A Comparison of Situational Leadership Framing by School Administrators:
During and After Principal Preparation

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Traditional principal preparation programs (PPPs) that include coursework and internship opportunities are most commonly the basis by which aspiring school leaders are prepared for future work (Dickens, et al., 2021; Grissom, Jason A., et al., 2018; Kearney & Valadez, 2015; Oliver, et al., 2018). The COVID-19 pandemic provided a challenge for aspiring school administrators, regardless of their personal dispositions or form of preparation (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020; Author & Author, 2021). Using Situational Leadership as a conceptual frame (Hersey & Blanchard, 1977), the purpose of this study was to compare perceptions by school leaders, pre- versus post-principal preparation program, who rely on a particular use of framing (Bolman & Deal, 2013) to guide their professional practice. In the spring of 2023, eight school administrators in their first three years of professional service, all of whom had been enrolled in an online principal preparation program (PPP), were interviewed to compare responses that they provided during their PPP to those expressed while serving as school administrators. In addition to the interviews, the study participants completed the Principal Self-Efficacy Survey (PSES) to indicate feelings of professional confidence. Results of this investigation showed high levels of self-efficacy among participants, especially with regard to instructional leadership, as well as a general agreement among participants regarding their use of situational framing. In addition, results showed a general increase in professional maturity, pre- to post-PPP, gleaned from self-reports about relationships and tasks in the workplace.

Keywords: Situational leadership, principal preparation, self—efficacy, COVID-19

Principal Preparation Programs (PPPs) were designed to provide substantive coursework and internship opportunities for teachers who aspired to serve as school administrators (Dickens, et al., 2021; Grissom, Jason A., et al., 2018). With each U.S. state defining unique credentialing requirements for aspiring school administrators, giving due attention to the various ways PPPs prepare administrators is integral to a larger discussion of how best to prepare them for service. Dickens, et al. (2021) provides context to this topic:

> …with widely varying principal preparation requirements from state to state, diverse school populations, and unique circumstances at state, region, and community levels, educational leadership preparation programs are challenged to effectively prepare leaders who are ready to lead in a multitude of contexts. (p. 52)

The consensus among educational stakeholders is that traditional forms of principal preparation (e.g., classwork and field experience) is adequate to prepare principals for the complex demands of their administrative roles (Pannell et al., 2020). Although past research describes opportunities for aspiring school leaders to gain an understanding of the profession within PPP coursework, it also recognizes the importance of practical training outside the classroom setting (Dickens, et al., 2021; Grissom, et al., 2018)

More recent research focuses on the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on educational learning (Author & Author, 2021; Davis & Nixon, 2024). During this global crisis, a greater emphasis on distance learning was swiftly adopted, focused on online discussion boards and video-conference sessions and eliminating in-person collaborative sessions for many, as well as hands-on experiences in particular subject areas (e.g., laboratory sciences, vocational classes). Having access to course data (i.e., discussion board responses) provided by PPP students who had completed part or all of their preparation during the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequently had assumed administrative roles in schools provided the motivation to engage in research comparing these data with current perspectives by these same individuals. Combined with this was an interest in how these former PPP students applied principles of best school administrative practices (e.g., situational awareness framing) and other perspectives associated with situational leadership.

The purpose of this study was to compare school administrators' perceptions of leadership dispositions and situational framing, pre- versus post- Principal Preparation Program. This investigation fills a gap in the research focused on school leader attitudes during and after PPP enrollment, with a particular emphasis on exploring perspectives regarding organizational theory, situational leadership and self-efficacy. This study was guided by the following research questions: (a) How differently do school administrators perceive organizational theory compared to when they were enrolled in a principal preparation program? (b) How well do assessments of situational leadership compare for aspiring school principals during their principal preparation programs versus when they later were serving as school administrators? and (c) How do early-career school administrator ratings of their own professional self-efficacy relate to their ideas of leadership and the use of framing?

As researchers call for more investigation into the practicality and effectiveness of PPPs, this study seeks to contribute to the existing body of literature that compares aspects of school leadership by students enrolled in PPPs with perceptions expressed later while serving as school administrators.

Review of Literature

The role of a school's principal is paramount when promoting a school's mission, vision and goals. Principals serve in a variety of capacities, from facilitators of the physical plant to lead communicator of school events to enforcers of student discipline and instructional quality (Federici & Skaalvik, 2012). As the leader of the faculty, staff, and students at a school, the principal is vital to ensuring student academic and co-curricular performance while addressing any challenges that may arise onsite or in the local community. A principal no longer serves purely as the manager of the building, but more and more takes on tasks as a team builder, aspirational leader, instructional leader, life coach, and agent of change (Crawford & Cowie, 2011; Westberry & Zhao, 2021; Davis & Nixon, 2024). Teachers enrolled in principal preparation programs (PPP) connect their own leadership strengths and challenges with established organizational theories and best administrative practices.

Research has found that successful PPPs emphasize instructional leadership, university-district partnerships, district evaluations, authentic and high-quality experiences in the field, and cohort support structures (Dickens et al., 2021; Pannell & Sergi-McBrayer, 2020; Clement et al., 2022). That said, research also suggests that PPPs may not be an adequate solution to preparing aspiring school administrators for every aspect of the profession. The consensus of these studies asserts that PPPs have fallen short in their programming, as the majority of these programs serve to evaluate a student's leadership capabilities in accordance with state-level expectations, rather than providing experiences relevant to the evolving duties of school administrators in the 21st century. Moreover, unsuccessful PPPs emphasize the need for a paradigm shift in the way aspiring leaders are evaluated and developed before they enter the workforce to better prepare them for the pertinent aspects of these roles (Grissom et al., 2018; Dickens et al., 2021; Genao, 2021).

With roles that range across the spectrum of leadership, it is valuable to recognize the importance of the Principal Self-Efficacy Survey (PSES), a tool that evaluates a principal's perception of their strengths, comfortability, and areas of improvement within their performance in the role. For this study, self-efficacy can be generally defined as self-perceptions about a person's ability to successfully perform tasks within particular contexts (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004). Research has found that a principal with a high level of self-efficacy serves as an essential motivator to those in administrative positions when navigating ways to combat difficulties, stress, and depression (Baroudi & Hojeij, 2018; Debes, 2020; Federici & Skaalvik, 2012; Hesbol, 2019; McBrayer et al., 2020). Naturally, high self-efficacy alone does not compensate for more traditional administrative skill sets (i.e., management skills, organization, adaptability, intellect) and other actionable attributes that are crucial to a person's performance in a professional setting. That said, highly developed self-efficacy has been found to increase one's confidence in their own abilities and affect one's ability to develop successful leadership strategies (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004; Weissblueth & Linder, 2020).

Some findings suggest that the structure of the PSES isn't an effective mode of self-evaluation, as there could be inaccuracies and inauthenticity. For example, the administrator may alter their answers or provide dishonest responses (Federici & Skaalvik, 2012) or the results of the PSES are representative of the principal's own motivations to produce their desired school outcomes (Skaalvik, 2020) rather than authentically measuring their perceptions of capacity.

Emerging research suggests that the evolving principal position should consider focusing on the additional inclusion of the principal's efficacy of emotional intelligence, in tandem with the traditional PSES, to encompass the broader spectrum of human emotionality that has become an essential function of the job (Blaik Hourani et al., 2020; Gurley & Dagney, 2020; McBrayer et al. 2020). In addition to the PSES, an exploration of situational leadership should be equally considered when evaluating the effectiveness of a school administrator.

Situational Leadership (Hersey et al., 1982) may be the most significant factor in advancing the mission and vision of a school since administrative leaders may directly, or indirectly, influence every aspect of the institution (Pannell & McBrayer, 2020). Additionally, self-reflection is also needed to provide an accurate evaluation of one's tenable emotional intelligence (Skaalvik, 2020). Debes (2020) found that "[emotional intelligence] explains higher percentages of variance in performance criteria than IQ and managerial competency … suggest(ing) that EI contributes (more) to career advancement than does IQ" (p. 50). Few studies explore any form of self-reflection of teachers in their PPPs, nor the aspiring school leader's perceptions of the effectiveness of their university programs (Fisher, 2010; Weissblueth & Linder, 2020). No studies, to our knowledge, explore preconceived notions of the principalship by teachers who completed their PPPs versus their current notions of their current administrative roles. As PPPs continue to evolve and attempt to better incorporate the reimagined configuration of emotionality and self-reflective inclusions to the PSES structure, it is worth noting that research is lacking key components regarding the comparison of principal self-reflection from active administrators in the field, in a longitudinal exploration of their previous perceptions of efficacy and conceptions of the role of a school administrator from student to practitioner.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is founded on principles of situational leadership as constructed by Hersey et al., (1979), which focuses on the manner in which leaders both self-identify and exhibit professional maturity through relationships and tasks. Task behavior refers to the leader's directions: telling people what, when, where, and how to perform. Relationship behavior refers to two-way communication, including listening and support by the leader. The Relationship versus Task (RvT) diagram (provided in Figure 1) is comprised of four quadrants (telling, selling, participating, and delegating) and further identifies four stratified levels of professional maturity (i.e., M1, M2, M3, and M4).

Figure 1
Professional Maturity: A Relationship versus Task Model of Situational Leadership (Hersey et al., 1982) (used with permission)
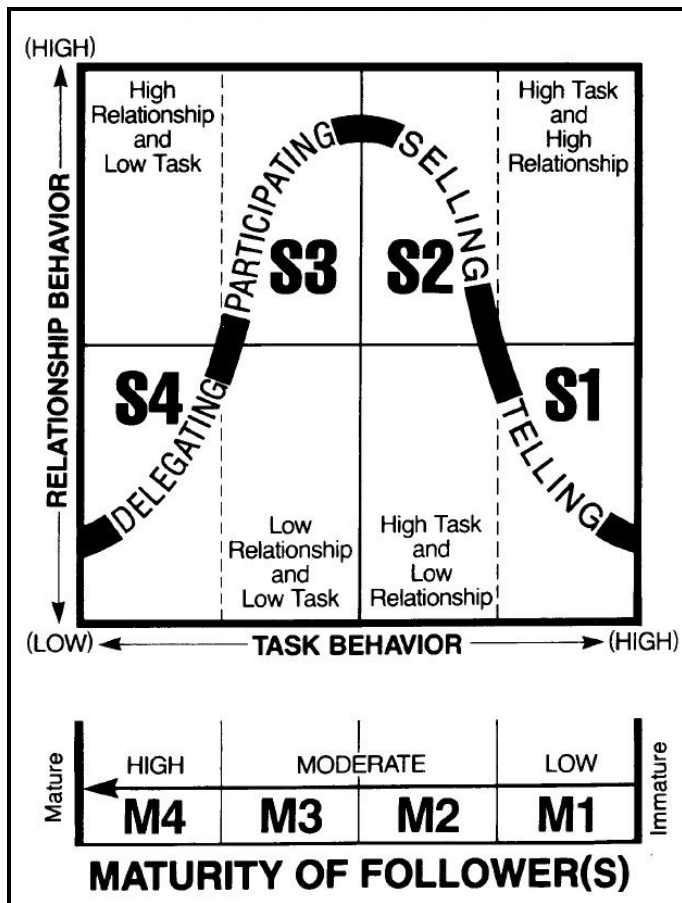
Method

To compare school administrator perceptions of leadership dispositions and situational framing, both before and after these professionals completed their principal preparation programs (PPPs), data was collected from course assignments, as well as the Principal Self-Efficacy Survey (PSES) and semi-structured interviews while serving as school leaders. These interviews covered topics ranging from perspectives that they and other leaders use, self-reports on where they identified themselves in the Relationship versus Task (RvT) conceptual diagram, and responses to a hypothetical school scenario that illuminated their use of situational framing.

Participants

The original pool of forty-five master's degree students, all of whom had been enrolled in a PPP in a large, public university in the Southeastern United States between 2019-2022, were contacted via email and asked if they were officially serving as school administrators. Ten of these former students responded affirmatively and, of these, eight agreed to participate in the study. In the final group, seven of the eight school administrators identified themselves as female, one as male, and all ranged in ages between 30 and 41. An internet search confirmed that the final group of eight were serving in an administrative role in a K-12 school, employed by their central

office. Two of these participants were serving at the elementary level, four in middle school, one at the high school level and one in a K-12 school. Of these, four served as assistant principals, one was a principal designee (performed school administrator functions when the principal was unavailable), and one participant was designated as the site's teacher leader. All schools where the participants worked served students whose families were designated as low socioeconomic income (SES), between 14% to 50%. Self-reported demographic and RvT information for all participants is provided in Table 1.

Table 1
Study Participant Information (n=8)

Participant Name (pseudonym)	Role	School Type	School Econ Dis* %	Age	Sex	RvT Placement** (PPP)	RvT Placement** (in-service)
Amy Keaning	Asst. Principal	Elementary	18	30	Female	S3/S4	S3/S4
Ursula Chapman	District Admin	K-12	21	39	Female	S2/S3	S2/S4
Sam Namath	Asst. Principal	Middle	30	33	Male	S1	S3
Monica Lehman	Asst. Principal	Middle	14	31	Female	S4	S4
Martha Grey	Asst. Principal	Elementary	16	32	Female	S4	S3
Wendy Smith	Prin. Designee	Middle	25	30	Female	S1/S3	S1
Alison Heart	Teacher Leader Coord.	Middle	50	41	Female	S3	S2
Madison Vincent	Asst. Principal	High	33	34	Female	S3	S1/S4

* School Economically Disadvantaged as reported by State Report Card; ** Relationship versus Task (RvT) Situational Leadership Quadrants: S1-Telling/Directing; S2-Delegating, S3-Facilitating/Counseling, S4-Selling/Coaching

Principal Self-Efficacy Survey (PSES)

Using an electronic surveying computer application (Qualtrics™), participants completed the Principal Self-Efficacy Survey (PSES) which assessed their feelings of professional self-efficacy. Likert scales ranged from 1 (none at all) to 3 (very little) to 5 (some degree) to 7 (quite a bit) to 9 (a great deal). This validated survey included eighteen, Likert-scale questions, separated into three areas - efficacy for management, efficacy for instructional leadership, and efficacy for moral leadership. Efficacy for management items allowed participants to gauge their ability to: (a) handle the time demands of the job, (b) handle the paperwork required of the job, (c) maintain

control of their own daily schedule, (d) prioritize among competing demands of the job, (e) cope with the stress of the job, and (f) shape the operational policies and procedures that are necessary to manage their school.

Efficacy for instructional leadership items allowed participants to gauge their ability to: (a) motivate teachers, (b) generate enthusiasm for a shared vision for their school, (c) manage change at their school, (d) create a positive learning environment at their school, (e) facilitate student learning at their school, and (f) raise student achievement on standardized tests. Efficacy for moral leadership items allowed participants to gauge their ability to: (a) promote acceptable behavior among students, (b) promote school spirit among a large majority of the student population, (c) handle effectively the discipline of students at their school, (d) promote a positive image of their school with the media, (e) promote the prevailing values of the community at their school, and (f) promote ethical behavior among school personnel. The Principal Self-Efficacy Survey (PSES) is provided in Appendix A.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The research team conducted semi-structured interviews using the Zoom ™ teleconferencing computer application. Using video, responses to questions were recorded that focused on: (a) participants' current professional roles, (b) questions on situational leadership that had been asked previously during their principal preparation program (PPP) organizational leadership and theory class, and (c) participant estimation of which frames, in order of importance, would be best used to assess a fictitious scenario. The questions on situational leadership were originally posed to the participants via an electronic discussion board and were focused on Bolman & Deal's (2013) four frames of situational inspection (political, human resources, symbolic and structural). More specifically, the participants responded to the following statements/questions: (a) Please comment briefly by hypothesizing which of the four frames you think school leaders "look through" the most, and why you think so, (b) Please share which of the frames you feel you "look through" the most in your current work in schools and why you think so? (c) Which of the four frames do you feel you are most capable of "looking through"? and (d) Which of the four frames is the most difficult for you to use in a real-life re-framing scenario?

Relationship versus Task Diagram and Situational Dilemma

One additional interview question required the participants to inspect a Situational Leadership "Relationship versus Task" (RvT) diagram and describe where they currently found themselves on the diagram. This question and the related diagram were also presented to each of the participants during their PPP organizational leadership and theory class. The final interview question required each participant to listen to a fictitious dilemma (provided in Appendix B) and subsequently assess the participant's understanding of the relative importance of each of Bolman & Deal's four frames (political, human resources, symbolic and structural) by ranking the order of importance. The fictitious dilemma is focused on a school administrator's response to a parent's concern about the availability of military themed books for students to access in a school library. After the scenario was read aloud by the interviewer, each participant was asked, "Of the four frames, which is the most important frame that an effective administrator needs to focus on

to best understand and address the described scenario? the second most important? the third most important? the least important?"

Procedures

To gain an understanding of previous studies that focused on the use of situational leadership in PPP and administrative service, the researchers performed a detailed literature review on these topics. Shortly thereafter, an application to conduct research was forwarded to the researcher's university institutional review board, which was accepted. The research team then contacted forty-five students, using their university email addresses, who had been previously enrolled in a PPP organizational leadership course at a large, public university in the Southeast United States between 2019 and 2022. In this email communication, each potential participant was informed about the nature of the study, data collection methods to be used (electronic surveys and interviews) as well as the study's potential benefits and risks. Ten of the 45 recruited individuals responded affirmatively (response rate: 18%) and a final group of eight individuals confirmed their participation by completing and returning their informed consent forms.

Before being interviewed by the researchers, each participant completed the Principal Self-Efficacy Survey (PSES) which gauged their feelings of professional confidence. After the PSES results were collected, the research team used the Zoom™ computer application to record individual semi-structured interviews that gauged participant views of professional dispositions and situational leadership, each lasting approximately thirty minutes. During inspection of the audiovisual recordings, notes were taken by members of the research team describing behavioral characteristics demonstrated by each of the participants (e.g., gestures, tonal emphases). Except for the situational dilemma and demographic questions, all questions used in the interviews were stated exactly as they had been presented as discussion board questions via the Canvas™ learning management system during each participant's PPP. As was done during their PPP, all participants were shown a Relationship versus Task (RvT) diagram during their interviews and asked to assess their situational leadership style by designating which quadrant(s) they see themselves represented at that time.

Audio portions of the recorded interviews were transcribed and subsequently edited for accuracy. Using audio transcripts of these interviews, open coding was used to analyze participant responses regarding their current service as school administrators, resulting in thirty categories. After the open coding process was complete, axial coding was conducted which resulted on four interrelated themes across all interviews. For questions that matched those which had been previously posed to the participant during their organizational leadership class (i.e., situational framing and RvT), responses were placed side by side for comparison.

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Results

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Participant responses to survey and interview questions were analyzed to compare participant feelings of self-efficacy and situational framing during their principal preparation program (PPP) and while serving as school administrators. In addition, numerical data gathered by the Qualtrics™ electronic surveying computer application was used to gauge participant responses to each of the Principal Self-Efficacy Survey (PSES) questions. Descriptive statistics (means,

ranges, and standard deviations) were calculated for each of the eighteen PSES questions (provided in Appendix A), as well as separate calculations for the three PSES subscales (efficacy for management, efficacy for instructional leadership, and efficacy for moral leadership). These results can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2

Principal Self-Efficacy Scale (PSES) Subscale Means (Standard Deviations) for Participants

Participant	Management	Instructional Leadership	Moral Leadership
Madison	6.0 (1.1)	6.7 (0.8)	6.0 (1.1)
Sam	6.3 (1.0)	7.3 (0.8)	6.0 (1.1)
Monica	5.7 (2.1)	5.7 (1.0)	6.0 (1.7)
Ursula	7.7 (1.6)	8.0 (1.1)	8.7 (0.8)
Alison	4.3 (2.7)	3.7 (1.0)	3.7 (1.0)
Wendy	7.0 (2.2)	6.0 (2.4)	5.7 (2.1)
Amy	6.3 (1.0)	7.3 (1.5)	7.3 (0.8)
Martha	6.7 (0.8)	8.0 (1.1)	8.0 (1.1)
M	6.3	6.6	6.4
SD	1.6	1.2	1.2
Range	4.3-7.0	3.7-8.0	3.7-8.7

Notes: Management Subscale Questions: 3, 11, 12, 15, 17, 18; Instructional Leadership Subscale Questions: 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 9; Moral Leadership Subscale Questions: 5, 8, 10, 13, 14, 16; Likert scale: 1=None at All, 3=Very Little, 5=Some Degree, 7=Quite a Bit, 9=A Great Deal

Means for all PSES subscales of efficacy for management, instructional leadership, and moral leadership for all participants were closely aligned, ranging from 6.3 to 6.6, most closely relating to "quite a bit" on the Likert scale. The highest average scores were attributed to instructional leadership (6.6) and the lowest were attributed to management (6.3). Owing to a single participant's low-end responses (Alison), individual participant subscale responses ranged from 3.7 (very little) to 8.7 (a great deal). Omitting her responses, individual participant subscale response lower range values were two points higher at 5.7 (some degree). Generally speaking, participants self-reported rankings of self-efficacy were slightly above average for all scales.

For data gathered during the semi-structured interviews, the audio portions were transcribed and later edited for accuracy. Recordings of visual data (e.g., gestures, emphasized words), were added to these transcriptions. Separate, open coding procedures were performed by both researchers to analyze participant responses, from which thirty categories were produced. Axial coding produced four interrelated themes, namely: (a) personality factors, (b) associations with school mission or vision, (c) workplace contextual factors, and (d) professional relationships. To substantiate these general themes, examples of responses from study participants are provided in the following sections.

Personality Factors

When study participants expressed their understandings about the degree that they focus on any particular frame or frames during the work day, as defined by Bolman and Deal (2015), many of them referred to their own personalities or dispositions. For example, when clarifying the reasons why she primarily focuses the structural frame at work, principal designee Wendy Smith shared that, "I think maybe it's a little bit more of my personality…if we have a certain goal like I'm going to try my best to meet that goal…I really am big on policies and procedures and those things being communicated…(so) it would be the structural frame". In relation to the broader themes of the study (i.e., self-efficacy, situational leadership, and professional maturity), personality factors relate to all of these in that school leader dispositions, confidence and the degree that they feel efficacious, affect the manner in which these professionals address unique circumstances presented in the workplace.

Associations with School Mission or Vision

In terms of how the participants generally use framing in the workplace, many of the participants felt grounded in their use of their school's mission and/or vision statements to assist them in particular circumstances. When asked to list the most important frame that an effective administrator needs to focus on to best understand and address a particular situational dilemma (i.e., debate on which books should be in the school library), participant Martha Grey stated that, "…so I think the first one would be, um, the structural frame. And just going by you know, what is the mission? what is the vision or the procedures that are in place already for something like this?" In relation to the broader themes of the study (i.e., self-efficacy, situational leadership, and professional maturity), addressing a school's mission and vision relates most directly with situational leadership. School leaders are tasked with grounding professional decisions based on the degree that the results of these deliberations support the mission and vision of their schools.

Workplace Contextual Factors

Many of the participants, when asked about the use of situational framing and which frame(s) they would use to guide them during the school day, mentioned the importance for them to more fully understand the context of the situation at hand. For example, participant Monica Lehman, an assistant principal, referred to the use of the symbolic frame when gaining perspective before addressing an issue at work, stating "I think…understanding where you're at, your community, your culture". To further press this point, participant Amy Keating, another assistant principal, stated that when addressing a situation, "…it honestly depends on the day and the season…and I've learned that in real life…". In relation to the broader themes of the study (i.e., self-efficacy, situational leadership, and professional maturity), contextual factors relate most closely with situational leadership as these considerations must be taken into account when school leaders regularly assess specific circumstances when making decisions during the workday.

Professional Relationships

Finally, the theme of professional relationships – the manner in which school employees relate to each other - was prevalent in the remarks given by many participants when asked about

situational framing. For example, district administrator Ursula Chapman stated when considering all the frames that school leaders need to use, that "…they are taken into account, all of them to some degree (but) if I had to rest on one, it depends on who they work with". When deciding which frame is most important to address a given situational dilemma (i.e., debate on which books should be in the school library), participant and teacher leader Alison Heart found that it was important to, "…follow…the human resources (frame), to kind of help with that relationship and to make (all parties) feel better about the situation or whatever". In relation to the broader themes of the study (i.e., self-efficacy, situational leadership, and professional maturity), professional relationships are most aligned with all three of these themes. A school leader's level of confidence exhibited in their role, their ability to effectively assess situations at their site, and the degree that they make "veteran" decisions – all have the potential to affect relationships with constituent parties at the school (i.e., parents, teachers, staff, students) and in the broader school community.

Situational Leadership

For questions related to situational leadership (i.e., frame designations and those associated to the Relationship versus Task chart), responses between what participants reported while enrolled in their principal preparation program were placed side by side with those the participants reported while employed as school administrators. To compare responses for all participants while enrolled in their PPPs and during their service as school administrators, tables were created which displayed the results for all participants for each of the four questions posed to participants regarding the use of Bolman and Deal's (2013) frames, namely which: (a) [they think] school leaders [they had] worked with "look through" the most, (b) [they] look through the most in [their] current work in [their] schools, (c) [they] feel [they were] most capable of looking through, and (d) [they felt] would be the most difficult for [them] to use in a real-life scenario [in their] workplace. The results for the first query, namely "choose one of these frames that you think school leaders you have worked with 'look through' the most" is presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Participant responses to: "Choose one of these frames that you think school leaders you have worked with look through the most…"

Participant Name (pseudonym)	Political	Human Resources	Structural	Symbolic	Current Role
Ursula Chapman	ILR		PPP		EPP Supervisor
Martha Grey		ILR	PPP		Assistant Principal
Alison Heart	ILR	PPP			Teacher Leader
Amy Keaning		PPP, ILR			Assistant Principal
Monica Lehman		PPP	ILR		Assistant Principal
Sam Namath		PPP	ILR		Assistant Principal
Wendy Smith		PPP, ILR			Teacher Leader
Madison Vincent			PPP, ILR		Dean of Intervention

Note: * PPP: While in Principal Preparation Program; ** ILR: While In Leadership Role; *** EPP: Educator Preparation Program

Comparing results of this first question reveals that three of the eight participants (Keaning, Smith, and Vincent) did not change their answers between the time that they were enrolled as PPP students and later while employed as school administrators, while five had different answers. Also, during the time they were in their PPPs and while in their current roles as school administrators, none of the participants felt that school leaders they had worked with looked through the symbolic frame the most. Additionally, only two of the participants felt that leaders they had worked with in the past used the political frame the most (both responses during their PPP), none of the eight participants responded with this frame while in a leadership role.

The results for the second query, namely "choose one of the [frames] you think you 'look through' the most in your current work in schools" are presented in Table 4. As stated previously, these results only reflect participant feelings during their service as school administrators.

Table 4
Participant responses to: "Choose one of these frames that you look through the most in your current work in schools."

Participant Name (pseudonym)	Political	Human Resources	Structural	Symbolic	Current Role
Ursula Chapman			ILR		EPP Supervisor
Martha Grey	ILR				Assistant Principal
Alison Heart		ILR			Teacher Leader
Amy Keaning			ILR		Assistant Principal
Monica Lehman		ILR			Assistant Principal
Sam Namath		ILR			Assistant Principal
Wendy Smith			ILR		Teacher Leader
Madison Vincent			ILR		Dean of Intervention

There was general agreement among study participants the use of human resources and structural frames was most prevalent in their work as school administrators. That said, as was true for the previous question [i.e., (the frames (they thought) school leaders (they had) worked with "looked through" the most], none of the participants felt that they, as current school administrators, looked through the symbolic frame the most in their work, and only one participant stated they looked through the political frame the most as an early-career school administrator.

The results for the third question, namely "which [frame] do you feel you are most capable of 'looking through'?" are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Participant responses to: "Which one of these four frames do you feel you are most capable of looking through?"

Participant Name (pseudonym)	Political	Human Resources	Structural	Symbolic	Current Role
Ursula Chapman			PPP, ILR		EPP Supervisor
Martha Grey		PPP, ILR			Assistant Principal
Alison Heart		PPP, ILR			Teacher Leader
Amy Keaning		PPP	ILR		Assistant Principal
Monica Lehman	PPP		ILR		Assistant Principal
Sam Namath		PPP, ILR			Assistant Principal
Wendy Smith		PPP	ILR		Teacher Leader
Madison Vincent		PPP	ILR		Dean of Intervention

Note: * PPP: While in Principal Preparation Program; ** ILR: While In Leadership Role; *** EPP: Educator Preparation Program

As was true for the previous two questions, the participants stated their confidence in the use of the human resource and structural frames, both as aspiring school administrators and while in service. While half the participants did not change their answers between the time they were enrolled in their PPPs and while employed as school administrators (three confirming the human resource frame, and one confirming the structural frame), the other four participants answered with a change to this question (all of whom moved from confidence in human resources/political frames to the structural frame). As was the case with the two previous questions, none of the participants felt, neither during or after their PPP, that the symbolic frame was the one they felt most capable of looking through.

The results for the fourth question, namely "which (of) Bolman & Deal's four frames do you feel would be the most difficult for you to use in a real-life scenario at your workplace?" are presented in Table 6.

Table 6

Participant responses to: "Which of these four frames do you feel would be the most difficult for you to use in a real-life scenario at your workplace?"

Participant Name (pseudonym)	Political	Human Resources	Structural	Symbolic	Current Role
Ursula Chapman	ILR			PPP	EPP Supervisor
Martha Grey	PPP			ILR	Assistant Principal
Alison Heart	PPP, ILR				Teacher Leader
Amy Keaning	PPP, ILR				Assistant Principal
Monica Lehman	PPP			ILR	Assistant Principal
Sam Namath	PPP			ILR	Assistant Principal
Wendy Smith	PPP			ILR	Teacher Leader
Madison Vincent	PPP			ILR	Dean of Intervention

Note: * PPP: While in Principal Preparation Program; ** ILR: While In Leadership Role; *** EPP: Educator Preparation Program

This table shows a general agreement by all participants, both during and after their enrollment in a PPP, that the political and symbolic frames would be the most difficult for them to use in a workplace real-life scenario. Stated alternatively, none of the participants responded that it would not be difficult for them to use the human resources and structural frames in a real-life scenario in the workplace. While two of the participants responded similarly in both timeframes (difficulty in using the political frame), five of the six participants moved from political to the symbolic frame, and one from the symbolic to the political frame.

Looking at all results of participant responses to questions about situational framing as described by Bolman and Deal (2013), they expressed confidence in their use of the structural and human resources frames when addressing issues in the workplace, with a corresponding lack of confidence in their use of the symbolic and political frames. These responses were supported by their pre-service experiences in schools and perceptions of school leaders they had worked with in the past.
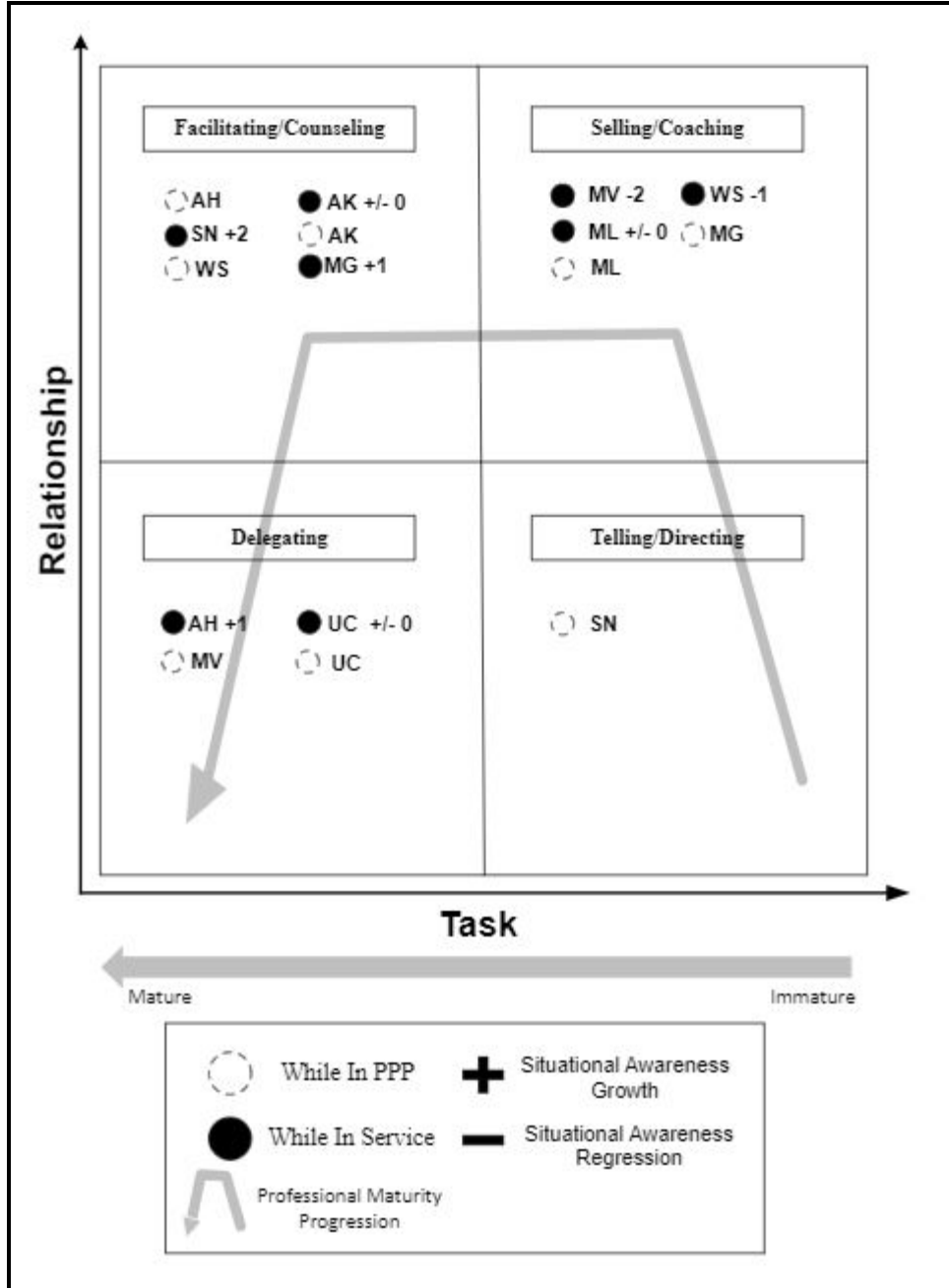
Professional Maturity

In terms of participant responses to the Relationship versus Task (RvT) diagram, a composite figure was created to illustrate participant responses reflecting both their feelings about their leadership style during their principal preparation program (PPP) and that during their current role as school administrators. Initials for participant pseudonym first and last names were used for brevity as well as the number of levels changed in terms of their situational awareness progression ("+" for level increase, "+/-0" for no change, and "-" for level decrease) to compare participant responses during their PPP versus those while employed as school administrators. This figure, provided in Figure 10, is based on the premise that, as leaders increase their

professional maturity as they progress from telling/directing (S1) to selling/coaching (S2) to facilitating/counseling (S3) to delegating (S4) (Hersey et al., 1982).

Figure 10

Participant Reponses When Referencing the Relationship vs. Task (RvT) Diagram

Based on this RvT figure, one can determine the degree that study participants increased their professional maturity between the time that they were enrolled in their PPPs to the time they were interviewed for this study as school administrators. It is important to note that, both during their PPP and during their interview, the participants were presented with a simplified version of the RvT figure which did not show any information about the levels of professional

maturity, as represented by the curved arrow and designations of M1, M2, M3, and M4. By inspecting Figure 10, there are three participants who self-reported themselves trending in a positive direction (i.e., SN+2, MG+1, AH+1), three participants responded by naming the same position (i.e., ML, AK, and UC) and two participants who trended in a negative direction (i.e., WS-1 and MV-2). Therefore, for this small group of participants, a composite tally of their self-reports using the RvT figure are essentially level, on average, with as many increasing as those decreasing, both in direction and magnitude.

Finally, while serving as school administrators, the participants in the study were asked to rank the frames they would use in responding to a fictitious dilemma focused on a school administrator's response to a parent's concern about the availability of military themed books for students to access in a school library. Although there may be some ambiguity about which order is considered "accurate", the researchers were less interested in how close the participants were to an actual answer than how closely their responses were to each other. The results of this inquiry are provided in Table 7.

Table 7
Participant responses to: "Of the four frames, please list the most important frame that an effective administrator needs to focus on to best understand and address the described scenario, the second most important? the third most important? the least important?"

Participant Name (pseudonym)	Political	Human Resources	Structural	Symbolic	Current Role
Ursula Chapman	3	1	4	2	EPP Supervisor
Martha Grey	3	2	1	4	Assistant Principal
Alison Heart	4	2	1	3	Teacher Leader
Amy Keaning	1	3	2	4	Assistant Principal
Monica Lehman	4	3	2	1	Assistant Principal
Sam Namath	2	3	1	4	Assistant Principal
Wendy Smith	1	2	3	4	Teacher Leader
Madison Vincent	2	4	1	3	Dean of Intervention

Note: 1=Most Important, 2=2nd Most Important, 3=3rd Most Important, 4=Least Important

Results of this sub-investigation focused on the application of situational framing produced wide ranging results. As table 7 shows, there is little agreement between participants about the order of importance of frames that need to be investigated for the same fictitious dilemma. No two participants placed the frames in the same order, and each frame had at least on participant place it in all four ranks of importance. It is clear that dynamic situations in schools, such as the one provided to the participants, may be seen by a school administrator from a variety of perspectives, but identifying the most important frames prior to addressing a situation, increases the likelihood of resolving school issues promptly and with a high degree of success (Bolman & Deal, 2013). These results, combined with those provided through participant responses about their confidence in use of individual frames, as well as those associated to the

Relationship versus Task (RvT) diagram, further reinforce the need for ongoing study of situational framing of aspiring and fully employed school administrators.

Discussion

This study was guided by three research questions: (a) How differently do school administrators perceive organizational theory compared to when they were enrolled in a principal preparation program? (b) How well do assessments of situational leadership compare for aspiring school principals during their principal preparation programs versus when they later were serving as school administrators? and (c) How do early-career school administrator ratings of their own professional self-efficacy relate to their ideas of leadership and the use of framing? Investigations of these questions produced mixed results. The comparison between responses of pre-service administrators during their principal preparation program (PPP) (discussion board responses) versus those communicated while in-service (interview responses) on the use of frames showed a great degree of alignment, as evidenced from the data presented in Tables 3-6. In terms of situational awareness, the data provided in Table 7 reveals little agreement in the participants ability as professionals to correctly rank frames of reference, when analyzing a fictitious scenario. Finally, the data in Figure 10 reveals that there was no marked increase using this particular measure of professional maturity among the participants in this study.

Results of this study show that school administrators who had been prepared in the same PPP reported a high sense of self-efficacy in their current roles. In addition, self-reported perceptions of situational leadership (i.e., framing) and professional maturity by this small group of early-career leaders varied greatly between those expressed while enrolled in their PPP versus those expressed after assuming leadership roles. In terms of estimating the degree of professional maturity as measured by the Relationship versus Task diagram (Hersey et al., 1982), there was no evidence that, as a collective group, the participants viewed themselves as increasing in that measure. Assuming that PPPs aspire to increase the professional maturity of aspiring school leaders, the results of this study, while limited due to the small number of participants, coincide with prior studies that advocate for a "paradigm shift" in the way that these professionals are prepared for service (Grissom et al., 2018; Dickens et al., 2021; Genao, 2021).

With regard to the confidence that the participants in this study expressed regarding the use of one or more in a select group of situational frames, they were in overall agreement that their confidence in the structural and human resources frames mirrored those of school leaders they had come in contact with earlier in their careers. The opposite was true of frames that they felt they were "least capable of looking through" as early-career school leaders, namely the symbolic and political frames. Assuming that there should be a balance of the use of frames (Bolman & Deal, 2013), both in terms of professional confidence and exposure to others who exemplify a high degree of expertise in their use, PPPs would do well to not only evaluate aspiring administrator confidence in the use of frames, but also mentor them with sitting school leaders who demonstrate capacity with situational framing that addresses their needs.

Although this study did not address the degree that assessing a principal's self-efficacy, as measured in this study with the Principal Self-Efficacy Survey (PSES) (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004), requires an additional measure of a school administrator's emotional intelligence (Blaik-Hourani et al., 2020; Gurley & Dagney, 2020; McBrayer et al. 2020), the variety of

participant responses to the same situational dilemma provides incentive to investigate the motivations of aspiring administrators from a variety of perspectives.

Comparing understandings of self-efficacy and situational leadership between aspiring and fully employed school leaders provides data that PPPs can use to determine the effectiveness of their programs. This is especially true when considering distinct areas that may need additional emphasis (e.g., symbolic and political situational framing). School district office human resources and supervision personnel would also benefit from an assessment of school leader self-efficacy and the use of situational framing to determine the capacity of school leaders in their schools, and devise professional development to bolster identified needs evidenced by these assessments.

Aside from the limited sample size, this study is limited by the use of participants from one PPP and the validity/reliability of the instruments (i.e., PSES, Situational Framing Graphic) used. Also, none of the participants were employed as school principals, rather they held lesser school administrative roles. Based on the limited results of this study, additional research is recommended into the use of evaluative instruments to measure self-assessment and situational awareness by aspiring school administrators as well as those employed in schools. Using the same protocols employed in this study, larger numbers of participants would assist in validating the instruments used, and assess the reliability of this study. Also, a larger sample size and more frequent assessments of participants (i.e., longitudinal) may result in a more robust investigation of the degree that demographic factors (e.g., age, years of experience, type of PPP, type of school, role in school) affect the degree that aspiring administrators alter their perceptions of the use of situational framing from the time they are preparing for service through their early-career experiences.

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Appendix A – Principal Self-Efficacy Survey

In your current role as administrator, to what extent can you…

	None at All		Very Little		Some Degree		Quite a Bit		A Great Deal
1. facilitate student learning at your school?	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
2. generate enthusiasm for a shared vision for the school?	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
3. handle the time demands of the job?	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
4. manage change in your school?	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
5. promote school spirit among a large majority of the student population?	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
6. create a positive learning environment in your school?	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
7. raise student achievement on standardized tests?	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
8. promote a positive image of your school with the media?	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
9. motivate teachers?	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
10. promote the prevailing values of the community in your school?	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
11. maintain control of your own daily schedule?	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
12. shape the operational policies and procedures that are necessary to manage your school?	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
13. handle effectively the discipline of students in your school?	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
14. promote acceptable behavior among students?	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
15. handle the paperwork required of the job?	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
16. promote ethical behavior among school personnel?	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
17. cope with the stress of the job?	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
18. prioritize among competing demands of the job?	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Appendix B – Participant Interview Questions

1. Please state your full name.
2. Since you were enrolled in the last year of your administrator preparation program at the University of Tennessee, have you been assigned to any school leadership positions or taken on any leadership roles? If so, please describe.

I will now share a screen with you that highlights Bolman & Deal's Four Frames, the major theme of EDAM 513 (Organizational Leadership). [show screen and read though all the descriptions]

3. Please choose one of these frames (political, human resources, symbolic or structural) that you think school leaders you have worked with "look through" the most, and why you think so.
4. Now, please choose one of these (political, human resources, symbolic or structural) you think **you** "look through" the most in your current work in schools, and why you think so.
5. If the answers to the last two questions are not the same, please hypothesize why you think this is the case.

I will now share with you a relationship versus task diagram, which describes the types of tasks and relationships leaders develop with those they work with.

6. Given what you see here, describe which quadrant best exemplifies where you are currently as an educational professional.
7. Going back now to Bolman & Deal's Four Frames [show that chart], which one do you feel you are most capable of "looking through"? (it may be different than your previous answer of which you look through the most)
8. Which Bolman & Deal's Four Frames do you feel would be the most difficult for you to use in a real-life scenario at your workplace?

*I will now describe a brief, fictitious scenario which is set in a school. After I do so, you will be asked to rank the four frames, from 1 being the most important frame that an effective administrator needs to focus on to best **understand and** address the described scenario and 4 being the least important frame to focus on in the given scenario. While I tell the story, you will have access to the "Four Frames" chart. A parent volunteer, working in the library, comes into a high school office at the end of the school year and asks to speak to the principal. The parent tells the principal that she is working with the school librarian to purchase books for students to check out the following school year. The parent states that she and the librarian drafted separate lists of books they think are informative, interesting and previously approved for use by the school district. She also relayed that the budget for purchasing these books is limited, so not all books that she and the librarian wanted can be purchased, so the two of them designated which three from each of their lists were not to be debated by the other. The parent then told the principal that the librarian chose, in the top three of her list, a book entitled, "The Tools of the Infantry Soldier: Guns, Ammunition, and Knives", which included both informational text and detailed images related to ground warfare. The parent then stated that although the book was on the school district approved list, she felt that it should not be made available to students with the current media focus on school violence. The parent finished by saying that she relayed her*

objections to the librarian, but felt the librarian, a former U.S. Navy sergeant was not receptive to her concerns.

9. Of the four frames, please list the most important frame that an effective administrator needs to focus on to best understand and address the described scenario, the second most important? the third most important? the least important?