any emails on student achievement, and they did not receive emails about safety. Further analysis indicated that Tim and Joe had received and sent the most amounts of emails on their predetermined dates. Of the 60 total principals' emails reviewed, 35 were received and 25 were sent.

After analyzing the received and sent principal emails, it is evident that the principals deal with various communications on a daily basis. Several of Tim's email subject headings included, "The Week Ahead", "Master Schedule Meeting", and "Technology". These particular subject headings were coded under public relations, professional development, and other for Figure 4.1. Examples of Kia's email subjects were "Pre-Observation Conference", "2nd Hour", and "Robotics". These subject headings were coded as professional development, policy/procedure, and curriculum/instruction/assessment. Some of the email subjects Joe sent or reviewed encompassed, "Students", "Aide", and "Heat". These subject headings were coded as student achievement, other, and safety. From the rational systems perspectives, these short subject descriptions lend themselves to filter quickly through emails during the workday. Also, the emails represent various subjects that each principal dealt with either through reading or

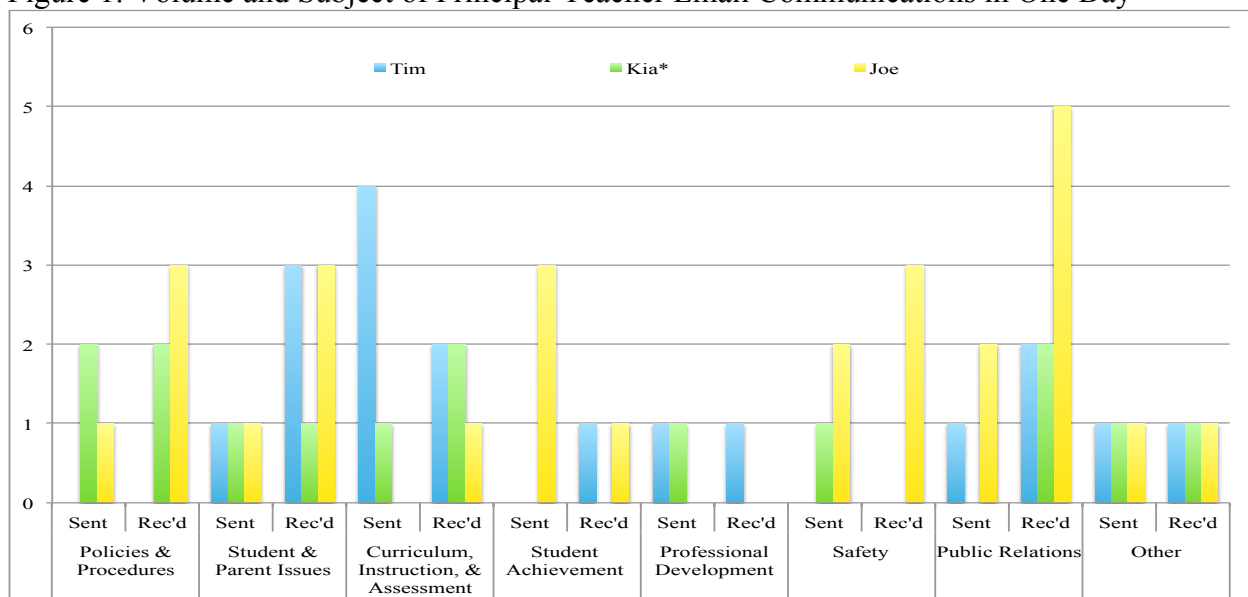
responding information text or requests from teachers. Each of the principals felt it was their responsibility to respond to the majority of the emails. The principals' responses to teachers' emails represents the natural systems perspective of attending to the individual's needs or requests. This snapshot of received or sent principal emails from teachers signified the inconsistent nature of email communications and how their focus shifts dependent upon the subject.

Table 3: Volume and Subject of Principal-Teacher Email Communications in One Day

Principal	Policies & Procedures		Student & Parent Issues		Curriculum, & Instruction, & Assessment		Student Achievement		Professional Development		Safety		Public Relations		Other		Total Sent	Total Rec'd	Total
	Sent	Rec'd	Sent	Rec'd	Sent	Rec'd	Sent	Rec'd	Sent	Rec'd	Sent	Rec'd	Sent	Rec'd	Sent	Rec'd	Total Sent	Total Rec'd	Total
Tim	0	0	1	3	4	2	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	2	1	1	8	10	18
Kia*	2	2	1	1	1	2	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	2	1	1	7	8	15
Joe	1	3	1	3	0	1	3	1	0	0	2	3	2	5	1	1	10	17	27
Total	3	5	3	7	5	5	3	2	2	1	3	3	3	9	3	3	25	35	60

* Participant did not submit all of the emails from the predetermined date.

Figure 1: Volume and Subject of Principal-Teacher Email Communications in One Day



Decision-Making Process in Regards to Email Communications

An overarching theme developed during the principal interviews was the decision-making process on how to craft emails regarding the content and tone of their email communications. The principals were conscious of content and tone of their emails and how his or her teachers would perceive the communications. The second subset research question is focused on content and tone, but understanding the decisions that go into writing an email is the first step in the process of sending an email because the writer must decide on the content and tone that will go into their email. Even if these decisions are subconscious, they are part of crafting an email message.

Content of Email Communications

What is the content and tone of email communication between principals and teachers?

The content and tone of an email are decisions that educators must face when crafting an email. When an email is sent from a principal to his or her teachers, it has the potential to impact relationships due to the content and tone of the email. The framework of the rational and natural systems perspectives provides further insight into how the content and tone of email between principal and teachers can impact the organization. While reviewing three selected focal emails from each principal and reviewing the interview transcriptions, I observed patterns of similarities and differences.

The forwarded emails from the predetermined dates listed above for each principal provided emails for a document analysis. The conceptually clustered matrix (Appendix F) represents 3 emails from each of the principals in the case study. I purposefully selected emails from each principal based on the content depth of the email and/or curiosity of the communication. I reviewed each email as a basic exchange between principal and teacher and

provided an interpretation from the standpoint of both the rational systems perspective and the natural systems perspective, along with a separate column labeled "other" for additional analyses and observations. Each email was reviewed for its content and tone and how both of these elements may affect daily operations and relationships within the school.

One similarity across the emails from the principals was they were conscious of addressing each email they received. Depending on the content of the received emails, a majority of the time each principal sent a reply. When the principals would respond to an email, there were distinct similarities to the length of content of the communications. The responses were short and direct. For example, "thanks", "please call or stop by", "sounds like a plan", and "thanks for letting me know." These responses were simply to acknowledge to the sender that the principal had received the teacher's email. As Kia alluded to, if the email needed further explanation, she would simply go and meet with the teacher in-person to get more details. Chris, one of Kia's teachers, reiterated this point stating, "If you want to talk about something important, she's not going to talk about it over an email, she will talk about it over a conversation."

The focal emails were discussed with each principal more in depth during their interviews. Tim's responses were consistent across all three emails. He believed they were informative and supportive, and he asserted that he would not revise them in anyway. Joe was reflective on his choice of content and the tone in a couple of the emails. For example, he sent an email to one of his teacher's directing her to come down to his office to talk about a student. He stated it was not an emergency so he used email instead of calling her. Joe admitted during the interview that he would revise the email and resend it with more of a description so the teacher would know why she needed to meet with him. Also, he realized the tone could make it

seem as a reprimand but felt confident the teacher would figure out she was not in trouble because he used a student's name. Again, Tim and Joe used short, direct responses when communicating by email to their teaching staffs with less formality in their greetings and salutations.

Although Kia's emails were similar in her short and direct responses, they differed because she added a humanistic approach to her communications with her teachers. Kia acknowledged that she was mindful of how her emails were perceived by staff. Charli supported Kia's perception by stating, "Her tone in emails are positive, inviting, and personable." Her other colleagues agreed. In looking at Kia's emails, I frequently observed the use of salutations and symbols, which created a friendly tone to her emails. For example, "hi", "bye", "!", ":", and ".....". Kia's emails may be considered informal in tone, but her communications are representative of her positive attitude towards staff. Charli added, "I really like how we are beginning to use email as a positive. She always encourages others to respond with other positives too." Kia provides a humanistic tone in her emails, which reflects the positive attitudes of her staff and the turnaround in climate in her first year as the principal of the school. It is clear from the data presented that each principal has his or her own style when communicating with their respective teachers through email.

From a rational systems perspective, the short and to the point principal email responses promote efficiency. Accordingly, from a natural systems perspective, the short emails also convey respect of teachers' time and an interest in not distressing teachers with an overabundance of information. This was consistent when I analyzed each of the principal's focal emails and what was discussed during our interviews. Emails may enhance the productivity between principals and teachers; however, the content and tone of an email are important factors

that influence the individual's perception of email. The rational and natural systems perspectives provide a lens on the potential influence an email could have on both organizational functioning and interpersonal dynamics through the content of the communication.

Furthermore, email has aided principals in updating their staffs on pertinent daily operations information, such as curriculum and assessment updates, student events, facility issues, and other topics the principal's had deemed appropriate. Rather than sending numerous email reminders through the week, Tim and Joe discussed the use of email to "blast" weekly information to their teachers. Teachers from both schools appreciated the fact that the principals took the time to write emails regarding "The Week Ahead" or "Reminders for the Upcoming Week" so that they knew what was going on in the building. Adam from Ace stated, "The 'Reminders for the Upcoming Week' was like a weekly checklist." Aaron followed up by stating, "It is like a bolded list. This is what's going on, don't forget." Alex exclaimed, "I enjoy the weekly reminders because when I see it, I know he is trying to be proactive." He added, "He's thinking ahead, and he doesn't want anybody else to trip up during the week." Tim explained, "The weekly updates provides teachers with the opportunity organize for the week and to get on the same page." He went on to state, "It's all the activities we have, whether it meetings on the master schedule or student activities it's all communicated through one email." The teachers at Oak felt the same way about Tim's routine weekly email he sent out. Oscar stated, "I certainly like the fact that he [Tim] has emails he sends out on a Sunday giving us a plan for the week on what we should expect." From a daily operations point-of-view, these examples of mass email communication reminders are an efficient way of relaying information to teachers so they can plan for the week and be informed on what is happening in their buildings.

In a fashion similar to the principals' blasts of information, Joe also mentioned that his teachers communicated to the entire staff fairly regularly via email. He commented this was "a great thing because it just keeps everybody in the know." These mass emails from both principals and teachers can be seen as beneficial from both the rational and natural systems perspectives. From both parties viewpoint, emails represent a way to communicate the agenda for the upcoming week and it keeps the teaching staff up to date on the events taking place within the school. Kia and the focus group referred to how they have been mass communicating as a staff. Charli stated, "I really like how we are beginning to use it [email] as a positive to communicate with all staff." Email provides principals and teachers with the ability to mass communicate through a structured forum to meet the organizational goals of the school.

While the principals and teachers believed it was important to send and receive information via email, they expressed that this was true only to an extent. Kia explained, "There's not really any guidelines for or clear direction on how lengthy email should be." Alex from Ace, with 27 years of experience, noted that he had been a teacher since the inception of email in his school. He provided insight about email, stating "I think that's where in the beginning email went wrong because people were throwing everything in it. They were trying to discuss all matters, and I was here since email started, and there would be too long of emails trying to discuss too much." Alex brought attention to one of the drawbacks that many participants mentioned, which is that email can become too in-depth depending on the topic. The teachers from all three schools admitted that they do not have time to read long emails. Chris stated, "If you can't say it in three sentences, then forget it." Teachers from each high school agreed with this assessment and appreciated the fact that their current principals were conscious and respectful of the demands on their time and demonstrated this by sending short

emails that did not go into too much detail. From the natural systems perspective, the attention principals give to issues of length and efficiency likely contributed to positive relationships with teachers.

From the forwarded emails the principals had sent me on their predetermined date, I analyzed the length of each email. Table 4 provides each email's length by the number of lines. The email length fell under 3 categories, succinct, slightly wordy and needlessly wordy (Baugh, 2011). From the focus group findings, I used 3 lines or less as succinct, 4 to 7 lines as slightly wordy, and more than 7 lines needlessly wordy.

Table 4: Content Length of Principal-Teacher Emails

Principal	Succinct		Slightly Wordy		Needlessly Wordy		Total Sent	Total Rec'd	Total
	Sent	Rec'd	Sent	Rec'd	Sent	Rec'd			
Tim	7	7	0	2	1	1	8	10	18
Kia*	7	7	0	1	0	0	7	8	15
Joe	9	14	0	2	1	1	10	17	27
Total	23	28	0	5	2	2	25	35	60

* Participant did not submit all of the emails from the predetermined date.

The findings indicated that a majority of the sent and received emails fell within the succinct category. Accordingly, the principals' sent emails were all succinct, except the 2 weekly information reminders that Tim and Joe had sent to their teaching staffs. Twenty-eight of the 35 teacher emails that were received by the principals were categorized as succinct. However, two of teacher emails were labeled as needlessly wordy. Those particular emails revolved around a student issue and a curriculum situation that needed to be fixed so students could work in the computer lab. Five of the 60 total emails reviewed were coded as slightly wordy, which were sent from a teacher to their respective principals. The findings suggested

both principals and teachers use email in an efficient manner due to the length in content of a majority of emails that were sent.

Thus, during the focus group discussions centered on a sample email, teachers were asked to comment on an email that was 13 lines long. The sample email addressed school policy and asked for assistance from the teachers to make the principal aware of student violations so discipline referrals could be given out accordingly. The email also reiterated the philosophy behind supporting teachers and reaffirmed the principal's commitment to doing so. Autumn from Ace stated, "To expect a teacher to take the time to read this, because I don't have time to read an email this long." Austin, a colleague of Autumn's, followed up by commenting, "He's (Joe, the current principal) been known to send out a couple of paragraphs. When am I going to read this thing?" From a principal's perspective, emailing information to teachers could be convenient, but at times may cause more resentment than what it is worth. Alex from Ace stated, "Generally, if I have to spend more than 10 seconds reading an email, I don't read it. We don't have time." Principals take the chance of over-communicating with each email they send out to their teachers, which has the potential to diminish email's effectiveness and efficiency.

Each teaching group had similar views about the sample email, but the Crest teachers reverted back to past experiences with a previous administration. This portion of the interview took on an animated discussion, starting with the most outspoken teacher of the group, Chris asking, "This wasn't literally written by a principal was it?" "Because if it was, that person shouldn't be a principal. It sounds elementary!" he exclaimed. Several other Crest teachers gave a simple, yet stern, way of seeing the sample email as "defensive," "too formal," "cold," "need to read through the lines," and "calculated." Chris stated, "This is our last principal. All he did was communicate through email. It was like he was hiding behind it." He went on to suggest, "It's

all about the tone, because like the sample email you showed us, this person (principal) isn't getting anything done.” Christy from Crest added to the previous comments by describing the sample email as a "blanket" email and claimed that topics such as this should not be blanket. "You don't blanket your staff because they don't like it, ever!” The term "blanket" in this scenario is a reference to talking to all staff about an issue, rather than addressing it with the individuals who had caused the issue. The blanket email could have been considered as an unfounded time commitment for other staff members not involved in the complaint.

The Oak teachers seemed more understanding of the purpose of the email and why the principal had addressed it. Oprah pointed out that the principal was trying to take care of an issue. Oliver agreed, stating, "The principal wants to support the teachers by taking care of the issue.” Additionally, Olivia said it was a statement that was "typical," adding, “I need your input, we are in this together.” She went on to state, "I wouldn't say I get an email that's a full letter like this, it's wordy.” Odessa stated, "It takes up too much of my time to read it, I would prefer if it's just straight up.” Teachers have their own unique experiences with administrators and how they communicate through email. Even though the three groups had similar issues, they differed in their analysis of the overall effectiveness of the email due to the email's length and time it took away from their other responsibilities as a teacher. This in-turn emphasized the decision-making process principals put into what they include in an email, and how the email is perceived through the eye of his or her teachers affects the principal's relationships with their teachers.

From the rational systems perspective, we might expect email communication to increase organizational functioning and efficiency. Indeed, all the participants in this study viewed email as efficient. An important aspect to the efficiency of email is the content of the email. Tim

stated, “Email is very effective in that you can get a single message out to everybody at one time.” Additionally, Kia explained, “Email is effective, especially for a business or organization when we have to get the word out quickly.” Joe had similar thoughts that email was a tool to communicate quickly with a large group of people. Odessa, a teacher from Oak, stated, “I think [the principal’s] a lot more aware of the issues a lot quicker due to email.” Oscar added, “I believe email helps with prompt communication.” Cristy from Crest asserted, “The use of email is a way to make announcements to the staff as a whole.” Alex from Ace stated, “Email is a time saving tool.” Austin interjected, “It beats the announcements coming over the loud speaker.” This evidence supports the fact that the participants from both sides believed email served as an efficient means of communication amongst staff. The use of email in these examples shows some of the benefits of email from the rational systems perspective. Email has the potential to promote efficiencies within organizations, including schools.

Email Communication as a Documentation Trail and Public Record

Another overarching theme from the principal interviews and teacher focus groups was that email was considered a legal document for which educators are liable. Both principals and teachers were conscious of what they discussed through email, knowing the possibility that their email communications could become public record. They noted that email provided educators with a documentation trail if there was a conflict; on the other hand email was also considered a public record, for which educators need to be conscious of before sending an email.

Email conversations present finality; once the email is sent, it is documentation and public record. Cathy, a special education teacher at Crest acknowledged that she has received Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests. FOIA is a request to view all information, including emails that pertain to a specific matter. All public school employees are subject to

FOIA. Cathy is cognizant of such requests and would prefer to verbally explain a situation rather than put it in an email. During Joe's interview and the focus group, the issue of being FOIA'ed was still prevalent. Joe stated, "If you don't want this across the front page of the newspaper, then don't click send." Aaron had similar insight stating, "The biggest drawback and my biggest fear of email is that if it is an issue that gets media attention, then the newspaper will come asking for every single email I had sent about the matter." Aaron went on to admit that if he has to use a name then he is probably not going to send the email, "because I do not want it to come back and bite me in the butt."

Chris had a different view of email due to his previous experiences with a principal. He liked the fact that email provided written proof, stating, "Let's see, three principals ago, I wouldn't have anything other than written-down stuff from him." Odessa had a similar view, stating, "I could see a situation in which you might want to deal with it (conflict) in emails just so something is in writing, like you want it documented that you did try to communicate with the principal." Other Oak teachers agreed with this statement by visually shaking their heads. Additionally, Autumn explained that other teachers at Ace were concerned about communicating through email. "They're worried to put what they're thinking in writing and send it because you could be FOIA'ed for that," Autumn reported. She went on to state, "Other colleagues have expressed concern over emails they have sent to Joe because they may be used against them in their evaluations." "Because once it's there and it's sent, you can't take it back," Autumn further explained. Again, email provides teachers and principals with an efficient outlet, but the sender must be aware of the potential repercussions once an email is sent.

Tone of Email Communications

The data collected from the teacher focus groups of each high school was consistent with the characteristics of how each principal communicated through email. The term, "business mentality" was used by both Tim and Joe's teachers due to their direct way of communicating through email. Both principals used email as means to communicate just the facts, yet both believed it was important to use a supportive tone in their emails. Tim and Joe understood that email was an important communication tool and did not use it to send superfluous communication. Both principals' mindsets were that if the email were not important, they would not send it. Joe elaborated that he considered email to have a priority level, a "hierarchy" in his own terms that determined whether or not he would send it out. He suggested, "I have my own level of importance, unfortunately it's probably a gut feeling on how it will impact their (teachers) day." Kia was just as direct in her correspondence, but she put as positive of a spin into her emails as possible. As an example, Kia recalled, "The tone was simply business minded, but with the dot, dot, dot being used as a little bit of a soft touch." Another example of her positive communications was opening and closing with a salutation. Kia explained, "I always have some kind of an introduction and some kind of a closing depending on the tone that I am trying to set when I send an email."

The tone of an email can have positive or negative implications depending on the intentions of the writer. All three principals felt as though it was important to stay positive in their emails. Kia explained, "I would hope that they [teachers] know me well enough to see some of my personality come through in emails." Tim believed, "I think my tone in emails are fair and appreciative." Joe stated, "I try to set the right tone because it is important," adding, "I want to be supportive in my emails." However, the misinterpretation of the tone of an email was

overwhelmingly the biggest concern for both the principals and teacher groups. As Tim stated, "Interpreting the tone is very difficult sometimes in an email." Kia explained, "We don't know how somebody's going to perceive what we (principals) write. Are they going to perceive an email as being too soft, too stern, or too hard?" Similarly, Joe stated, "I can read any email to you and put any tone or inflection that I want into an email and make it sound happy, jovial, snarky or condescending." Email allows the receiver to inflect his or her own tone. Joe suggested, "Individuals can hear the voice they want to hear." Each principal asserted that they were careful in creating the right tone with email they sent to their teachers. How a principal uses tone in an email and how their teachers perceive it may have an impact on relationships within a school.

Of the 60 reviewed sent and received emails between principals and teachers in this study, the tone of an email had a significant impact on the effectiveness of the communication. Table 5 represents the tone of emails amongst the principals and their teachers. The emails were coded according to the emotional tone of the email: positive, neutral, or negative; formality of the email: polite/appropriate, somewhat polite, or inappropriate; and magnitude of the affective responses: high, medium, or low. Each of these codes and operational definitions can be located in Table 2.

Table 5: Tone of Principal-Teacher Emails

Principal	Positive		Neutral		Negative		Polite & Appropriate		Somewhat Appropriate		Inappropriate		High		Medium		Low		Total Sent	Total Rec'd	Total
	Sent	Rec'd	Sent	Rec'd	Sent	Rec'd	Sent	Rec'd	Sent	Rec'd	Sent	Rec'd	Sent	Rec'd	Sent	Rec'd	Sent	Rec'd	Total Sent	Total Rec'd	Total
Tim	2	2	6	7	0	1	3	2	5	5	0	3	1	0	0	4	7	6	8	10	18
Kia*	5	1	2	6	0	1	6	2	1	3	0	3	3	5	2	3	2	0	7	8	15
Joe	3	3	6	11	1	3	3	4	3	6	4	7	8	12	2	3	0	2	10	17	27
Total	10	6	14	24	1	5	12	8	9	14	4	13	12	17	4	10	9	8	25	35	60

* Participant did not submit all of the emails from the predetermined date.

The principals' emails were generally positive and polite as far as the tone of the communications with their teachers. However, the data suggested Tim and Joe emails were more neutral in emotion. Neither of the principals used symbols; however they did include either a greeting or salutation but usually one or the other. Their emails were succinct and had little to no magnitude to the communication. The data supports Kia's email communications to her teachers were generally positive and polite. She used of symbols and punctuations on a frequent basis, along with including a greeting and a salutation to each of her emails. Joe's emails were less formal and at times appeared to be inappropriate for his position. The use of symbols, punctuations and consistently using greetings and salutations made the email communication more positive and polite in its tone.

The received teacher emails varied in emotion, formality, and magnitude to their respective principals. Generally, the teachers were positive to neutral in their emails, but a percentage of the communications were considered inappropriate due to their informality. The data indicated Ace High School teachers had 7 email communications, which were considered inappropriate to send to their principal. The tone of those emails revolved around safety and

student issues. The teachers of Oak and Ace High Schools used symbols, punctuations, greetings and salutations on a more frequent basis compared to their principals. The teachers' emails were more neutral in emotion and informal in tone compared to the principals. The magnitude of the affective responses was more prevalent in the teachers' email communications due to use of symbols and punctuations. The data infers that the tone of emails between principals and teachers vary, including the emotion, formality and magnitude of the affective responses.

The principals' expressed tone in an email can have an impact on the overall effectiveness of the communication. Tim believed that it is more important to set the right tone in an email compared to the actual content. He believed if there were more of a negative tone, his teachers would simply not read the email. He remarked, "If the email is negative in tone, then it's not an effective communication." Joe had a similar view stating, "You're using professional language, especially if it's something that isn't professionally communicated." Using email in the daily operations of a building is a delicate balancing act with what is included in a communication and how it comes across to teachers.

Teachers in the teacher focus groups were similarly aware of the potential misinterpretation of tone in emails. Odessa from Oak stated, "Tone is the biggest drawback to emails." "There's no voice making sure it comes across the way you meant it," she explained. Odessa added, "I'm always nervous that something I said didn't come across the way I meant it to be." Oscar, Oliver, and Olivia agreed with Odessa that tone was as a determining factor on whether or not the email was an effective communication. Several of Tim's teachers made observations about their email communications with him, sensing that he cared about his staff. Oprah stated, "I feel like that there always seems to be a level of concern that comes out in

emails from him.” Olivia explained, "It never feels like he's [Tim] putting you off or he's answering quickly. It definitely feels like he takes the time to answer.”

The case study of Crest High School provided an example of how positive emails can turn around the teachers' perception of a building. Teachers at Crest High School had similar feelings about tone being an important factor for how they perceive emails from the principal. "It is hard to always get your full intent across," Cathy commented. Crystal and Charli spoke up during the interview after that comment was made, explaining that email "doesn't get the sarcasm," "body language," or “eye contact”. Misinterpretation of email due to tone was a particular concern with this particular teachers’ group due to the turnover rate of the principal position over the last five years. Charli stated, "You can misinterpret a lot of stuff. I think to myself, ‘What did they [principal] mean by that.’” Chris commented that email was the only method of communication they had with the previous principal. The impression the teachers gave was that the previous principal hid behind email as a way to cover from dealing with staff or student issues. The teachers conveyed Kim’s communication style as being quite different in her first year as Crest High School Principal.

In characterizing Kia’s communication style, the teachers described her email communications as "positive, inviting, and personable.” The teacher group felt her tones in emails were polite and friendly. Autumn stated, "She’s never become defensive or angry in her emails to the teaching staff or me.” Other teachers agreed with this observation. The Crest teachers appreciated Kia's positivity. As a result, they reported incorporating more positivity into their own email communications with one another. "She always encourages others to respond with positives because each email she sends out is positive," Cathy explained. Charli added, "Her tone in email has created a positive culture in our building.” This particular case

study demonstrates the impact of email tone and how it can potentially affect the culture and climate of a school.

Ace High School teachers shared the same views about the tone of email, but took it a step forward with concerns of confidentiality and liability. Austin shared an example of an email between him and Joe in which he was not sure if he was in trouble or just needed to take care of the situation. Aaron suggested, "If an email is going to be more than a yes or no, I'm probably not going to send it over email." The Ace teachers made several comments about an in-service training focused on confidentiality. The training appeared to have an impact on several teachers because there were several comments about "once it's there and it's sent, you can't take it back." Additionally, Autumn explained, "Even if you're emailing quickly, you have to really think about what you're saying and the way you're saying it because once you hit send, it's there." The group was quick to insert their opinion of Joe as a principal, stating he was supportive and positive, but they also inferred he is a business-oriented individual when it comes to email.

The common misinterpretation of tone in an email could be viewed from the natural systems perspective. Email communications create complexities between the organizational goals versus the motivation and behavior of the individuals within the organization. Both principals and teachers viewed email as an efficient mode of communication, but the drawbacks were misinterpretation and perception of tone. Oprah from Oak asserted that she was more comfortable knowing the recipient personally because they would be able to read her tone of voice in an email. All the participants from both sides preferred a face-to-face conversation rather than email. Kia stated, "I would never use electronic communication (email) if there's a conflict." "You don't have that human piece in an email," she added. Tim had a process he followed when there was an issue with a teacher. He had his secretary schedule a meeting with

the teacher because as he stated, "I do not want to engage in a conversation prior to being able to meet with them face-to-face." Joe had a similar philosophy, stating, "When there's a conflict, I communicate face-to-face because I want nothing to be misunderstood." The teachers from each school had the similar sentiments. Of the fifteen teachers interviewed, all of them stated that they preferred face-to-face communication if an issue arose. Cathy from Crest stated, "It's hard to always get your full intent across in an email." Charli from Crest elaborated, "You can misinterpret a lot of stuff. 'What did you mean by that?'" From a natural systems perspective, the email communication that occurs between principals and teachers should have a humanistic approach to achieving the organizations goals. All three principals reported being supportive and positive in their email communications, which could be considered using both the rational and natural systems perspectives in achieving the goals of the organization.

Principals' Views on Email Communications

How do principals view their email communications as changing the nature of their relationships with teachers?

The next two sections of this chapter, principals' and teachers' views, will answer my primary research question: *How has email affected communication and relationships between high school principals and teachers?* The findings of this study indicate that email influenced the nature of the principals' communication with their teachers. The participants believed email impacted the organizational communication through its efficiency. However, each principal in the case studies believed it was more effective to build relationships through face-to-face conversations with his or her teachers. All three principals believed that if there were a conflict with a teacher, they would use face-to-face communication with the individual rather than using email. From a rational systems perspective, email provided an efficient and structured mode of

communication between principal and teacher. Nevertheless, from the natural systems perspective, email has the potential to impact relations from a motivational and behavioral standpoint depending on the content and tone of the email. The principals in these three case studies concluded that email created better communication lines between them and their teachers, but it did not replace the personal aspect of an in-person conversation to build relationships.

The principals understood the importance of determining the correct mode of communication, either by email or face-to-face, depending on the circumstances surrounding the communication. A question was posed to each principal as to whether he or she thought email had helped or hindered their relationships with their teachers? Tim and Joe both felt as though they had become better communicators because of email. Tim explained, "Email has helped because communication is huge, and it has helped me develop a strong communication technique." He felt as though his teachers had a good idea about what was going on in the building due to email communications that were sent out from his office. Additionally, Tim believed his teachers understood that he would not waste their time sending unimportant emails. Joe reverted to his weekly email, "Reminders for the Upcoming Week" as an example of how he had become a better communicator with the use of email. Joe suggested, "It helped me communicate better and get out information." Kia stated that email allowed her to be more accommodating when communicating with her teachers. "I use email primarily as a follow up or if I have had an afterthought after a conversation has already taken place," Kia suggested. Kia was persistent throughout the interview about the importance of having face-to-face conversations with her teachers. "I would never discuss something via email that should be discussed face-to-face," she explained. Tim and Joe relied on email as a communication tool,

whereas Kia considered email as an accommodation. While it seems email has influenced how these principals communicate with their teaching staffs, the degree of influence depended on an individual's preference and feasibility.

A school has many different variables that impact the culture and climate of a building. From an organizational standpoint, communication plays a vital role in the day-to-day operations of a school. The principals in these case studies acknowledged that email had made a positive impact on the culture and climate of their schools, but they asserted that email was not the exclusive – or even primary – tool for building relationships. Tim explained, "I think the real relationships are built on a personal level by being in the halls, talking to them (teachers) face-to-face, one-on-one. That's where the real culture is built." Tim suggested that email was a tool to help with his communication responsibilities as a principal. Kia believed email was an avenue to connect with teachers who did not feel comfortable with face-to-face conversations. Kia realized, "Just because I am comfortable with face-to-face conversations, doesn't mean they (teachers) are." After an email is sent, Kia said she has a decision to make: either respond via email or go have an in-person conversation with the teacher. Kia rationalized, "If I sense in their (teacher's) tone that they are uneasy or uncomfortable, I won't even respond through email. I go find the teacher and talk with them just so I can reassure the individual." Joe felt that email provided an outlet for teachers to communicate with him whenever they deemed it necessary. Joe stated, "I think email helps because a teacher can communicate with me if there is something weighing on their mind at midnight or during the school day. This way they don't have to wait to sit down and have a conversation with me." Tim summarized, "Truthfully, it's the personal one-on-one time. If a teacher comes in to my office and they want to talk, that's where you build the

culture.” Tim, Kia, and Joe rendered that there is a time and place for email. Email is one form of communication that has the potential to shape the culture and climate of a school.

As noted earlier, face-to-face conversations were the preferred method of communication for topics that were potentially sensitive. This consideration was part of the relationship-building process for the principals. Tim explained that he had a procedure he followed, “Not because I am afraid to talk to anybody, but quite honestly I don't want to engage in a conversation prior to being able to meet with him or her face-to-face.” Tim said he was hesitant to contact a teacher about an issue through email before an actual face-to-face, because he would get the question, “What's this about?” From a relational standpoint, he believed it was important to address the issue with the individual teacher in-person before anything was misinterpreted through email. Furthermore, Tim reassured his staff, “If you don't hear from me, there's not a problem.” He was confident with the fact that he would be the first person to talk to someone if there was a conflict. As the building leader, Tim relied on his relationships with teachers to discuss issues that needed to be resolved. Kia was direct in her response stating, “I would never use email if there were a conflict with a teacher.” Kia was concerned with how the email would be perceived. Kia concluded, “I don't think it's fair to do that through email.” She was adamant that she would meet with the teacher face-to-face if there was a conflict. Kia realized the importance of meeting teachers’ in-person to develop relationships, rather than relying on email to get her point across. Joe had the same philosophy when it came to teacher conflict, stating, “When there is a conflict, I communicate face-to-face because I want nothing to be misunderstood.” He wanted to make sure that nothing would be lost in translation and that his expectations would be clear going forward. In considering this potential for misunderstanding, Joe was mindful of what he said in email because it could affect his relationship with that particular teacher. After analyzing the

principals' comments regarding how they deal with teacher conflict, there seemed to be uneasiness with using email when it came to certain issues. All the principals' reaffirmed they prefer face-to-face conversation compared to email when there is a conflict with a teacher. Each principal was confident with the relationships that they had built with their teachers to address any issues of conflict in-person, rather than rely on email to communicate their concerns.

The natural systems perspective is relevant to how the principals from these case studies approached developing relationships with their teachers. Each principal preferred face-to-face conversations with their teachers. They felt it was important to get to know their teachers and to understand each individual's own characteristics. However, there was a contrasting difference between the principals and how they crafted an email to an individual teacher. Tim took the approach, "I treat them all the same, I don't discern between individuals." From the natural systems perspective, Tim sends emails as a means to not disturb the productivity of his teachers in the classroom. Conversely from a natural systems perspective, Joe and Kia acknowledged that when they send out an email to an individual teacher they take into account who the individual is and how it will affect them. Kia presumed her staff knows her well enough to see her personality come through in her emails. Joe stated, "I make sure that if there's somebody I know gets nervous or worried, I make sure that I put on there (in the email) it's nothing big or I try to remain positive with them. On the other hand, I've got teachers that just want the facts and that is what I give them." From the rational and natural systems perspectives, what is communicated and how it is perceived are two separate issues. Again, trying to balance between efficiency, content, and individual perception is something that all three principals are aware of when communicating with their teachers through email. Internal communication between principals and their teachers is an important element in the relationship-building process. Understanding

relationships can be developed through communication is an important area for principals to continually focus on. Building principal-teacher relations and interpersonal interactions amongst staff are key factors in creating a positive school culture and climate.

Teachers' Views on Email Communications

How do teachers view their email communications with their principal as changing the nature of their relationship?

The teachers that participated in the case studies believed that email was a communication tool, not a relationship builder. The teachers' questions and responses coincided with their respective principals on how they viewed email impacting their relations with one another. The overall consensus of the teachers was that email was an efficient means to communicate with the principals, but that if there is a conflict or personnel matter, the correspondence should be face-to-face. From a relational viewpoint, this awareness by the principals was imperative to the teachers because it signified respect for the individual.

The teachers had similar views as the principals; each teacher reported they would prefer face-to-face conversation with the principal if there were a conflict. Oliver stated, "So there's no misreading a tone, or a sentence, or a statement." Adam explained, "I mean, you know, not leaving anything to be lost in translation, there's no question as to the tone or tenor of the discussion (over email)." Several teachers from Crest and Ace acknowledged using email to schedule an in-person appointment with their principal if there was a conflict so there would not be a misinterpreted. Email provides an avenue to communicate, but face-to-face conversations have the potential to nurture relationships between principals and their teachers.

Likewise, the teacher focus groups believed in-person conversations were appropriate, especially when it came to teacher accountability, to create natural collaborative working

relationships with his or her principal. Standardized student assessments, teacher evaluations, and personnel conflicts were several issues the teachers felt warranted a face-to-face conversation rather than an email. Autumn from Ace provided an account of her and Joe having a face-to-face conversation about the M-STEP (Michigan's new student assessment) because she was confused about several issues with the testing. She appreciated that he took the time to listen to her concerns in an in-person conversation and then followed up through email with sources he had found for her. This is an example of the principal and teacher balancing their communication in a way that meets goals from both the natural and rational systems perspectives. The teacher and principal took time to meet with one another, which correlates to the natural systems perspective because the principal was addressing the behavioral and motivational needs of the teacher. The follow-up of an email provided sources for the testing, which lent itself to the rational systems perspective to efficiently produce the goals of the organization. Combining both the natural and rational systems perspectives in this particular principal-teacher interaction lends justification to using both perspectives when communicating with teachers. The two perspectives can be integrated to strengthen the functioning of the organization overall.

The reverse situation occurred when Odessa from Oak made the comment that she wished her principal would have had a face-to-face conversation with her about her teacher evaluation, instead of doing it primarily through email. The use of email in this example could be viewed from the rational systems perspective as an efficient way of communicating goals to the teacher. On the contrary, from the natural systems perspective, meeting face-to-face with the principal and teacher could have enabled the principal to meet the personal needs of his or her teachers. As the instructional leader, it is important for principals to realize that communication

over email, as in this example, could be a detriment to the relationship-building between principal and teacher. Teacher evaluations have the potential to create anxiety for both parties. Having open dialogue and constructive feedback in a face-to-face conversation could provide value for the principal and teacher.

Each school had different experiences with how principals used email to communicate with their teachers. The teachers at Oak and Crest High Schools reported that they had principal turnover in recent years. From the leadership turnover, teachers expressed having experienced different communication styles. The teacher groups reported similar levels of relatively high satisfaction with their current high school principals and how they used email. A reoccurring theme developed amongst the teacher groups as it did with the principal participants: Both preferred face-to-face conversations compared to email, especially as it related to a conflict or a personnel issue. From the teachers' perspective, if and how a principal communicated, along with getting to know his or her teachers, is what built relationships, which in turn affected the overall culture and climate of a school.

Consensus from the focus groups was that email did not help or hinder relationships between teachers and their principals. The Oak teachers expressed uncertainty as to whether email had helped or hindered their relationship with their current principal. Several Oak teachers spoke up and said it depended on the day and who the principal was at the time. Odessa provided insight into the current state of principal and teacher relations at Oak. Odessa stated, "Email has helped with communication, but Tim is spending more time behind his desk catching up on emails." She went on to compare the previous principal and Tim, believing she saw the previous principal in the classrooms more often. Conversely, with the efficiency of email, she believed Tim was aware of more issues. Odessa described Tim as knowing more in regards to

the daily operations and his staff. "I feel like he knows what's going on in our lives and we know what he's expecting from us, especially with his weekly emails and recaps of everything we need to know," she explained. Olivia was neutral on whether email helped or hindered relationships. She went on to explain, "He's easy to talk to. Even if I sent an email, I could talk to him in person. I would not necessarily hide behind email." Oscar added, "Email helps with prompt communication but relationships are built beyond simply sending communications." Several other teachers agreed. As a group, they believed relationships were built face-to-face but certainly prompt email could be effective in the daily operations of a building.

The Crest High School teachers related this question to their previous principal before they addressed their answers towards the current principal. Four of the five teachers stated there was no relationship with the previous principal because he or she hid behind email. Chris exclaimed, "It was the only method of communication." After several responses, Cathy refocused her answer on the current principal. She stated, "If there's already a relationship, then you can talk to someone. Most people (teachers) feel that we can talk to her freely." The Crest teachers felt Kia used email as more of an opening or follow-up with her teachers. The teachers believed that if there were a conflict Kia would discuss it with the teacher face-to-face. "She [Kia] sends an email as an opening to the conversation. From there the conversation would be held in private, especially conflict," Charli explained. Charli described email as a "vehicle." Christy followed up by noting, "We use it more for like an announcement just basic information." Knowing Kia's personality have made the teachers feel comfortable knowing that if there was a conflict, she would address it with the appropriate staff member. Also, the teachers appreciated Kia's use of email as an avenue to start a conversation, but would follow-up

with the individual face-to-face. The focus group at Crest believed Kia has built positive relationships to gain the trust and respect of the staff.

Teachers in the Ace High School focus group proclaimed that email was a "tool." Several teachers believed email was more of a convenience due to multiple teachers being in different classrooms or buildings throughout the school day. Austin, who is between two different buildings during the day, said email was useful for him. He remarked, "It tips me off to what is going on, and it beats the announcements coming over the loud speaker." The Ace teachers felt as though email was an efficient way to mass communicate a message to the entire staff. Alex described email as a "time saving tool." Aaron added, "I don't really see any other benefit." The teachers from Ace seemed to focus on email as more of a convenience rather than a critical communication tool in their daily operations. Adam stated, "Email or any other type of electronic communication diminishes the personal relationships." From a relationship-building standpoint, the teachers felt Joe was accessible to them whenever they requested his time. They mentioned he is always in the hallways meeting and greeting students and staff, which made him more approachable to have conversations with. The Ace teachers did not rely on email to communicate with Joe, but viewed it more as a tool of convenience.

However, even though teacher participants' reported an efficient quality to email, they also noted that it came at a cost of time. Oscar from Oak stated, "I think it's definitely a much more efficient communication, but it does take more time." Olivia added, "You feel an obligation to get back with him (principal) as quickly as possible, and you don't always have the time; it's (email) overwhelming when you have everything else going on." The loss of time and the feeling of being overwhelmed both have the potential to distract from or alter the interpersonal relationships staffs develop when they interact in-person with one another. Email

has created a “wall” between work and collegueship. Teachers reaffirmed they are spending more time emailing now then interacting in-person and developing relationships with their peers. Olivia felt as though email definitely kept her in her classroom more often, which could limit her ability to build relationships with both her principal and her teaching colleagues. Odessa added, "There are new teachers in the building. I just do not have time to get to know them. All you're getting is an email, and you have no idea what this person is really like. We rely on email all the time, and that is an issue." Among the three different groups of teacher participants, all reported that email was the main form of communication amongst colleagues and administration. Olivia stated, "I can imagine [that] being a principal or teacher before email would have been much easier." Email may be perceived as a more efficient means of communication from the educator's point-of-view in this study, but the outcome may be affecting the personal relationships that may be developed through face-to-face interactions. The amount of time emails takes up along with all the other responsibilities of being an educator constitutes a potential loss of personal time spent with other colleagues.

Furthermore, how the teachers' perceived email and its effect on the culture and climate of a school depended on their experiences with their current and previous principals. Odessa described how most of their teacher evaluations are done through email. She admitted, "Sometimes you just want your principal to hear the emotion behind everything you're doing." Oprah followed up with the statement, "Let me look at your face and see how you're reacting." Responsibilities, such as teacher evaluations, have the potential to bring anxiety and strain on principal and teacher relations the Oak teachers believed the evaluation should be done face-to-face rather than through email.

From the teachers' perspective, email has provided teachers with an efficient means to communicate and greater accessibility to their respective building principals. The teachers as a collective group similar views that face-to-face conversations were more appropriate due to the sensitivity of the topic. These in-person conversations have a potential reciprocal affect to forge relationships between principals and teachers. The current principals of Oak, Crest, and Ace have seemed to garner the trust and respect of their teachers through their communication and leadership. Hence, the comparable positive culture and climate each focus groups reported about their schools during the discussions.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, the case studies at Oak, Crest, and Ace High Schools have provided evidence to support email's functionality and efficiency in facilitating the day-to-day operations of a school. However, the participants expressed similar views about email not replacing the day-to-day, face-to-face interactions of principals and teachers conversing and getting to know one another on a professional and personal basis. What email has given principals and teachers are an efficient means to communicate electronically with one another. From an organizational standpoint of view, the rational and natural perspectives within systems theory provided a lens into the communications between principals and teachers. The rational systems perspective gave insight into email's overall effectiveness on how principals were communicating with their teachers. Decision-making in areas such as the content, tone, structure and goals of the communications were several variables of email that were analyzed through the rational systems perspective. The natural systems perspective provided individuals' perception on how email influenced his or her behavior, motivation, and impact on the culture and climate of a school. Using the data collected and both systems theory perspectives, I was able to answer

my primary research question, *How has email affected communication and relationships between high school principals and teachers?*

The evidence provided in this chapter points to email having the potential to impact the communication and relations between principals and their teachers. First, the volume, content, and tone of email communications between educators' plays a role in the perception of the effectiveness of the email communication. Second, email is a communication tool, which provides access, information, and connectedness within a school to both principals and their teaching staffs. The data suggests that both principals and teachers have had different experiences sending and receiving email. Third, depending on the principal and situation, the decision of when to use email and when not to use it can impact relations between principals and teachers. Analyzing when and what should be sent in an email is significant. The decision-making process to determine whether an email is an effective means of communication is imperative to achieving the intended goals of the organization

The general feelings amongst these educators were that email had a specific purpose, and that was to communicate efficiently and constructively. All three principals had similar but distinct styles when they used email to communicate with their teachers. For instance, Joe and Kia suggested that before they send out an email to a teacher or their teaching staff, they contemplated how it would affect them as individuals. Additionally, Tim and Joe considered their emails important for the simple fact that they would not send one if it was not informative to their teachers. Furthermore, the teachers had positive perceptions of their current principals, but past experiences have led them to be conscious of what was said and not said through email. The teachers groups had similar issues with email. The content and tone of an email could be easily misinterpreted. This was why all participants acknowledged that email served a purpose

for efficiency reasons, but there were issues that were better served through face-to-face conversations. The consensus among the participants was that the decision-making process when using email should be deliberate on behalf of principals and teachers because once an email is sent it becomes a permanent record. Just as important is how email may affect relationships amongst teachers with their principals. Crest High School provided an example of how positive communication through email could have the potential to impact principal and teacher relations. Kia created a trickle-down effect to her teachers to create a positive culture and climate in her building. Tim and Joe had a “business” mentality to their email communications but from all accounts, they were supportive and accessible to their respective teaching staffs. These three case studies have provided insight into how email has affected the communication and relationships between principals and teachers.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

As Hastings and Payne (2013) suggested, most employees have little choice about communication technologies, which are often provided or dictated by organizations. Email has become a prevalent means of communication in today's schools due to the amount of information that is exchanged between principals and teachers. The purpose of this study was to understand how email has affected communication and relationships between high school principals and teachers. There were two primary goals of the study, first was to analyze how email has changed the communication between high school principals and his or her teachers. Second, to examine the impact, if any, email has had on principal and teacher relations. There were also several secondary goals of the study, including the volume, content and tone of emails sent to and from principals and teachers. Furthermore, I used the rational and natural systems theory perspectives to guide the study. The theoretical framework lenses provided alternate ways of viewing the patterns of discovery as it related to email communications between principals and teachers.

All eighteen participants provided a wealth of insight into how email has impacted them as professionals and its effects on principal/teacher relationships. The principals of the three high schools had similar, yet unique styles of communicating with their teachers using email. Each participant agreed that email was an efficient way of communicating with teachers from a daily operational standpoint. The teacher groups also agreed with the overall efficiency of email, but also revealed caution when communicating through email due to past experiences with previous principals. In addition, email communications have the potential to play a pivotal role in shaping the culture and climate of a school. The three case studies showcased email's

relevance in daily operations of a building and insight on how it has not replaced face-to face conversations when building relationships.

Summary of Major Findings

The three case studies provided five patterns of discovery that were consistent with how email has affected the communication and relations amongst principals and teachers. The first and second patterns were that email provides an *efficient* way to communicate between both levels but at a cost of an increase in *volume* of communication. Additionally, the *decision-making* process of when to send an email, along with the content and tone of the communication was the third pattern derived from the data. During the principal and teacher group interviews, the insight conveyed was that content and tone played a pivotal role in the overall effectiveness of the email. The content and tone of an email is the area that exceeded all others in its potential to impact communication and relationships for both principals and teachers. The fourth pattern developed were the *drawbacks* of email, which included time consumption and possible misinterpretation of email. The fifth pattern was the idea that face-to-face conversations still had a greater impact on the *relationship-building* between and amongst principals and teachers. From the principals' and teachers' perspectives, having a personal conversation was a more appropriate way to communicate sensitive information to an individual teacher or teaching staffs rather than through email. The decision to have a face-to-face conversation with someone was the most authentic way to build relationships, which garnered trust and respect between principals and teachers.

The patterns that emerged from this study suggest that email has impacted the daily communications between high school principals and teachers. Additionally, the participants from each side believed email was one facet of communication that had the potential to impact

principal and teacher relationships. Crest High School was a prime example of how email can influence the culture and climate of a school through principal and teacher communications. In addition, the decision-making process on how to craft an email with its content and tone is critical to the overall effectiveness of the communication. Furthermore, the rational and natural systems theory perspectives can be used as a framework when examining how principals and teachers communicate through email. I argue that principals must consider both the rational and natural perspectives when crafting an email. How an email is perceived depends on the nature of the message, which principals must be cognizant of because of the potential impact it has on relationships within a school. These five patterns were uncovered according to the initial research questions that guided this study.

Connections to the Existing Literature

As the literature reviewed in this study alluded to, we have just started to scratch the surface on the phenomenon of email. From an organizational standpoint, what impact has email had on employer productivity, social interaction amongst employees and overall communication effectiveness? Current research investigated email's affects, usefulness, and limitations within organizational communications. This study attempted to address several of these issues in a school environment using high school principals and teachers as participants. In this section of this chapter, I discuss the major findings of the study and the connections to the existing literature.

Assessing how individuals communicate within an organization is vital due to communication's complexities and potential impact on the working environment. The complexities refer to the attainment of organizational goals, individual behavioral motivation, and social aspects within and amongst employees. The findings in this study highlight the

complexities of email communications between principals and teachers, a dynamic of which educators should be conscious. Here, I link these findings to existing literature in a number of critical areas. The first set of literature examines the effects of email from a workplace perspective. Second and third, I discuss the literature to define systems theory and integrate the rational and natural perspectives as a framework for examining email communications in schools. Fourth, I consider literature on how principals' and teachers' relations are built through leadership and communication. The study's findings and its connections to the reviewed literature encapsulate how email has affected the communication between principal and teachers. Additionally, email has the propensity to affect principal and teacher relationships, which plays a pivotal role in shaping the culture and climate of a school.

Email in the Workplace

From a workplace standpoint, email has created a communication tool that alleviates some pressure but adds other social and professional complications to the employee and organization. Email has afforded all types of organizations with efficiency, immediacy, a quick reference retrieval resource, and a documentation trail of electronic communications (Renaud et al., 2006; Chase & Clegg, 2011; Gimenez, 2006). However, research in various fields has found that email has also produced increased workloads, disruption in productivity, frustration, addictive behavior, time consumption, and has decreased face-to-face social interactions (Renaud et al., 2006; Chase & Clegg, 2011). The study's findings suggest comparable patterns regarding email's impact on schools as well. The principals and teachers believed email provided them with greater efficiency, immediacy and a means to document electronic conversations. Likewise, the drawbacks were similar in that participants admitted that email caused distractions from collegial interactions, increased time consumptions in workloads and resulted in fewer

frequent face-to-face conversations with principals and teachers. There are similarities to the study's findings and reviewed literature when it comes to email. In addition to the strengths and weaknesses of email, scholars have sought to identify rules guiding communicative behavior (Hastings & Payne, 2013).

The lack of commonality of rules or etiquette when using email creates glaring inconsistencies within organizations, including schools. As Hastings and Payne (2013) described, the lack of formal training for email use that exists in most organizations makes the need for employee creation of communication rules imperative. Kia Long, the Crest High School principal, alluded to the same line of thinking. She believed the lack of training and etiquette when using email has produced the aforementioned drawbacks. The writer of an email has a decision to make each time he or she sends out a communication. Furthermore, with the heightened sense of professionalism within education, the context and tone of an email could impact the job security of both principals and teachers. Several studies reviewed highlighted the fact that employees had the tendency to use email for documentation purposes at some point (Gimenez, 2006; Hastings & Payne, 2013). Having the awareness as a writer of what is stated in an email and it being a public record for potential use should play a role in whether an email is sent or not. Some organizations provide trainings on the usage of email due to its prospective liability. Ace High School administration provided such professional development for its staff. The presenter's message still resonated with both the principal and teachers, many of whom referred to the training several times during the interview and focus group.

Using Systems Theory to Understand Email Communication between Principals and Teachers

A key finding of this study is that email can dramatically impact the culture and climate of a school. I highlight Crest High School as a primary example. The Crest teachers reflected on

a recent experience with their previous principal, who left the district a year ago. One teacher explained, "That's the only way he communicated," referring to email. The rest of the Crest group agreed; his emails were a way to "catch" the teachers doing something wrong or "sneak" something by them. As a first year principal at Crest High School, Ms. Kia Long has turned the climate and culture of the building around through her positive communication skills. Kia has focused her attention on communicating with her staff to develop relationships that are vital to her school. Her use of email is one way of communicating with her teachers. Kia understands the impact of email communication, and she uses it sparingly for reminders or as a conversation starter. With all email communications, she stays positive. During the Crest focus group, teachers commented on how Kia's positive and supportive email communications had a reciprocal effect on the teaching staff. The teachers had noticed more positive interactions amongst the staff. Several teachers believed Kia's positive communication approach had trickled down to the teachers. This is an extraordinary example of how email can impact the relationship between a principal and her teachers and a powerful reminder of the potential influence email communications have on shaping the culture and climate of a school.

Individuals are central players in organizations, and how they communicate is an aspect worthy of scholarly exploration. The theoretical framework of the rational and natural systems perspectives used in this study provided a lens for analyzing organizational communication between high school principals and teachers using email. How principals and teachers communicate with and amongst one another plays a pivotal role in shaping the culture and climate of a school. Email has provided educators with a quick and efficient means to access other colleagues. The decision-making that goes into crafting an email with the content and tone is meaningful due to the perception of the receiver. Having awareness on how an email can

impact relationships with his or her teachers is an important element of principal communications. This study was able to review communications between principals and teachers using distinguishing features from the rational and natural systems perspectives. In doing so, the research has brought attention to how email has changed the nature of communication and the potential it has to affect principal and teacher relations.

The efficiency of communicating through email lends itself to both the rational and natural perspectives. The rational perspective is based on efficiency and accomplishing goals. In relation to the rational perspective, two of the three principals in the case study used a weekly update email to remind teachers of upcoming school events and activities. Furthermore, with education's evolving standards, assessments, and reporting requirements, there is pertinent information that must be communicated. The natural perspective comes into play with principals' having the awareness that it is important to keep their teaching staffs up to date with these changes. This equates to the natural perspective due to understanding that individuals need to be informed to help drive motivation and behavior to reach organizational goals.

The findings from these case studies also illustrated that how an email is perceived is in the eye of the beholder. Principals and teachers should be mindful of how their emails may be perceived and the potential impact it could have on an individual. The principals and teachers who participated in this study all agreed that email is an efficient means to communicate, but there are issues that should be discussed face-to-face due to the sensitivity of the topic. The decisions of the who, what, where, when, and why of an email should and must be considered in all future communications due to its impact on relationships and organizational cohesiveness. For example, a teacher from Oak High School explained that she would rather have her evaluations conducted face-to-face rather than through email. Principals need to understand that

there are sensitive topics that teachers would rather discuss in-person to provide more in-depth conversations relating to their performance. As referenced in the literature review, instructional leaders of a school, principals are expected to give constructive feedback to teachers to help them grow as educators. Accordingly, as long as colleagues maintained face-to-face contact, they could compensate for any loss of meaning or context that might have occurred through email communications (Zack, 1993).

The decision making process in crafting an email revolves around the content and tone of the message. An interesting revelation occurred during the principal interviews. Tim Jennings, the Oak High School principal, admitted that when he sends an email, he does not factor individual's feelings into account. His approach to emailing is systematic, which suggest he primarily views the impact of email on the organization from the rational perspective. The other two principals, Kia Long and Joe Hobson, acknowledged that they think about how an email will affect a teacher or a teaching staff before they send it. In addition, all three principals were all mindful of being positive and supportive when using email.

The relationships that developed between principal and teachers through email communications in the three case studies varied. The focus groups seemed to respect their current principals and the style they use to communicate. The teachers from both Oak and Ace High Schools described Tim and Joe's email communications as direct and to the point. The two principals were considered to have a "business" mentality when communicating through email, which coincides with the rational perspective. The focus group from Crest High School found their current principal to be humanistic and considerate of each teacher's individual feelings. Kia admitted she was conscious on how she came across to her teachers through email. Her approach to communication suggested that she took a natural systems perspective when it came

to running her organization through email, catering to the individual teachers' motivations and behaviors. Kia's philosophy of attempting to exude positivity rubbed off on the teachers and helped turn around the culture and climate of an unstable working environment between the previous principal and the current teaching staff.

Principal-Teacher Relations

It is safe to say email has provided educators with an efficient means to communicate with one another, but at what point does email become a hindrance to principal and teacher relations? Gupta and colleagues (2011) believed, in an information-sharing context, not all email can be associated with negative costs; it may actually speed up completion of other tasks. The negative costs, though, come when principals and/or teachers are behind their computers constantly sending or checking email rather than socializing with one another in person. Sarbaugh-Thompson and Feldman (1988) do not advocate for an office where workers chat endlessly, but they realized casual conversation could perform valuable functions. They viewed social interactions amongst employees as positive because in the long run they facilitate organizational activity by establishing and maintaining relationships between workers.

Email has the propensity to become addictive in nature because people can spend their time either sending or reading email constantly. The Crest High School teachers revealed that the previous principal communicated only through email and had little to no social interaction with his teachers or teaching staff. Handy (1995) asserted that it is essential to increase trust throughout organizations, as organizations become more virtual and networked. Finding a balance between communicating through email and face-to-face conversations is an essential element to garnering trust and developing relationships amongst school staff. Sarbaugh-Thompson and Feldman (1998) suggested that a way to build trust among employees in

organizations is to have more social interactions. Communication and leadership are two ways principals build trust into relationships with their teaching staffs. As previously stated, all 18 participants in the study agreed that, depending on the sensitivity of the topic, it is better to have a face-to-face conversation rather than communicating through email.

Implications of the Findings

There are implications for practice in schools and other organizations. The *first recommendation* is for any individual who writes emails to be conscious of the content and tone of their communication. The *second recommendation* is for principals, CEO's, supervisors, or directors to understand that their email communications have the potential to impact the culture and climate of their respective work environments. The *third recommendation* is for high school principal to be aware that some issues are better addressed face-to-face rather than communicating through email. The *fourth recommendation* is for increased education for future principals and all educators in the area of communications, particularly electronic communications.

Recommendations for Practice

I believe this study crosses boundaries and barriers in all walks of personal and professional life. Emailing is just as prevalent today as having a face-to-face or phone conversations. Unfortunately, email does not provide body language or vocal recognition like the other two forms of communication mentioned. Therefore, having awareness as a writer of the potential impact you could have on an individual or individuals is key. The decisions that go into crafting an email should not be overlooked or undervalued. As the findings of this study indicated, the content and tone of an email had a relevance to the perception and overall effectiveness of the communication. Email is an efficient and immediate communication tool,

but it has its limitations. The lines between professionalism can blur when using email. As Hastings and Payne (2013) suggested, it can be easier for a person to become emboldened to vent in unprofessional ways through email. Furthermore, as stated throughout this study, once an individual presses *send*, the email becomes an archived document and possible public record. Being cognizant of these drawbacks is important for anyone who writes an email, especially in a professional setting.

Along those same lines, the focus of this study has been to analyze how email has affected communication and relationships between high school principals and teachers. This study is relevant for any heads of organizations, including CEO's, supervisors, directors, etc. Having an understanding and awareness of what you send out in an email can play a significant role in a communication's effectiveness and the relations you build with your staff. Furthermore, the theoretical framework of the rational and natural systems theory perspectives creates awareness for educators when crafting an email. Principals and thus other leaders can adopt one of the perspectives when thinking about their email communication with staff. However, after reviewing the findings of this study, it would be wise of principals and other leaders to be mindful of both lenses. That is, principals and leaders need to think about the impact of email on organizational operations and on interpersonal dynamics.

How an individual in authority communicates has a trickle effect to his or her own staff. An example of such an effect was featured with Kia Long, Principal of Crest High School, and the positive nature of her email communications with her teachers. Several of the teachers explained that due to her humanistic approach in communicating through email, it had rubbed off on staff as a whole. The teachers went on to exclaim that email communication amongst the teaching staff became more positive and supportive amongst one another because Kia had

modeled the behavior. Granted, email communications is only one aspect of building relationships, but heads of organizations should not underestimate its potential impact on shaping the culture and climate of a working environment.

For practicing principals or future principals, deciding when to send an email is equally as important as how to craft a message. All eighteen participants in these case studies agreed that there are some issues or sensitive topics, which should be discussed face-to-face, compared to email. The participants mentioned several topics they would rather discuss in-person. These topics included evaluations, professional conduct and personnel matters. All three principals realized the importance of taking the time to meet with teachers face-to-face to develop individual relationships amongst staff. The sample email that was discussed with the teacher focus groups was another example of how meeting with the staff face-to-face may have been a more effective way to communicate with the teachers. The teacher focus groups were put off by the sample email due to the tone and length of the communication. Communicating with teachers is a vital component of a principal's job responsibilities. In addition, when and how a principal communicates has the potential to impact his or her relations with the teaching staff.

Therefore, in today's global society, I argue that educators need to be educated in the area of communication through staff professional development training, higher education coursework, or administrator preparation programs. Appendix H is a training memo I created and developed for educators as it relates to email communication. The training memo is a reference guide for both principals and teachers on the positive and negatives of email communications between and amongst one another. The memo encapsulates the findings and implications of this study. The hope is to bring a greater awareness and understanding of how email communications could affect relationships and impact culture and climate of a school.

This training would provide an introspective reflection into an individual educator's use of email and discuss the finding featured in this study. Using the memo as a guide, I would discuss with educators the process of determining appropriateness of email communications. The session would consist of roughly a half hour presentation with educators. I would divide the training into four different sections. The training would focus on topics that are appropriate for email, succinct email communications, developing interpersonal relationships with staff and finding a balancing between the distinguishing features of both rational and natural systems perspectives when using email. I would provide several examples of both appropriate and inappropriate emails. Furthermore, I would offer explanations to why the examples were appropriate or were not appropriate for email. In addition, I would draw attention to individuals' use of email and how it may impact their workloads and relationships with their colleagues.

Communication creates an open environment for various stakeholders to become involved in the school and can particularly shape the development of the relationship between the principal and teaching staff. Email communication and social media have just scratched the surface of the various forms and connectivity organizations will contend with in the future. As important as it is for students to be prepared for the twenty-first century and beyond, it also holds true for educators. Email has changed the playing field for education. Customer service through email communication should remain a priority for principals and teachers. Further training or education in the field of communication would help develop principals and teachers in balancing their responsibilities as educators and the relationships with their respective stakeholders.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are further implications for future research in regards to email's influence on organizational communication in relation to education. How principals and teachers

communicate with and amongst one another plays an important role in shaping the culture and climate of a school. Further qualitative studies could examine K-12 principal email communications with stakeholders in varying demographics and school sizes. This study provides a brief glimpse into the different approaches male principals used compared to a female principal when communicating through email. Additional research comparing the content and tone of male and female principal email communications would be insightful, especially as it relates to the impact of the culture and climate of a school. Email has produced employee immediacy and accessibility, which in-turn has presented potential drawbacks to the systemic nature of effective organizational communication. Quantitative and mixed method studies would be appropriate to get an accurate depiction of the total volume of emails principals' send and receive in a week, month, and year. The research would focus on how email has impacted principals' use of time. Finally, as schools use a growing variety of electronic communication, researchers should question and examine how these technologies shape and transform communication with various stakeholders. Examples of such technologies could include Facebook, Twitter, blogs and other social media forums educators are using to communicate with their stakeholders.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

From the advent of the Internet and now electronic communication, including email, communication has increased exponentially and the accessibility of professionals, including high school principals, cannot be understated. Email lends itself to an anywhere, anytime workplace. Research in this area is starting to increase steadily, with most studies focusing on the private sector, including private business and government agencies. The complexities of educational organizations and, specifically, the nature of twenty-first century high schools, are practical for such research. As Hoffman and Cowan (2010) argue, “The relationship between the professional and personal needs of U.S. workers and their organizations is complex and clearly worthy of scholarly attention” (p. 206). Therefore, developing a greater understanding on the significance of email and its role in the ever-changing landscape of education, organizational communications is worthy of scholarly research.

The use of email has changed the dynamics of the twenty-first century organization including those in education. It is influencing how high school principals communicate with various stakeholders. The amount of email communication that flows in and out of a high school principal’s office on a daily basis can be overwhelming. Student issues, discipline, parent concerns, staff concerns, curriculum and instructional needs and federal and state reporting are a few examples of the plethora of topics that a high school principal deals with through communication on a consistent basis. How messages are being sent and received from principals may affect the relationships they have with their teachers. How a principal effectively communicates with his or her teachers has the potential of affecting the overall culture and climate of a school.

Organizational systems theory offered a theoretical framework for this study, which I used to help understand the effect of email as it related to communication and relationships between high school principals' and teachers. For the purpose of this study, I used the rational and natural systems perspectives exclusively. The rational and natural systems perspectives presented a research framework for narrowing down the focus on each email communication and considering the content and tone of communication between principals and teachers. Therefore, it was imperative to define systems theory and each perspective's key elements so the reader had a clear idea of how the communications were being analyzed. The rational and natural systems perspectives could potentially help principals and teachers be more aware of how they communicate with each other and provide insight into how to communicate more effectively. Depending on the principal, their communication style may resemble either the rational or natural systems theory perspectives. Communicating more prominently with one of these perspectives could be detrimental to teacher relationships, which in turn affects the climate and culture of a school. It would be wise for principals to utilize both the rational and natural systems theory perspectives when communicating with teachers through email.

The communication between principals and teachers is a critical dynamic in a school's culture and climate. The content and tone of messages can be perceived in many ways. The rational theory provides a lens in which email communication is valued for its efficient and immediate manner in delivering information from a principal to his or her teaching staff. For example, a principal could email out announcements to the teachers in lieu of holding a staff meeting. From the natural perspectives standpoint, using the same example, the principal may hold a staff meeting so the announcements could be discussed in an open setting allowing teachers the opportunity to discuss their feelings or concerns as a group with the principal. As a

high school principal adopting both perspectives is more effective for what needs to be accomplished as a building leader. The systems theory lends itself to exactly that: how to simultaneously accomplish multiple goals within an organization. How the goals are communicated plays an important role in shaping the working environment of an organization. From an educational standpoint, analyzing what is being communicated through email is an important element of how schools function to accomplish the goals set forth. This research will hopefully lead to awareness and an understanding for high school principals and teachers of how to communicate more effectively with each other. Blending the rational and natural perspectives could create a more collaborative culture and climate amongst staff within a school.

Even though there was not direct literature related to email communications between high school principals and teachers, there was a foundation of research from which to base my study. First, I reviewed effects of email in the workplace, which provided insight into how email impacted different organizations. Second, I defined systems theory along with the rational and natural systems perspectives to provide a theoretical lens for my analysis. Third, I integrated the rational and natural systems perspectives into understanding how email communications could be analyzed between principals and teachers. Fourth, I reviewed research on how principal and teacher relationships are built through leadership and communication. The reviewed literature established the purpose of my research.

The method I used to collect and analyze the data was qualitative. I visited three Michigan high schools to conduct case studies. Three principals and 15 teachers voluntarily participated in interviews and focus groups. Additionally, I collected emails from each principal to analyze the communication between them and their teachers. Once the data was collected, I was able to triangulate the findings. I created an analytic matrix and a conceptually clustered

matrix to provide visual evidence of the data collected. From there, I deduced my overall findings regarding the role of email communication within educational organizations.

The findings of the study were significant in the fact that there has been limited research conducted in schools as to the phenomena of email and its impact on communication and relationships between and amongst staff. Both the principals and teachers agreed that email is an efficient way to communicate from a day-to-day operational standpoint. However, in the view of all participants, email does not replace face-to-face interactions between principals and teachers. Email has the potential to limit principals' and teachers' time and communication effectiveness. Those limitations included the potential misinterpretations of content and tone, which in the minds of the participants were the most significant drawbacks when using email. Each principal that participated in the study was cognizant of those drawbacks. Each principal had their own stylistic tone when using email, but for the most part the communications reviewed were informational in content. This data was evident via the forwarded emails collected from each principal.

The principals and teachers believed email had little effect on relations, but during the Crest High School teacher focus group it was revealed that previous principals only communicated through email. This example supports the conclusion that email has the possibility to affect the culture and climate of a school. With the changeover in principals, the Crest High School teachers admitted to seeing a change in the working environment. The teachers believed Kia's humanistic approach to communications, including email, has trickled down to the teachers and has created a more positive culture and climate within the school.

Furthermore, email is an avenue to connect anytime, anywhere. The accessibility and immediacy of email at times has potential to create undue pressure from both principals and

teachers. Fascinatingly, during the principal interviews, time consumption and accessibility of email were only brought up once. On the other hand, teachers from all three schools were aware of the time commitment emails had on their principals' workdays and the amount of time they put into reading and writing emails. Several participants suggested that email has kept teachers trapped behind their desks rather than socializing with other colleagues. Other teachers revealed they do not have time to read emails. During the teacher focus groups, sentiments revealed that if an email were longer than three sentences, teachers would not read it. Another example was if a teachers had to count slowly in his head to ten seconds and was not finished reading the email, then the message was too long. Email has the potential to distract from job responsibilities, such as managing a building and teaching. However, from the rational systems perspective, emails are intended to communicate critical information for the organizational functioning. Principals and teachers need to be aware that if the information is not communicated, it may be a detriment to the organization. No matter the amount of information communicated in an email, it is way to get everyone on the same page. Consequently, even though it may take more time to read a longer email, it may be critical from an operational standpoint of view. Again, having an awareness of these issues can provide principals and teachers a better understanding of the etiquette of sending and receiving emails to and from each other.

Finally, the evidence suggested that the principals and teachers from each school were acutely aware of emails being used as a documentation trail for certain matters. Ace High School held training with legal counsel the year prior to the study detailing how emails were considered public records that could be obtained through the Freedom of Information Act. This was another example of how email has changed the nature of communication between principals and teachers. The training was mentioned several times during the interview with the principal

and throughout the teacher focus group. A teacher from Crest High School believed email was a tool to "catch" people doing something wrong and teachers were reluctant to send emails because of that line of thinking. Interestingly, several other teacher participants from the two other schools had similar views of email being a documentation trail. Other teachers felt email had been used as a "blanket" to cover wrongdoings on behalf of the principal when it was communicated to them through email. The teachers in the focus groups seemed content with their current principals, but admitted that previous experiences with past administration had forged awareness of how an email was crafted and how it could affect them professionally. The principals seemed to be aware of this particular perception among the teachers. Hence, the reason principals preferred face-to-face conversations on sensitive topics were to dispel those misconceptions. Email can be an efficient tool, but has tendencies to make individuals have mistrust in the true intent of the message.

Although this study is focused on email communications among high school principals and teachers, the topic is relevant to all individuals who use email as part of their professions. When crafting an email in a professional setting, the writer must be cognizant of the content and tone of the communication. The reader's perception of the email has the potential to impact the overall effectiveness of the message and once sent it now becomes a trackable document. As it relates to principals and teachers, how individuals communicate with each other plays a role in shaping the culture and climate of a school.

Given the vastly changing landscape of technological communication, including email, current and future educators should receive proper training and education on this topic. Accordingly, Appendix H is a training memo that will hopefully help guide educators in understanding how their email communications could potentially affect their relationships with

one another. Furthermore, the memo is meant to promote constructive communications amongst educators to aid in the positive culture and climate of a school. The memo was grounded from analysis of the findings from the three case studies. Takeaways from the training memo included, *first*, deciding if an email is the appropriate forum to discuss a topic. Accordingly, being aware of whether or not to send an email affects the volume of email received. Email allows increased accessibility and immediacy. How you deal with these pressures is vital to your personal and professional well-being (Chase & Clegg, 2011). To combat the potential anxiety and addiction of email you should check your email intermittently (Gupta et al., 2011). This helps by not sitting at your desk and waiting for the next email to come through your inbox. Additionally, turn off your email or the alerting mechanism on your computer when working on other responsibilities. This helps focus your attention to the task at hand, which hopefully promotes increased efficiency and productivity to your work. Moreover, the decision-making process of whether to send an email should go hand-in-hand with how the communication is crafted in its content and tone. This would include being cognizant of the length, appropriateness and formality of an email. The *second* takeaway is to keep an email succinct in content with the inclusion of greetings, salutations, symbols, and exclamation marks to exude a positive and polite email. Also, principals and teachers need to be aware that some issues or sensitive topics do not belong in an email. *Third*, one must develop interpersonal relationships through face-to-face communication. Having sensitive conversations face-to-face may be more appropriate. *Fourth*, through the relationships that have been developed, the writer of an email should have a sense of what and how to communicate with the individual or individuals. *Fifth*, an individual must develop a nexus between both the rational and natural systems perspectives when communicating through email. Email has become a transcendent

way to communicate within education. It is now up to educators to use this communication tool in an efficient and effective manner to promote positive relationships, which in turn has the potential to create positive cultures and climates within schools.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

ANALYZING EMAIL: INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS FOR HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

I will interview each of the high school principals once – September of 2014 through June 2015. Interviews will last 45-60 minutes and will follow the protocols below.

Foci: How has email affected the high school principal's relationship with their teaching staffs?

What types of decisions go into using email as a communication tool with an individual teacher or teaching staff?

- What form of communication do you communicate with your teachers with the highest frequency?
- If we think of principal/teacher communication as happening in one of four ways, and I'll list those for you in a moment, I want you estimate the percentage of your communication with teachers that happen in each way? The four ways are group's in-person, one-on-one in-person, emails, and other written forms.
- How many emails do you feel you typically send and receive from teachers in a typical day?
- Let's look at your emails from the predetermined date that you have already forwarded me....
 - How many emails did you send and receive from your teachers on the predetermined date?
 - Now that we've counted these, what are your thoughts?
 - Do you mind if we dig into your emails from the predetermined date? Can you talk me through the emails you sent that day? Talk me through emails you sent that day to a teacher or teaching staff.
 - Why did you communicate this over email?
 - What was your thought process in communicating through email?
 - As you read this now, what kind of tone do you think you're sending?
 - Would you revise this email if you were going to resend it?
- Do you view email as an effective communication tool? If so, why or why not?
- What are some benefits to using email as compared to other forms of communication to communicate with your teachers?
- What are some drawbacks of using email to communicate with teachers?
- How do you think teachers react when they receive emails from you?
- How do you alert staff to an important email communication? How do you decide which emails are worth alerting staff to?
- When there is a conflict with a teacher, what form of communication do you use to communicate with that individual? Why?

- What do you see as the balance between getting the information across and sending the right tone in an email?
- How do you take personal characteristics of your teachers into consideration when you are communicating with them through email?
- Has email helped or hindered your relationships with your teachers? If so, how?
- How has email communication impacted the culture and climate of your school as it pertains to principal/teacher relations?
- Do you feel like the amount of email you've sent and received over time has changed? If so why?
- Is there anything else you'd like to share with me regarding how you use email with your teachers?

APPENDIX B

TEACHER FOCUS GROUP SAMPLE EMAIL

From: High School Principal

To: Instructional Staff

Subject: Staff Meeting Follow-up

Staff,

In regards to school policy of food and/or drink in the hallways please notify me of the situation via a discipline referral and I will handle the situation accordingly. I need to know so I can make sure I am cracking down on the behavior. I will also make an announcement tomorrow regarding this issue.

Again, I will strive to be consistent, fair, and timely. Each discipline referral that has come to my desk I have taken care of and I have supported each one of your recommendations for a consequence.

I strive to create a balance between discipline, respect, trust, and relationship building with the students. From the sounds of our staff meeting I will focus my efforts on discipline again. I was unaware of some of those concerns and all I have asked is for you to come and discuss these issues with me before it becomes a bigger issue.

To reiterate we are a "TEAM" and I stand behind that philosophy both by my words and actions. I will strive to be a better leader both professionally and personally.

Sincerely,

High School Principal

APPENDIX C

ANALYZING EMAIL: INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS FOR HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS FOCUS GROUP

I will interview a focus group of high school teachers once – September 2014 through June 2015. The teacher focus group interviews will last 20-25 minutes and will follow the protocols below.

- Do you view email as an effective communication tool between you and your principal? Why or why not?
- What are some drawbacks of using email to communicate with your principal?
- How do you think the principal reacts when he/she receives emails from you?
- What is your principal's perceptions of your emails?
- Look at a sample email from a principal...?
 - Tone?
 - Style?
 - Tell me about the message coming through?
 - Reaction?
 - Appropriate for email?
 - How does this compare to the emails your principal typically sends?
- When there is a conflict with your principal, what form of communication do you use to communicate with the principal? Why?
- Has email helped or hindered your relationships with your principal? How?
- How has email communication impacted the culture and climate of your school as it pertains to principal/teacher relations?

APPENDIX D

STUDY OVERVIEW AND CONSENT EMAIL

To: District Superintendent & High School Principal

Principal Researcher: Anthony Berthiaume - Superintendent, New Lothrop Area Public Schools & Michigan State University Doctoral Student

Dissertation Title: Email Communication and Its Impact on High School Principal and Teacher Relations

Hello,

I am a doctoral student at Michigan State University in the K–12 Educational Administration program. To complete my degree I have chosen to conduct a study that I believe has significant relevance in education today. The current literature lacks information on the impact of emails on high school principals' jobs. The purpose of this study is to research the way electronic communication is transmitted in and out of a high school principal's office and how it may be changing the nature of their work. I would like to use the rational and natural systems perspectives of organizational theory to analyze how email has affected the communication and relationships between high school principals and teachers. As a secondary inquiry, I want to examine the amount, content, and tone of emails sent from high school principals to their teaching staffs.

First, I will ask your high school principal to forward me sent teacher email communications from a random predetermined date to analyze and generate interview questions. Second, I will come to your district's high school and interview the building principal. Lastly, I will interview a focus group of 5 to 6 teachers on staff selected by the high school principal after the school day has ended. Each interview will take place at the interviewee's school building. The interviews will take about 45-60 minutes to complete for the principal and 20-25 minutes for the teachers. The interview is anonymous. At no time will your name be associated with your responses to the interview. All information will be secure at all times.

There are no foreseeable risks to you by completing this interview, as all results will be kept completely confidential. The expected benefits to this study will be that the research will provide information on how email has impacted the relationships between principals and teachers.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Once the interview is completed, your participation will have been completed. You may choose not to participate in the study. If you do decide to participate, you can change your mind at any time and withdraw from the study without negative consequences.

Results will be presented in aggregate form only. No names or individually identifying information will be revealed. Results may be presented at research meetings and conferences, in scientific publications, and as part of a doctoral thesis being conducted by the principal researcher.

This research protocol and informed consent document has been reviewed and approved by the Michigan State University Institutional Review Board for use from September 2014 and June 2015. If you have questions about the approval process, please contact the Michigan State University Human Research Protection Program at irb@msu.edu or call 517-355-2180. If you have any questions concerning your participation now or in the future, you can contact the principal researcher, Anthony Berthiaume at berthia4@msu.edu or 517-285-7823 or you may contact the dissertation chair, Dr. Kristy Cooper at kcooper@msu.edu.

Consent to Participate:

I have attached three different consent forms to be signed by the District Superintendent, High School Principal, and high school teachers on staff selected by the building principal. Please read all of the above information and the attached consent form about this research study, including the research procedures, possible risks, side effects, and the likelihood of any benefit to me.

Further, by agreeing, you are indicating that you are a District Superintendent and High School Principal and understand the consent form and agree to participate in the research study.

Please see the attached consent forms and email me a signed consent form from the District Superintendent and yourself. Thank you for considering participation in my research.

Thank you,

Anthony Berthiaume
Doctoral Candidate
Michigan State University
Superintendent – New Lothrop Area Public Schools

APPENDIX E.1

HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL EMAIL STUDY: SUPERINTENDENT CONSENT FORM

Please consider this information carefully before deciding whether or not to participate.

Goal of the research:

- Examine how email has changed the nature of high school principal's job and the impact it has had on the relationships between high school principals and teachers.
- As a secondary inquiry, I want to examine the amount, content, and tone of emails sent from high school principals to their teaching staffs.

Data Collection:

Phase I - I will ask the high school principal to forward me sent teacher email communications from a random predetermined date to analyze and generate interview questions. Then I will interview the high school principal of the district and ask them to review with me a variety of emails from a date I have designated in which they have communicated with an individual teacher and/or teaching staff. The interviews will last 45-60 minutes and focus on the use of email to analyze communication between principal and his or her teacher(s). The interview questions will be predicated on sent emails from the principal to a teacher and/or teaching staff. This conversation will be audiotaped and transcribed.

Phase II - I will conduct a 20-25-minute focus group interview with high school teachers from your district on their perception of email and how it impacted the relationship between the participant and the principal. The interview will be focused on teachers' perception of email and how the communication tool affects the culture and climate of a building. I will ask participants to review a generic email from a principal to analyze the content, tone, and the participant's perception of the communication. This conversation will be audiotaped and transcribed.

Benefits:

By participating in this study, principals and teachers will be able to share their perspectives on the impact of email with a wide audience and inform educational practice more broadly. My hope is to use the results from these interviews to gain an understanding of how email is being used by high school principals to communicate with their teaching staffs. I may also quote the participants anonymously in published materials and presentations about this research.

Confidentiality:

Interviews will be completely anonymous, and any results shared with principals, teachers or the district will be aggregated to protect the anonymity of individual participants. All principals will be identified by pseudonyms in any reporting, and key-identifying characteristics will be altered slightly to disguise the identity of the participant. All teachers will also be identified by

pseudonyms, and key-identifying characteristics will be altered slightly to disguise the identity of the participants. In any reporting outside the school, the school will be identified by a pseudonym, and the location will be identified by a descriptor, such as a semi-rural community just outside a major city in Michigan.

Withdrawal:

The district's participation in this study is completely voluntary. If, at any time, the district or the high school wishes to quit, that is within their rights. If the district or high school decides to quit before the end of the study, Anthony will not use any material from surveys, observations, or interviews collected up to that point without written permission from the district.

Researcher Contact Information:

Any questions about this research may be directed to Anthony Berthiaume or Dr. Kristy Cooper, Anthony's faculty advisor at Michigan State University, Department of Educational Administration:

Anthony Berthiaume
Doctoral Candidate
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Superintendent - New Lothrop Area Public
Schools
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Dr. Kristy Cooper
Assistant Professor
Department of Educational Administration
Michigan State University
403 Erickson Hall
East Lansing, MI 48824
Office: 517-353-5461
kcooper@msu.edu

Whom to contact about your rights in this research:

Whom to contact about your rights in this research, for questions, concerns, suggestions, or complaints that are not being addressed by the researcher, or research-related harm:

Michigan State University Human Research Protection Program, Olds Hall, 408 W. Circle Dr., Room 207, East Lansing, MI 48824. Phone: 517-355-2180. Email: Irb@msu.edu

Agreement to participate:

As superintendent of the school district, I give my consent for Anthony Berthiaume to conduct research at the district's high school. I understand that the district and the high school are free to withdraw from this research at any time if we so choose, and that Anthony Berthiaume will gladly answer any questions that arise during the course of the research.

Superintendent Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name (print): _____

APPENDIX E.2

HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL EMAIL STUDY: HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

Please consider this information carefully before deciding whether or not to participate.

Goal of the research:

The purpose of this study is to research the way electronic communication is transmitted in and out of a high school principal's office and how it may be changing the nature of their work. I would like to use the rational and natural systems perspectives of organizational theory to analyze how email has affected the communication and relationships between high school principals and teachers. As a secondary inquiry, I want to examine the amount, content, and tone of emails sent from high school principals to their teaching staffs.

What you will do in this research:

If you agree to participate in the study, I will ask you to forward me sent teacher email communications from a random predetermined date to analyze and generate interview questions. Then I will come to your building to interview you and ask questions pertaining to the volume of email you receive and send on a designated date, along with analyzing your email communications to individual teachers and/or teaching staffs. The interview will be 45-60 minutes on the use of email to analyze communication between you and your teacher(s). The interview will be focused on questions relating to your sent emails to your teachers. This conversation will be audiotaped and transcribed.

Benefits:

By participating in this study, you will be able to share your perspective on the impact of email with a wide audience and inform educational practice more broadly. My hope is to use the results from this interview to gain an understanding of how email is being used by high school principals to communicate with their teachers. I may also quote you anonymously in published materials and presentations about this research.

Confidentiality:

I will protect your confidentiality by using pseudonyms for you, your school, and your teachers in any printed materials or presentations and by disguising you, your school, and your teachers through modifying any personal details that could compromise your confidentiality.

Withdrawal:

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If, at any time, you wish to quit, you can.

Protection of the data:

The transcripts of the interview will only contain your real name during the transcription process. Once all recordings have been transcribed, all names will be changed to pseudonyms. The

interview recordings and transcripts will be stored on my computer until the completion of this project. Then, they will be permanently erased.

Researcher Contact Information:

Anthony Berthiaume
Doctoral Student
Michigan State University
Superintendent - New Lothrop Area Public
Schools
9285 Easton Rd.
New Lothrop, MI 48460
Office: 810-638-5054
Cell: 517-285-7823
berthia4@msu.edu

Dr. Kristy Cooper
Assistant Professor
Department of Educational Administration
Michigan State University
403 Erickson Hall
East Lansing, MI 48824
Office: 517-353-5461
kcooper@msu.edu

Whom to contact about your rights in this research:

Michigan State University Human Research Protection Program
Phone: 517-355-2180; Email: irb@msu.edu

Agreement to participate:

The nature and purpose of this research have been satisfactorily described to me, and I agree to become a participant. I understand that I am free to quit at any time if I so choose and that Anthony Berthiaume will gladly answer any questions that arise during the course of the research.

Principal Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name (print): _____

APPENDIX E.3

HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL EMAIL STUDY: HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM

Please consider this information carefully before deciding whether or not to participate.

Goal of the research:

The purpose of this study is to research the way electronic communication is transmitted in and out of a high school principal's office and how it may be changing the nature of their work. I would like to use the rational and natural systems perspectives of organizational theory to analyze how email has affected the communication and relationships between high school principals and teachers. As a secondary inquiry, I want to examine the amount, content, and tone of emails sent from high school principals to their teaching staffs.

What you will do in this research:

If you agree to participate in the study, I will conduct a 20-25 minute focus group interview with you and your teacher colleagues on the perception of email and how it has impacted the relationship between you and your principal. Furthermore, I would like to examine how principal email communications have influenced the culture and climate of your building. The interview will be focused on questions relating to emails that you have received from your principal. I will ask you to review a sample email from a principal to analyze the content, tone, and your perception of the communication. This conversation will be audiotaped and transcribed.

Benefits:

By participating in this study, you will be able to share your perspective on the impact of email with a wide audience and inform educational practice more broadly. My hope is to use the results from this interview to gain an understanding of how email is being used by high school principals to communicate with their teachers. I may also quote you anonymously in published materials and presentations about this research. Furthermore, I acknowledge that you participated in this study after your contractual hours. I will be offering a \$10 gift card after you have completed the interview for your time and consideration.

Confidentiality:

I will protect your confidentiality by using pseudonyms for you, your school, and your principal in any printed materials or presentations and by disguising you, your school, and your principal through modifying any personal details that could compromise your confidentiality.

Withdrawal:

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If, at any time, you wish to quit, you can.

Protection of the data:

The transcripts of the interview will only contain your real name during the transcription process. Once all recordings have been transcribed, all names will be changed to pseudonyms. The interview recordings and transcripts will be stored on my computer until the completion of this project. Then, they will be permanently erased.

Researcher Contact Information:

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Whom to contact about your rights in this research:

Michigan State University Human Research Protection Program
Phone: 517-355-2180; Email: irb@msu.edu

Agreement to participate:

The nature and purpose of this research have been satisfactorily described to me, and I agree to become a participant. I understand that I am free to quit at any time if I so choose and that Anthony Berthiaume will gladly answer any questions that arise during the course of the research.

Teacher Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name (print): _____

APPENDIX F

CONCEPTUALLY CLUSTERED MATRIX

Table 6: Content and Tone of Principal Emails from a Rational and Natural Systems Perspective

	Principal #1		
	Rational	Natural	Other
	Email #1		
Basic Exchange	In this email, Jane has alerted Tim to a new idea about the need for a math ATL class. Tim replies that this is a good idea and will pass it on to the counselors.	He said "thank you" and "great idea." Did not include a salutation. I know from the interview that this was about a transition class, called approaches to learning for freshmen. Administration and teachers have had success with the class so they have opened it up to sophomores and juniors. The teacher was requesting that the school improvement team look at adding a transition class that would focus on math.	I'm noticing that all of Tim's emails are about getting the job done and communicating in a timely and efficient manner.
Interpretation from an Organizational Standpoint	Email appears to be a way for teachers in this school to share ideas about programming and course offerings with the principal. In his response, the principal evaluates the idea based on data that has been reviewed ("great idea") and lets the teacher know who will handle implementing the idea ("I will share... with the counselors"). This lets the teacher know who to follow up with if she wants to dig further or make more specific suggestions. In some ways, this is operational planning via email. From interview, I also learned he forwarded Jane's email to the counselors (efficiency).	Tim communicates via short emails often with teachers. Signs his first name. Addresses them by first name. He does not appear to waste time including information that he assumes the teachers already knows (shorthand and familiarity). Shows an appreciation for bringing the idea up to him and reciprocates with a reply to the request. Tim went on to state in the interview that we were very appreciative and tried displaying it in his response to Jane's email, due to the amount of time and effort the school improvement team had put into meeting their school improvement goal.	
	Email #2		
Basic Exchange	In this email, Tim welcomes his staff back from Thanksgiving break. He also reminds teachers of the difficulty "many" students have during the holidays, which he stated in his interview that he expects his staff to understand and remember his expectations. During my interview Tim stated that he likes to send out a weekly email on Sundays called "The Week Ahead" to staff so everybody knows what is happening throughout the week. This weekly communication goes to the Superintendent as well.	The first word that appears in the body of the email is "Staff" but then Tim goes on to state "Welcome back!" to staff, using an exclamation point to emphasize his feelings. He also emphasizes students' emotional needs during the holiday season in his second sentence. In the third sentence, Tim puts in bold "Please continue your patience and encouragement". Tim also stays positive when listing the regional honors choir, putting "Good Luck!" in bold, using capital letters and an exclamation mark to show support for the students in choir. He ends the email stating have a great week using an exclamation mark for the third time in this email to convey further emotion.	At the beginning of this email along with others I notice that he does not use a greeting, such as "hi", "good morning", etc. At the end of Tim's email there isn't salutations, just his name Tim. Interesting to that there is no signature box, including title and contact information when he writes to his staff.
Interpretation from an Organizational Standpoint	This email is a way for the principal to send out a mass communication to his staff about events for the upcoming week. The email is an efficient way to communicate with staff so that they know what is occurring throughout the week in the building. It also helps the staff plan their week so if they would like to attend an event they know when, where and what time it starts. Tim stated in his interview that "The Week Ahead" is routine and his teacher expect it.	The email communication is a basic event planning checklist for the staff to go by for the week. Tim is able to set the tone in his introductory paragraph reminding his staff about students' needs. He uses bold to signify the importance of putting students' needs first. He uses bold, exclamation points, and capital letters to emphasize what he is saying but in a positive way. The staff gets to see a softer side of Tim but at the same time the email has a balance between structure/order and support.	

Table 6: (cont'd)

	Principal #1		
	Rational	Natural	Other
	Email #3		
Basic Exchange	The subject line stated "call or stop by". The body of the email is a request from Tim for Jill to stop by his office or call him before fourth hour.	The subject line of the email was not formal, no capitalization or complete phrase. Tim starts with "Hi Jill", which is difference from the previous two emails analyzed. Tim also uses the terms please and thanks in his brief email to Jill. He also gives Jill the option either "call or stop by" as an option to communicate. At the end of the email Tim uses his first name to end his communication, which could be perceived as informal.	This email intrigued me due to is subject line and direct and brief communication to the teacher. As a researcher I found myself wondering if Tim communicates like this on a regular basis or with certain teachers? If this was one of his teachers I would be wondering if I had done something wrong, even if he used please, thanks and given me the option to call or stop by. Also, are teachers used to Tim's direct and short emails like this, is it the norm of the building? If I was teacher receiving an email like this my thought would be that I was in trouble.
Interpretation from an Organizational Standpoint	Tim directed to Jill to communicate with him in-person or over the phone by a certain time period. The perception of this email is short and direct. During the interview, Tim stated that a situation occurred in Jill's class that he needed to discuss with her. Also, at times it is hard to get a hold of Jill because she is a roving teacher from building to building. Tim also believed that Jill already knew what this was about. This communication could be viewed as a way of communicating directly and efficiently with a staff member.	The email is direct and to the point. From Tim's interview, he perceives that Jill knows why he wants to communicate with her in-person or by phone. The email is a quick and efficient way to notify a teacher that the principal needs to discuss something with the individual. If Jill did not know what Tim wanted then this communication could be perceived in a negative way due to its directive tone and no explanation to why she needs to meet with him.	

Table 6: (cont'd)

	Principal #2		
	Rational	Natural	Other
	Email #1		
Basic Exchange	The email is a reminder to Anna about her pre-observation conference with Kia the high school principal. The subject line states "Pre-Observation Conference". In the body of the email Kia states "Reminder" and tells Anna that they are meeting "today during your prep hour". Kia does not use a salutation and add her signature box to the email with her name, school, and title.	Kia starts her email by using "Hi Anna". Then Kia start the her sentence with "Reminder.....we have your". Kia stated that her tone with the dot, dot, dot (....) was "a soft touch". The email is a quick reminder that is one sentence long on the day of Anna pre-observation conference. In the interview Kia stated that she had already met face-to-face with Anna to set up a pre-conference observation date, so this email was a quick reminder. Kia added that no further information was needed in the email to Anna.	After reviewing the interview transcription this email symbolizes what she said. Kia is a principal that likes to communicate face-to-face with her teachers, email is just a medium to get a quick and efficient manner to get a message out to a teacher. Also, she is very aware of the tone of her emails. Adding a "hi" at the beginning and the subtle approach to the dot, dot, dot (....) is a soft approach to communication through email to Anna.
Interpretation from an Organizational Standpoint	The email is a reminder that Kia and Anna are meeting today for a pre-observation conference. The email is used for planning purposes and an efficient means to communicate without disrupting Anna's classroom.	The email from the principal conveys a thoughtful approach after meeting with the teacher face-to-face as a reminder of their pre-observation conference. Email is also an efficient means to get a quick message to the teacher. Overall, the email could be perceived as positive with the "Hi" and "Reminder....".	
	Email #2		
Basic Exchange	Kia had previously met with Alice before forwarded this email to the teaching staff. The forwarded email was message to Kia's staff from Alice as a reminder to fill out the secret Santa forms and explained the process for turning them in.	Kia did not open the forwarded email with a greeting, she stated in her interview that she sent it as is. Kia also stated in her interview that the email was friendly in content and a positive event for the teachers. Kia admitted if the content was not positive then capitalizing "TODAY" could have been perceived as "demanding". The email end with "Thanks!", the use of the exclamation mark shows appreciation for teachers participation in the gift exchange.	Kia mentioned in her interview the fact that she met with Alice face-to-face before forwarding the secret Santa email to the entire teaching staff. Email to Kia is just a vehicle to either start a conversation or reiterate something that she has already discussed with a teacher or teachers. She uses email for efficiently for reminder purposes.
Interpretation from an Organizational Standpoint	Kia used email to mass communicate with her teachers about the secret Santa gift exchange. Also, by forwarding the email Kia is showing her support for the gift exchange. This type of activity has the potential to create a positive climate/culture amongst teachers.	The email communication is a reminder to teachers about participating in the gift exchange to promote a warm and positive work environment in and amongst the teaching staff. Kia forwarding this message could be perceived as pressure, but most would assume that she is in full support of this fun event.	

Table 6: (cont'd)

	Principal #2		
	Rational	Natural	Other
	Email #3		
Basic Exchange	<p>This email is a change of conversation that happened between Kia and Ben, one of Kia's teachers who was frustrated with a science extra-curricular program he was participating in. During Kia's interview, she stated that she wanted to accommodate the teacher by meeting with him to talk about his issues so they could "fix the situation". They used email to communicate with one another to set up a face-to-face meeting to discuss the teacher's frustrations.</p>	<p>Kia's first response back to Ben about his frustration was met with "Sorry.....!! I had know idea." In Kia's interview she stated that she was trying to be "somewhat light hearted" because when people have meltdowns they are never fun. Her next response was to ask if James had been any help or can "we" contact any other schools for support? Kia expressed in her interview that she did not know much about the extra-curricular program so she was more sympathetic to his frustration and willing to help in whatever way she could. The second thread of the emails between Kia and Ben was letting him know that they could touch base sometime today and see what options they could come up with. She stated in the interview her tone was one of offering to help. At the end of the email Kia ended with "Meltdowns aren't fun!!" Using the word meltdown from one of Ben's previous email helped make light of the situation which he was trying to explain to her in the second thread of emails about the situation. She added two exclamation points to the last part of the email to signify humor and that they would work through the situation together.</p>	<p>After analyzing Kia's interview, emails to and from her teachers, and the teacher focus group interview, she shows a humanistic approach in her email communications on a consistent basis. She is open to helping her teachers in anyway she can, even though she might not have all the answers.</p>
Interpretation from an Organizational Standpoint	<p>The first thread of the email communication lended some guidance to the teacher by asking if he had contacted with "James" or "can we contact other schools for support". Kia's email was supportive and open to the idea of helping Ben figure out a solution to his frustration. Kia stated in her interview that her tone in response to Ben's email was more of understanding and offering to help with his issues revolving around lack of support from others who knew more about the extra-curricular program. The final thread of the email came from Ben to see whether or not it was ok to meet now. The perception is that communicating through email helped relieve some of the stress the teacher was feeling and when the opportunity presented itself he would go meet with Kia face-to-face about the issues he was having with the program. It also shows that Kia is accessible to her teachers. Within the day after she was first contacted by Be, Kia was having a face-to-face conversation about his frustrations that he emailed her with earlier that same morning.</p>	<p>Kia's emails to Ben were short but provided support and guidance. When Kia stated in the first thread of emails asking if "we" could contact other schools for support represents her willingness to help. The emails also signify her humanistic approach to administrations by empathizing with the teach. Finally, Kia promotes a culture of collaborativeness by making sure they would discuss options to resolve Ben frustration with the extra-curricular program.</p>	

Table 6: (cont'd)

	Principal #3		
	Rational	Natural	Other
	Email #1		
Basic Exchange	<p>The subject line of the email is "Reminders for the Upcoming Weeks", Joe, the high school principal stated in his interview that this is a routine email he sends out to his teachers "as a reminder of things that are coming up" and "what's going on". The opening of the email is a short statement that these are reminders for the upcoming weeks. Joe numbered his reminders to organize his thoughts. As he stated in his interview "Other administrations make newsletters, but that's not me. I just get the information out". The first event is a statement about technology issues they were having with their computer labs. Joe stated that these issues have been happening for the last month so he wanted the teachers to know they realize their is an issue and they are working on the problem diligently. Also, it was a reminder for teachers to make sure they were updating their lesson plans and having backup plans ready if the lab wasn't up and running. Events 2-4 were events coming up throughout the week and to make the staff aware of what, who, when, and where the events were taking place. Lastly, Joe made a statement to his teachers to have a happy and restful holiday break. Joe made a statement in the interview that he usually attaches an educational article to his weekly reminders, but he didn't this week. His ending salutation was straight and to the point, "Have a great week," and ended his email with his first name "Joe".</p>	<p>Joe explains step-by-step to his teachers on how they are processing the technology problem they are having in their computer labs. The last two sentences of #1 in his "Reminders for the Upcoming Week" focus on understanding the inconvenience and empathy towards his teachers due to the extra work it is creating for them. He also commented his teachers for their "professionalism and ingenuity". Joe stated in his interview that he had hoped #1 in this email would be perceived as teachers "please patient". Events #2 and #3 was to make his teachers aware of a couple of student events that he had hoped they would come out and support he students. Additionally, he wished the staff a "happy and restful break" and recognized their hard work and effort up until this point of the school year. He ended the email with "have a great week" and signed off with just his first name "Joe".</p>	<p>After reviewing Joe's emails, he take a business like approach to his email communication with his teachers. He is straight to the point and does not add extra information to the emails, which when interviewing the teachers focus group they appreciates his consideration for their time when creating emails to his teaching staff.</p>
Interpretation from an Organizational Standpoint	<p>Joe's "Reminders for the Upcoming Weeks" is a weekly mass communication to his teachers as helpful reminders and letting teachers know what is going on in the building. In the teacher focus group interview Joe's teachers stated: "I do like those", its a "bolded list", "easy to read", "plan, plan, plan" and "very neutral statements". Joe revealed in his interview that he discussed his first event with the building union representative and his superintendent before sending the email out to his teachers. Joe communicated this with the building union representative and superintendent "so they understood what the message was that was out there" and "so they could be all on a unified front" when making this statement to his teachers. The email is an efficient means to inform teachers on what expect for the week.</p>	<p>The "Reminders for the Upcoming Weeks" is a routine and efficient way of mass communicating a checklist of the upcoming events that the principal sends out to his teachers on a weekly basis. There is transparency and a sense of accountability with the technology issues they are having in the building. Joe states, "this is not a fix that will happen by tomorrow or even by the end of the week, but the district is committed to resolving the issue as soon as possible". Joe and his teachers are hopefully on the same page when he states it's an inconvenience and states his appreciation to his staff for their professionalism during this time period. It's an honest approach to facing an issue that affects the daily operations of a building. At the end of the email Joe recognizes and states his appreciation for teaching staffs hard work before they go on holiday break. Joe's salutation is informal and signs off with just his first name. This could be perceived by his teachers as an informal but may signal that he is approachable.</p>	

Table 6: (cont'd)

	Principal #3		
	Rational	Natural	Other
	Email #2		
Basic Exchange	Rich, one of Joe's teacher in an email asked if maintenance was still working on raising the temperature in his room. Joe replied "yes they are" and reported that the temp astute was reading 69 degrees in Rich's classroom. Joe stated that he bumped the temperature to 72 degree and told Rich to let him know if the temperature rises.	The subject of the email that Rich sent to Joe was "Heat". Joe could gather from the subject line what the email was about. Rich's previous email was inquiring if they were still working on the heat and ended the email with "Chilly in here today". Joe responded by stating yes and what the temperature was saying and what he would "bump" it up to. Joe ended his email stating "Let's see if it comes up".	Email was used in this situation as efficient means to solve an issue with a teacher's classroom temperature. It was basically a to-do list for the principal, which the teacher felt comfortable asking him to do and it was resolved in a timely manner.
Interpretation from an Organizational Standpoint	Joe stated in the interview that in one of his "Reminders for the Upcoming Weeks", he communicated that the building was having boilers issues. He also notified the teachers to let him know if they were having issues with the temperature in their classrooms. Rich took him up on the issues, Joe stated in his interview that he replied to Rich with "a quick answer and also let him know that I've got a resolution for him". Joe's perception of his response back to Rich was that he "recognized there was a problem and was quickly finding a way to rectify the situation". Rich contacted Joe through email, which made it more efficient and effective for Joe to resolve. Rich did not have to disrupt or try to find Joe for a solution to his problem. He emailed Joe in hopes of resolving the issue, which it was.	The email between teacher and principal was short and to the point. The teacher was looking for a solution to his classroom temperature so he emailed the principal. The principal took care of issue promptly by the date stamp of both emails. Twenty-eight minutes in between the first initial email and the principal's response. There was no salutations such as "hi", "thanks", "bye" between the teacher or principal. So either both parties felt comfortable with one another or both individuals were frustrated with one another. Joe stated in his interview that he wanted to provide Rich with a "quick answer" and to "rectify the situation" he wouldn't have revised this email if he had the chance to.	
	Principal #3		
	Rational	Natural	Other
	Email #3		
Basic Exchange	The subject line states "student". Joe requested Kristy to "stop down when she had a minute". The next sentence stated that Joe wanted to talk to her about "student x". During the interview Joe stated that this situation was not an emergency or he would have communicated with Kristy with a phone call or face-to-face. Also, he stated that he used the student's name so Kristy "could start wrapping her head around any of her personal experiences" with the student. Joe used of the student's name as providing the teacher "with a little background knowledge" before she met with him.	The subject line of the email stated "student". The first line of the email from Joe was missing the word "you". Joe stated that he would like to talk to her about "student x". The first name of the student was given but the last name was just the first initial.	The principal uses email as an efficient and quick form of communication with his teachers. He takes into account characteristics of his teaching staff and individual teachers before he sends out an email. For example, Joe stated that Kristy "is a very competent teacher who is one of my best". So if he did not provide a lot of detail to her it was not as if she should feel anxiety or worry about his request to meet with her.
Interpretation from an Organizational Standpoint	The principal requested his teacher come see him when she had a chance. There was little information the teacher could imply from the email other than a student name. Joe stated that the tone of the email was a "directive" but it was not an emergency. Joe admitted that if he had a chance to revise the email he would so the teacher had more information to go from so it didn't seem like she was being disciplined or "it wasn't a huge concern". Joe did state in the interview that he perceived the teacher would not have anxiety of his request. Joe went on to state that when he had the conversation with Kristy that she "could almost predict what the conversation was going to be about".	The subject line "student" was not capitalized. The email sounded informal but important at the same time due to the directive and lack of description given by the principal to the teacher. There was not a salutation at beginning or end of the email or even a signature with the principal's name. The email was an efficient way to communicate with the teacher so it wouldn't interrupt her classroom. This email was a request from the principal to teacher so that they could discuss a student in her classroom.	

APPENDIX G

CONNECTION OF FINDINGS

Table 7: Connection of Findings and Research Questions

Research Questions	Findings
How has email affected communication and relationships between high school principals and teachers?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The principals and teachers viewed email as an efficient means to communicate from a daily operations standpoint of view. 2. Depending on the sensitivity of the topic, both principals and teachers would prefer a face-to-face conversation to discuss an issue. 3. The principals and teachers believed the misinterpretation of tone in email is its biggest drawback. 4. Principals and teachers overall did not feel as though email communications had any bearing on their relationships. 5. There were several examples of teachers having bad experiences with prior principals through the use of email. 6. Email provided a way to document conversation for both principals and teachers.
What is the volume and content of email communication between principals and teachers?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The principals and teachers viewed email as an efficient means to communicate from a daily operations standpoint of view. 2. Email has allowed principals and teachers to mass communicate with each other, through daily or weekly announcements 3. The principals were not overwhelmed with the volume of email they get from teachers. 4. The principals viewed email as a way to communicate with teachers so they would not be distracted while teaching. 5. The teachers were cognizant of the volume of emails principals receive on a daily basis. 6. Some teachers were concerned how email contains them to their classroom, rather than having face-to-face interactions with their colleagues 7. The content contained in emails that were sent to and from principals varied.
What is the content and tone of email communication between principals and teachers?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The principals and teachers believed the misinterpretation of tone in email is its biggest drawback. 2. The principals were similar in their styles responding back to teacher emails, short and to the point responses. 3. The principals' tone and content in emails differed depending on the individual. 4. When emailing teachers, principals thought it was important to be supportive and polite. 5. The teachers felt the shorter the email the more likely they were to read it.

Table 7: (cont'd)

Research Questions	Findings
How do principals view their email communications as changing the nature of their relationships with teachers?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The principals viewed email as an efficient means to communicate from a daily operations standpoint of view. 2. Depending on the sensitivity of the topic, the principals were more likely to meet with a teacher or his or her teachers in a face-to-face conversation to discuss an issue. 3. The principals are conscious of trying to communicate in-person with his or her teachers but it was not always feasible. 4. The principals view email as a conversation starter or as reminders. 5. Email provided a way to document conversation with teachers. 6. One of the principals pointed out that there is no formal etiquette or training when communicating through email.
How do teachers view their email communications with their principal as changing the nature of their relationship?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The teachers viewed email as an efficient means to communicate from a daily operations standpoint of view. 2. The teachers felt principals were more accessible through email. 3. Depending on the sensitivity of the topic, the teachers would rather meet with the principal face-to-face conversation to discuss an issue. 4. The teachers found the weekly reminders to be helpful in keeping them in the loop as far as knowing and planning for the week. 5. Email provided a way to document conversation with principals. 6. The length or tone of an email can lose the overall effectiveness of an email.

APPENDIX H

PRACTICAL TRAINING HANDOUT ON EMAIL COMMUNICATION BETWEEN PRINCIPALS AND TEACHERS

Memo

To: K-12 Educators

From: Anthony Berthiaume, Doctoral Candidate & Superintendent

Cc: Michigan State University Guidance Committee

Date: October 21, 2015

Re: Practical Training Handout on Email Communication between Principals and Teachers

First and foremost, principals and teachers should decide on whether an email is the appropriate forum to communicate through depending on the sensitivity of the topic. Topics that should not be discussed through email as it relates to the findings of the study include personnel issues (discipline, evaluations, etc.), personal opinions of staff, student or parents.

Furthermore, being aware of whether or not to send an email affects the volume of email received. Email allows increased accessibility and immediacy. How you deal with these pressures is vital to your personal and professional well-being (Chase & Clegg, 2011). To combat the potential anxiety and addiction of email you should check your email intermittently (Gupta et al., 2011). This helps by not sitting at your desk and waiting for the next email to come through your inbox. Additionally, turn off your email or the alerting mechanism on your computer when working on other responsibilities. This helps focus your attention to the task at hand, which hopefully promotes increased efficiency and productivity to your work.

Here are several examples of communication that would not be appropriate for email:

To: Principal
From: Teacher
Subject: Student X

She is continuing today to say things about me today. I'm so mean, he hates me... I have just informed her she may leave if she doesn't like it here because I'm not going to

tolerate his continual rude comments. She wants to argue it's her first Amendment rights to say what she wants. I have informed her those aren't going to protect her in my classroom...and the struggle with her continues.

To: Teacher
From: Principal
Subject: Discipline

Good Morning Teacher,
This email is inform you that I am writing you up for being contractually late to work for the third time this school year. Please inform me if you would like to discuss or send me a written explanation of your tardiness.

Sincerely,
Principal

Here are several examples of communication that would be appropriate for email:

To: Principal
From: Teacher
Subject: Student Grades

Hi Principal!

Thanks for letting me know. Sarah and I had a heart to heart on Tuesday. She has some other grades that are not looking good at all. She went with us yesterday on a promise of some of her missing assignments in English and Math getting turned in and attending AST. We also discussed the concerns you voiced about Spanish. We are re-evaluating Friday (tomorrow) to determine what we are doing with next week's days out of class. If you wouldn't mind letting me know if you have seen any improvement in her Spanish work after Friday's class so that we can use that information in our re-assessment during 6th hour on Friday.

Thank you!
Teacher

To: Teacher
From: Principal
Subject: Meeting Request

Good Afternoon Teacher X,
Please contact my executive assistant tomorrow to schedule a time to meet with me to discuss the possible union meeting that was being conducted during our scheduled staff meeting.

Please be advised you are welcome to bring another representative with you to this meeting.

Thank you,
Principal

The *second* takeaway from the findings of the study is to keep the content of an email, succinct and to the point. Individuals should be conscious of the length of the communication due to the time consumption of reading and possible response to the email. However, there are times when educators communicate a listing of events or weekly reminders. In this case, the content length was not a concern due to the informative nature of the mass email communication to all staff. Additionally, the tone of an email can be reflected in the emotion, formality and magnitude of the communication. The use of symbols, punctuation marks, all capital letters, bolding, italicizing and the inclusion of greeting and salutations can have the potential to impact the individual's perception of the email in positive or negative manner.

In conclusion, keeping an email succinct in content with the inclusion of greetings, salutations, symbols, and exclamation marks shall exude a positive and polite email.

Here are several examples of communication that would not be appropriate for email:

To: Teacher
From: Principal
Subject: Issue

Stop down when you have a minute. I want to talk to you about a situation with a student!

To: Principal
From: Teacher
Subject: Curriculum Problem

Please take my name off for next year. I will never do this again. I've gotten absolutely no help from anyone but this Carol person and she may be ignoring my emails now. This Marie person has ignored numerous emails from me and I am just sick of it. The stress level from not knowing anything is at an all-time high and I hate it. If I could quit it today, I would. I will NEVER do this again.

Here are several examples of communication that would be appropriate for email:

To: All Staff
From: Teacher
Subject: Secret Santa

Just a reminder to fill out your "Secret Santa" form and put it in my mailbox TODAY so I can come around and have you pick your person tomorrow and Friday (in case I don't get to everyone tomorrow). Thanks!!

To: All Staff
From: Principal
Subject: Weekly Reminders

Here are some reminders for the upcoming week.

1. As many of you are aware the computers remain to be an issue. For the last month, the school district has had technicians from all different backgrounds come out to work and trouble shoot what our issues are and is continuing to contract with vendors who have an expertise in thin-client configurations. While the answer is not as simple as a lack of server space and working memory, it appears that may be a starting place. This is not a fix that will happen by tomorrow or even by the end of the week, but it is one in which the district is committed to resolving as soon as possible, regardless of the cost. I'm hoping we will have a solution for the problem and it corrected over break, but there is no guarantee that will happen. I know this is inconvenient and causes you to get very creative to find alternate ways to deliver your curriculum. I commend you for your professionalism and ingenuity.
2. Our choir will be performing on Tuesday, November 18 at 7:00 p.m.
3. Our band will be performing at the mall on Wednesday and at the Senior Citizen's Center on Friday.
4. Friday will be a jean day sponsored by NHS. NHS students will be around on Friday to collect for jean days.
5. Finally, I would like to wish all of you happy and restful holiday break. I know how hard all of you have worked through the start of the school year and the time off is well deserved.

Have a great week!
Principal

The *other takeaways* from the study focus on the interpersonal relationships principals and teachers should develop in creating a positive climate and culture for their respective schools. Relationships are developed through different forms of communication. Having face-to-face conversations helps build relationships. Relying on one form of communication can be a detriment to a school. Once relationships are developed between principals and teachers, the writer of an email should have a sense of what and how to communicate amongst one another. *Finally*, an individual must develop a balance between both the rational and natural systems perspectives when communicating through email.

Here are several examples of email communications which would be a balance between the rational and natural systems perspectives:

To: Teacher
From: Principal
Subject: Graduation

Sounds great, Nancy! We also have to talk about ordering caps & gowns. I can meet any day after work next week except for Wednesday, so just let me know what works for you.

Take care! ☺

To: Teacher
From: Principal
Subject: Pre-Observation Meeting

Hi Sheila,

Reminder... we have your pre-observation conference scheduled for today during your prep hour.

Looking forward to meeting with you to discuss your goals and how I can be of assistance to meet them!

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