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# A Qualitative Study: Forensics Coaches' Perceptions of Administrators' Leadership Styles and the Impact Within Their Professional Learning Communities

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This dissertation, directed and approved by the candidate's committee, has been accepted by the College of Graduate and Professional Studies of Abilene Christian University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

## **Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership**



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Dr. Joey Cope, Dean of the College of  
Graduate and Professional Studies

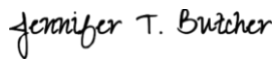
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Abilene Christian University

School of Educational Leadership

A Qualitative Study: Forensics Coaches' Perceptions of Administrators' Leadership Styles and  
the Impact Within Their Professional Learning Communities

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Kenyatta D. Farmer

June 2020

## Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to every little girl who dares to dream. To the teenager who might not know which path to take, start walking, and never look back. To the woman who made mistakes but did not allow those mistakes to define her future, this is for you. Most importantly, I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Jacquelyn Ray Brown. Momma, thank you for believing in me. Thank you for the prayers and the sacrifices that you made for me. To my children: Nicholas, Taevia, and Sydney Lewis, I love you in and out of time. I hope that you, too, will dream. Dare to dream an impossible possibility and watch God add his super to your natural as he transforms your dreams into a supernatural reality. I love you.

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“And He has said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.’ Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me” (2 Corinthians 12:9, The New King James Version). Heavenly Father, thank you for giving me the strength to complete this task. I give you the glory and the honor.

I want to express my most profound appreciation to the following people for their support of this project: my committee at Abilene Christian University for your guidance and encouragement. God placed me with compassionate leaders who wanted to see me succeed.

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To Dr. Tifarah Dial, whose love and friendship blesses my soul every day of my life. You were there when I felt like giving up. You saw the tears of despair fill my eyes and roll down my face, but you encouraged me to stay in the fight. You sat up with me when I needed a friend, and you reminded me of the things I had already accomplished. I would not have completed this journey without your support.

I want to thank the forensics coaches who participated in this study. I value the time that each of you gave me in sharing your personal stories and lived experiences as forensics coaches and educators. Thank you for what it is that you do with our students. I appreciate your commitment to the forensics profession.

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## Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative interpretive study was to explore class 5/A-6/A forensics coaches' perceptions of administrators' leadership styles and their impact on their professional learning communities in northeast Texas. This study was conducted through open-ended, semi-structured interviews to explore forensics coaches' perceptions of administrators' leadership styles and the impact within their professional learning communities. The problem that drove this study was that within schools where there may be only 1 or possibly 2 highly qualified teachers hired to teach non-core subjects, the opportunity for discourse regarding student learning, shared work-related problems, student achievement, challenges, and best practices are limited. Forensics coaches work behind closed doors, rarely collaborating with colleagues about ways to enhance coaching and teaching practices improving student success. The sample population was high school forensics coaches in Texas with 3 or more years of coaching experience in class 5/A-6/A university scholastic league. The findings indicated a preference for off-site professional learning environments, as well as a desire for administrators to apply multiple styles of leadership depending on the context. The results suggested that administrators consider implementing various modes of leadership styles within their leadership practices focused on forensics coaches' professional development and strategies of leadership to provide adequate provisions to improve forensics coaches' job performance.

*Keywords: forensics coaches, full-range leadership model, transformational*

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Over the last decade, interest in the links among research, policy, and practice in education has increased (DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005). A professional development model serves many purposes for teachers to learn new teaching methods and strategies, share best practices, and make connections with colleagues to enhance professional learning experiences (DuFour & Fullan, 2013). Van Driel and Berry (2012) argued researchers, policymakers, school administrators, and teachers who can apply knowledge beyond traditional school reform efforts and training form a professional learning community for all education stakeholders to support best practices for unique school contexts.

Characterized as a robust systematic process allowing teachers to share practices to improve student achievement, a professional learning community exemplifies the concept of ongoing and continuous collaborative learning through error analysis and reflective practices (Caskey & Carpenter, 2012). Working together in teams, teachers share best practices, foster curriculum development, and engage in continuous job-embedded learning (Darling-Hammond, 2006). This robust process of collaborative learning assumes that teachers are lifelong learners who should gather and share insights from their experiences, with the support of their teammates and leaders, to ensure that this learning enriches and increases the quality of their teaching and achievement of learning outcomes (DuFour & Fullan, 2013).

The literature related to the areas of shared collaborative peer instruction suggested that professional learning communities are well suited to provide a framework for teacher development that is connected to appropriately structured learning environments and that sustain stellar teaching practices (Caskey & Carpenter, 2012). These intentional learning communities offer a sense of hope for improving schools through working relationships among the staff.

Administrators and teachers contribute to continuous teacher and student growth (Van Driel & Berry, 2012). This process creates an environment that is conducive to increased collaboration and sustainable academic achievement. Stanley (2011) referred to intentional collaboration as a significant component in constructing individual and school capacities for continuous and sustainable learning in the rapidly changing field of education.

The benefits of professional learning communities provide members with opportunities to clearly explain their approach and best practices for teaching students (DuFour & Fullan, 2013). Through a shared commonality, members enhance the quality of collaboration and fuel their creative energies. When members of professional learning communities share in this creative process, they contribute different perspectives about their teaching experiences. These collaborative practices help navigate the road to sustainable professional learning (Cusick, 2014).

For teachers to partake in a collaborative process, institutions must create opportunities for teachers to participate in instructional teams that are driven by student learning. When an instructional team emphasizes student learning, they designate meeting times embedded in the workday during the school year (DuFour et al., 2005). Hilliard (2015) asserted that when professional learning communities are connected to teacher needs, structured to support individual teacher learning and strengthen development, it contributes to a system that promotes a healthy learning environment. Even in schools that wholeheartedly support and enforce the idea of collaboration, teachers often work in seclusion (Sindberg, 2014).

Despite research highlighting the benefits of professional learning communities improving instructional practices, which lead to increased student achievement, DuFour and Fullan (2013) posited that existing organizational structures within many school districts continue to cause distress. Moreover, this continues to be a prevalent trend throughout the public

education system in the United States (DuFour et al., 2005). There are many disparities found within the professional learning community that affects content-specific, teacher learning, and school leadership practices. These deficiencies cause significant negative impacts on the professional learning experiences for content-specific teachers (Freeman, Rogers, & Hopkins, 2017). Often, passive participants, such as forensics coaches, may be isolated on their campus because they are often the only forensics coach or debate teacher in a building or district (Carmack & Holm, 2015). This can lead to a gap in practical knowledge as an instructor specifically in forensics, adheres to pedagogical content (Stanley, 2011).

The roles of forensics coaches and teachers have evolved considerably over the past four decades (Rogers, 2002). Forensics coaches handle administrative policies and regulations, accounting, tournament schedules, travel arrangements, fundraising, teaching classes, monitoring individual student growth, bookkeeping, after-school practice, public relations, student evaluations, and maintaining the knowledge of communication theory and practice (Bistodeau, 2015; Outzen & Cronn-Mills, 2012). The professional development of forensics coaches is exceptionally critical because of their boundless capacity to positively affect student achievement; however, there is a lack of understanding of the importance and the impact of forensics coaches. Professional learning communities within a conventional public educational school setting tend to fail in harnessing this potential due to the lack of content-specific development.

More than four decades ago, McBath (1975) argued that the core of research in the field of forensics coaching was to improve education through both longevity and continued academic education for teachers. Researchers contended that providing opportunities for teachers to collaborate within a subject-specific learning community lends a solution from the isolation these

teachers might experience (DuFour & Fullan, 2013; Stanley, 2011). As teachers continue to experience challenges with school restructuring and strict accountability required by federal and state government policies (DuFour et al., 2005; DuFour & Fullan, 2013), scholars recognized the significant role leadership plays in supporting teacher growth and professional learning (DuFour & Fullan, 2013). Stanley (2011) noted that school administrators create productive collaborative, professional learning environments when they group teachers into effective teams, breaking down the walls of isolation that weaken professional learning environments. Likewise, Neumerski (2012) argued that the school administrator's function is to create opportunities where teachers can work together where they can share content-specific practices for improved learning.

Researchers described teacher perceptions of the impact of professional learning communities' implementation (DuFour et al., 2005); however, there is limited empirical data that explores the impact of professional learning communities on forensics coaches' instructional performance and learning (Van Driel & Berry, 2012). This warrants the need for a detailed exploration of forensics coaches' perceptions regarding administrators' leadership styles that impact professional learning communities within their schools. The collection of data could spark a discussion that educational institutions may utilize to help administrators analyze their leadership styles. This study aimed to address the current drought of published research that continues to cause long-term implications for forensics coaches and their leaders (Outzen & Cronn-Mills, 2012).

## **Background**

In 1926, The National Forensics League chartered 100 high schools (National Forensic Association, 2013) and provided individual speaking and competitive debate activities

(Littlefield, 1991) for high school debaters in the United States. Forensics, as a cocurricular activity, has been viewed as an educational undertaking (Brand, 2000). Within the forensics curriculum, students are taught how to advance their speaking skills and become more influential critical thinkers (Williams & Gantt, 2005). Forensics coaches guide students in critical thinking, argumentation, and public speaking using mock debate practiced within a classroom setting (Carmack & Holm, 2015). This approach enhances personal leadership qualities within the students in areas outside of debate competition (Outzen & Cronn-Mills, 2012).

Carmack and Holm (2015) asserted that forensics coaches' who formed a more effective team relationship with their students produced a change in the group dynamic, which generated "a positive correlation between the presence of a squad or team, and their feelings of success" (p. 34). Unlike educators who coach high school sports, with the support and guidance of other sports coaches and athletic directors, forensics coaches might not have access to this type of support system (Jensen & Jensen, 2007). The amount of time that forensics coaches devote toward hours of preparation, practice, and competitions, quickly results in professional burnout.

Carmack and Holm (2015) argued that many forensics coaches who experienced the burnout of coaching typically exit the forensics profession, leaving the next generation of coaches with the same principles and methods of forensics education and training and create a void for adequate progress. Unfortunately, the review of the literature indicated that forensics coaches suffered a lack of scholarly productions. Kuyper (2011) argued that administrators do not have current research or data on how to best support the collaborative needs of forensics coaches through the lens of coaching. Comprehensive knowledge based on research could benefit forensics educators and their leaders, building a culture of professionalism and sustainability required in academic standards.

## **Statement of the Problem**

According to Holm and Miller (2004), within a school where there may be only one, possibly two, highly qualified teachers hired for noncore subjects, the opportunity for discourse regarding student learning, shared work-related problems, student achievement, challenges, and best practices are limited. A significant problem in high schools, particularly for subjects like student debate, is there is often only one forensics coach or debate teacher in a building or district (Bistodeau, 2015; Bull & Cummings, 2002). Forensics coaches' work behind closed doors, rarely, if ever, collaborating with colleagues about ways to enhance coaching and teaching practices to improve student success (Carmack & Holm, 2015). No exploration exists that provides continuous development that mimics the process of constant revitalization and professional growth. The lack of this exploration leaves forensics coaches alone without the guidance of a role model (Dodor, Sira, & Hausafus, 2010).

Park and Choi (2016) claimed that administrators hold the key to creating positive learning environments in which teachers are likely to develop relationships that promote personal growth and shared collaborative planning. With the increasing administrative duties and policies forensics coaches are forced to employ (Freeman et al., 2017), the time for experienced school principals to create and effectively support the role of forensics coaching is now (Bistodeau, 2015; Littlefield, 1991). This study hopes to contribute significantly to the examination of administrators' leadership styles and the perceived impact their tactics have on the professional learning communities of forensics coaches.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this basic interpretive qualitative study was to explore forensics coaches' perceptions of administrators' leadership styles and the impact within their professional learning



communities. Through the inclusion of the forensics coaches' frontline experiences and engagements with their students, this study could help administrators analyze their leadership styles. Through this personal analysis, administrators could positively impact the forensics coaching profession and advance students' content knowledge.

### **Research Questions**

This study explored forensics coaches' perceptions of administrator's leadership styles and the impact within their professional learning communities. The following research questions guided this study:

**Q1.** What are the forensics coaches' perceptions of administrators' leadership styles who work in their schools?

**Q2.** How do those perceived leadership styles impact their professional learning communities?

### **Definition of Key Terms**

For this study, the following key terms are defined.

**Debate.** Debate is a formal discussion. It involves the opposing views of two parties, affirmative and negative, on a given topic (Freeman et al., 2017).

**Forensics.** Forensics is known as an argumentative mental sport that originates from the adjective "forensics." Forensics is known as the earliest meaning in English, belonging to, used in, or suitable to courts or to open forums and public discussions (Carmack & Holm, 2015).

**Forensics coach.** The forensics coach is an educator who serves as the director of forensics, head coach, assistant coach, or high school teacher of a forensics team (Bartanen & Littlefield, 2015).

**Full-range leadership model.** Focusing on various workforce situations where the

leader's behavior is distinguished between three styles of leadership, transformational, transactional, or laissez-faire, the full-range leadership model characterizes the leader's level of engagement (Avolio & Bass, 1991).

**Laissez-faire leadership.** A leadership style with a lack of involvement or a passive, hands-off approach when leading others (Avolio, 1999).

**Leadership.** The action of leading a group of people or an organization (Eval & Roth, 2011).

**Professional development.** An intensive and collaborative training experience, ideally incorporating an evaluative stage where professionals earn or maintain credentials through academic degrees, formal coursework, attending conferences, and informal learning opportunities situated in best practices (DuFour & Fullan, 2013).

**Professional learning communities.** A team of like-minded educators who collaboratively share a common interest, meet frequently, share expertise, and work to improve their teaching skills and students' academic performance (DuFour et al., 2005).

**School administrator.** An employee who holds a certified position that requires a certificate that authorizes them to serve as a school leader or administrator responsible for leading, hiring, evaluating, and supervising teachers (Eval & Roth, 2011).

**Transactional leadership.** Transactional leadership rewards followers through a rewards and punishments system. Transactional leaders motivate followers for short-term gain (Burns, 1978). Transactional leaders promote compliance by followers through both rewards and punishments.

**Transformational leadership.** Burns (1978) defined transformational leadership as leadership where leaders appeal to a personal sense of duty, or higher calling, rather than

personal gratification.

**University interscholastic league.** Created at the University of Texas in Austin around 1910, the university interscholastic league (UIL) governs the arrangement of schools into regions and districts to ensure schools are competing with the same number of students in similar locations (University Interscholastic League, 2018).

### **Chapter Summary and Organization of the Study**

Educational institutions could utilize the research found in this study to help administrators analyze their leadership styles to positively impact the forensics coaching profession and advance students' content knowledge. By identifying possible themes, trends, and concerns, this study has aimed to contribute additional knowledge to improve the quality of leadership and the overall advancement of the forensics coaching profession. This chapter echoes the disposition of Carmack and Holm (2015) when systems are created that are not sustainable or viable for healthy long-term professional participation, we need to consider not what we are doing but how we do it (p. 24).

Forensics coaches in Texas face unsustainable systems viable for long-term professional participation. This study sought to analyze forensics coaches' perceptions of administrators' leadership styles and the impact within their professional learning communities.

Chapter 1 provided the problem of practice, the purpose of the study, research questions, and definitions. The definitions related to forensics coaches' perceptions of administrators' leadership styles that impact professional learning communities within their schools clarify the research questions. Chapter 2 includes a detailed description of the literature review related to the leadership styles of school administrators. Chapter 3 includes a detailed discussion of the methodology selected for this study. Chapter 4 provides the results and analysis of the study.

Chapter 5 includes a detailed discussion and interpretation of the research, followed by recommendations for future studies.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to explore forensics coaches' perceptions of administrators' leadership styles and the impact within their professional learning communities. According to Rogers (2002), a problem confronting forensics coaches who are professional educators is minimal research. Northouse (2007) defined leadership as a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal (p. 5).

Leadership is a significant concept in the evaluation of a teachers' perception as it links the individual teacher to the institution and navigates an instructional team toward a common goal (Anderson, 2017). Kurland, Peretz, and Hertz-Lazarowitz (2010) asserted that an administrator's leadership style determines the amount of support and guidance provided to their teachers. Existing literature does not currently identify forensics coaches' perceptions of school administrators' leadership styles in professional learning communities in Texas.

The review of the literature included in this chapter utilized various educational search engines, including Abilene Christian University, Google Scholar, Education Resources Information Center, the digital library of education research, and information from journal articles. The most frequently searched terms included *leadership*, *school administrator*, *full-range leadership model theory*, *leadership styles*, *leadership theory*, *transformational leadership*, *transactional leadership*, *laissez-faire leadership*, *professional learning communities*, *professional development*, *debate*, *forensics*, and *forensics coach*.

Chapter 2 provides the theoretical framework, the evolution of leadership theory, the full-range leadership model theory, leadership styles measured by the full-range leadership model theory, which include transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles (Avolio, 1999; Bass, 1990; Burns, 1978). This chapter also includes the role of school administrators,

forensics coaches' perceptions of leadership, current school administrator and forensics coach relationships, forensics coaches' professional development, and the optimum supportive working environment for forensics coaches. Chapter 2 identified existing gaps in the literature related to the perceptions of forensics coaches and leadership. At the end of Chapter 2, a summary is included, followed by an outline of Chapter 3.

### **Theoretical Framework**

According to Creswell (2013), the theoretical framework foundation is crucial because it guides the researcher in evaluating the research problem and research questions. There are a variety of leadership studies offering research findings on how to implement theory into practice effectively (Anderson, 2013; Anderson & Sun, 2017). These theories describe, predict, and comprehend phenomena and, in many cases, test and encompass existing knowledge within the framework of critically bounding assumptions (Northouse, 2016).

The full-range leadership model serves as a framework used for guiding and evaluating the research problem and research questions for this study (Avolio & Bass, 1991). Developed by Burns (1978), the full-range leadership model is a comprehensive model of various leadership styles and concepts to strengthen leadership behaviors. When applied appropriately, leaders achieve success (Burns, 1978). Researchers investigated the effectiveness of the full-range leadership model and noted how it propels leaders and subordinates toward a lifetime journey of empowerment (Judge, Piccolo, & Ilies, 2004). While there are several leadership theories investigated in leadership studies, the lack of research assessing how the leaders (administrators) and subordinates (forensics coaches), perceive administrators' leadership styles, and the impact within their professional learning communities warrants academic consideration.

Bass and Avolio (2004) theorized that leadership encompassed three domains:

transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire. According to Burns (1978), transformational leadership focuses on the behaviors of leaders who create opportunities for followers to visualize themselves, making positive changes. Bass (1990) added to the contributions of Burns (1978) by examining how followers felt about leaders' behaviors that influenced followers to be more self-aware, seeking to satisfy higher needs (p. 4). Teachers experienced more significant levels of empowerment under the leadership of administrators who displayed transformative leadership behaviors that shaped the school vision and learning environment (Kurland, Peretz, & Hertz-Lazarowitz, 2010), promoting followers' creativity.

In contrast to transformational leadership, Burns' (1978) transactional leadership focuses on contingent reward via positive reinforcement (p. 5). The relationship between administrators and teachers regarding "teacher pay for performance" is not only positive for teachers' improvement in overall student performance but also revealed teachers' lack of job satisfaction (Geier, 2016, p. 23). In organizations with high turnover, the positive effects of the transformational relationship between administrator and teacher increased teachers' sufficiency for rumination and compassion (Neumerski, 2012).

On the other end of the leadership continuum, Bass and Avolio (2004) posited laissez-faire leadership as hands-off or management by exception. Laissez-faire leaders allow followers to conduct their affairs as they deem necessary, which yields a more passive approach in leadership (Avolio & Bass, 1991). Avolio (1999) claimed this is known as management by exception, which takes place when the leader steps in during times of uncertainty or when things go wrong. While the laissez-faire leader is quite different from the transformational and transactional leader, Fairman and Mackenzie (2014) asserted these three leadership styles describe behaviors of leaders in various work situations.

## **Evolution of Leadership Theory**

Long before people connected the letters of the alphabet to create written or spoken meaning, people wondered why certain individuals stood out as leaders (Northouse, 2016). As society's interests increased, so did man's fascination with leadership. The historical life stories written about great leaders served as leadership blueprints. According to Yammarino (2000), people could read these blueprints to discern behaviors and basic characteristics of leaders in hopes of modeling their behaviors and decisions to what society deemed as successful leadership.

According to Spencer (1896), the great man and trait leadership theories dominated the 19th and early 20th centuries. He asserted that great men were born and not made. Believers of these theories studied biographies to distinguish leadership traits inherited, encouraging students to adopt those traits determined to be successful. However, Stogdill (1948) argued that trait-based theories were problematic and that traits were not universally associated with effective leadership. Stogdill believed that leaders, in certain situations, might not display the same leadership characteristics in different situations. He further attested a leader's characteristics were relevant to the context and how leaders interact within that context.

During the late 1960s and 1970s, research shifted away from leader traits to leader behaviors. Around this time, the job of a modern-day school administrator supported the notion that education and training improved the effectiveness of leaders (Kelly & Richardson, 2010), moving into more current styles of leadership referred to as transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire approaches. These leadership approaches explored the context in which leadership is practiced (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991). I examined these leadership styles in hopes of sparking a discussion that educational institutions can utilize to help administrators analyze how their



leadership styles positively impact the forensics coaching profession and advance students' content knowledge.

### **School Administrators Leadership Styles**

The literature review and theoretical examples provided critical information for investigating school administrators' leadership styles that may embody the morals and drive, the wants and needs, the aspirations, and the expectations of both leaders and followers (Avolio & Bass, 1991; Balyer, 2012). The study of assessing how the leaders (administrators) and subordinates (forensics coaches) perceive administrators' leadership styles is a critical aspect of this study. I examined transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles and how researchers have interpreted their effectiveness in the leadership of school administrators.

**Transformational leadership.** Transformational leaders address the individual needs of their subordinates and act in ways to get their subordinates to trust and admire them (Northouse, 2007). This type of leader is solicitous about the emotions, values, ethics, standards, and long-term goals of the subordinate. Bass and Avolio (2004) described transformational leadership encompassed within four distinct characteristics: inspirational motivation, influence, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation.

Balyer (2012) investigated the level of transformational leadership behaviors that school administrators demonstrated while conducting their administrative duties during regular school hours. The outcomes of this study revealed that administrators demonstrated high levels of characteristics of transformational leadership in terms of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation behaviors. Skogstad, Hetland, Glaso, and Einarsen (2014) examined teacher perceptions of transformational leadership qualities among administrators. The results strongly indicated that teachers preferred

behaviors that directly aligned with facets of transformational leadership. Researchers concluded that followers were more appreciative of leaders who displayed transformational behaviors related to intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and the transactional behavior of contingent reward (Bass, 1990; Dale & Fix, 2008).

The transformational model encapsulates a normative approach to school leadership, principally focusing on the progressions by which leaders aim to impact school outcomes as opposed to the nature or direction of those outcomes. Moreover, there is a possibility of being criticized as a conduit for governing teachers and, more likely, to be accepted by the leader than their followers (Amanchukwu, Stanley, & Ololube, 2015). Geier (2016) noted that a significant weakness of transformational leadership has the likelihood of becoming autocratic or oppressive due to the charismatic features of being healthy and heroic.

Cusick (2014) claimed leaders in education needed to equip themselves with the foundation of skillful leadership in order to implement change. The leader's aptitude to influence should always be preserved in order to maintain the competitiveness of educational institutions. Successful leaders explain the vision and missions with fidelity and inspire a high spirit among teacher educators to achieve mutual goals in teacher training. Mulla and Krishnan (2011) revealed there were direct and indirect influences of transformational leadership on the effectiveness of teaching and learning. Idealized influences and intellectuals directly contribute to the ability of teachers to self-reflect as a practice. The collective distribution of goal sharing by transformational leaders and teachers enable them to plan strategies to accomplish their goals effectively.

According to DuFour and Fullan (2013), implementing planned strategies can be smooth due to the structures of collecting feedback from school administrators and teachers. Thus,

leaders construct opportunities to deal with complicated teaching and learning obstacles by supporting innovative and critical thinking among teachers. The practice of individualized consideration by transformational leaders is indirectly related to stimulating teacher-educators self-reflection. The personal attention given by transformational leaders enhances the capabilities of teachers sharing resources acquired from each other when under personal observation by their leaders (Eval & Roth, 2011). Therefore, the overall influence of transformational leadership is believed to enhance the ability of teachers to deliver quality education to their students.

**Transactional leadership.** Transactional leadership is when managers provide employees with something they want in exchange for the leaders' desired outcomes (Bass & Avolio, 2004). The methods and structures of transactional leaders compared to charismatic and transformational leaders differ. Charismatic leadership focuses on influencing a group or organization to contribute toward better working conditions. In transactional leadership, governing the conduct of the individual and defining how well the individual performs in a particular system is the primary objective (Burns, 1978).

According to Avolio and Bass (1991), transactional leadership and transformational leadership differ such that transactional leadership is telling the follower what to do, and transformational is selling the follower an idea or principal way of thinking. The transactional path highlights positive and negative reinforcement, whereas the transformational path highlights motivation and inspiration (Geier, 2016). Transactional leaders are reactive; transformational leaders are proactive (Bass, 1990). Transactional leadership engages an individual's self-interest, while transformational leadership gives priority to group progression.

Dale and Fix (2008) examined transformational and transactional leadership styles used by school administrators in secondary schools, indicating outcomes for the transactional

leadership style had a slightly negative effect on a composite scale about teachers' perceived job satisfaction. Hauserman and Stick (2013) claimed limited potential for the success of transactional leadership, while transformational leadership is considered favorable and leads to better long-term performance. However, a significant weakness of transactional leadership is that set goals and objectives limit the followers' creativity (Khan, 2017).

**Laissez-faire leadership.** The full-range leadership model includes transformational and laissez-faire forms of leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Laissez-faire leadership is classified as the most ineffective style of leadership. Bass and Avolio (1994) defined laissez-faire leadership as the avoidance or lack of leadership. According to Avolio and Bass (1991), laissez-faire leaders are hands-off, backseat leaders providing ample opportunities for group members to facilitate independent decision making. A significant weakness of laissez-faire leadership is that the freedoms granted are determined by the consensus of group goals, techniques, and working methods.

Laissez-faire leaders intervene sparingly; however, Yammarino (2000) asserted that this style of leadership is most effective with highly motivated, mature followers. Therefore, the leadership style of laissez-faire leaders is often perceived as lacking leadership. When educators experience feelings of incompetency or inadequacy, the negative impact of laissez-faire leadership during these critical situations is perceived as a lack of leadership. Further, laissez-faire leaders are far less influential in situations in which educators must cope. The lack of leadership from laissez-faire leaders is detrimental to the development of potential leaders.

### **The Role of the School Administrator**

Over the past decade, the role of the school administrator has evolved beyond the building manager or school leader (Neumerski, 2012). The school administrator provides

instructional leadership (Hoy & Smith, 2007) and is critical in creating organizational contexts, establishing connections between teachers, allowing for cohesion and improved collaboration. There is a myriad of responsibilities and activities connected to the role of school administrators. School administrators stimulate, nurture, and support teachers, and encourage cooperation and work collaboratively (Balyer, 2012).

Anderson and Sun (2017) stated the leaders' responsibility is to empower teachers to collaborate in self-managing teams to develop their instruction with a growth mindset. Anderson (2017) stated that leadership styles have five main characteristics, including having mutual trust, fostering the leadership abilities of others, setting goals, visualizing, and the capability of supporting the professional development of teachers. If a school administrator shifts the educational paradigm in a school, the administrator must radiate specific characteristics to implement change and move away from failed systems of the past.

### **Forensics Coaches' Perceptions of Leadership**

The nature in which forensics coaches perceive their administrator's leadership styles plays a vital role in comprehending the satisfaction of forensics coaches in terms of their professional development, which directly affects students' performance (Holm & Miller, 2004). These perceptions include how forensics coaches view their relationships and interactions with administrators. According to Jensen and Jensen (2007), new forensics coaches value themselves higher and have higher expectations of their administrators. As forensics coaches move forward in their careers, receiving professional feedback from their administrators concerning their work performance motivates and empowers them (Bistodeau, 2015).

Debate as a forensics activity comes from multiple forms of speech and debate events that have emerged over decades of competition (Outzen, 2016). Policy debate, Lincoln Douglas

(LD) debate, public forum debate, and parliamentary debate have all found their place at the high school level. According to Kuyper (2011), understanding the differences between debate and individualized competition is more difficult for people outside of the debate and forensics community. Compton (2012) noted that debate is commonly not understood by those in other academic disciplines due to exclusive community language and standards. The perceptions of forensics coaches and school administrators are essential regarding leadership styles because of the impact of these leadership styles on teacher professional development. Caskey and Carpenter (2012) claimed that collaboration happens when teachers and administrators work as partners, sharing their knowledge, contributing ideas, and developing plans to reach educational and organizational goals. A better understanding of the perceptions of forensics coaches about their administrators' leadership styles could provide a more effective means of improving forensics coaches' job performance.

### **School Administrators and Forensics Coaches' Relationships**

In any educational setting, relationships play critical factors in student success (Boies, Fiset, & Gill, 2015). Several stakeholders contribute to this success. Focusing on the leader and the subordinate, Bass and Avolio (1994) noted that these relationships rely heavily on the personal characteristics of those involved. According to Carmack and Holm (2015), the relationship between the school administrator and the forensics coach has been explored as one needing the other. How the leader interacts with the subordinate within the context of the situation is codependent. School administrators who participated in high school forensics attested to the value of forensics education. They viewed forensics as a crucial component in fostering critical, independent thinking, enhanced educational experiences, and the contributions of forensics in other academic programs (Outzen, 2016). The forensics coach, who is also a

classroom teacher, might coach two sections of forensics: debate and individual speaking events (Bartanen & Littlefield, 2015). Upholding the responsibilities of a classroom teacher and the responsibilities of coaching forensics is time-consuming (Bistodeau, 2015). As forensics moves into the 21st century, the issues confronting the activity will require leaders who are capable of managing the challenges (Bartanen & Littlefield, 2015).

The relationship between administrator and teacher differs according to the school location and the number of teachers in each school (Amanchukwu et al., 2015). However, the relationship should exist to improve instruction and professional development. Outzen and Cronn-Mills (2012) stated that forensics coaches would significantly benefit from working closely with speech department administrators. Meetings held independently of other faculty members provide opportunities for forensics coaches to establish relationships. The dissemination of information about the forensics teams' success or needs should be the responsibility of the administrator.

### **Professional Learning Communities and Leadership**

According to Stanley (2011), when teachers collaborate, student learning improves. Nationally, public schools attempt to create sustainable professional learning communities to contribute to this success (Van Driel & Berry, 2012). Implementing these measures motivates the teaching staff to take the appropriate actions to improve student learning and achievement. DuFour and Fullan (2013) declared student achievement increases when professional learning communities consisting of teachers and administrators foster a collaborative work environment. It is without question that no single individual is more important to initiating and sustaining improvement in high school students' performance and teacher success than the school principal (DuFour & Fullan, 2013, p. 28).

Little (1982) facilitated a qualitative study of six schools, where four schools were found to be successful. The criteria for success were based on student achievement on standardized achievement scores. Two schools were identified as unsuccessful using the same criteria. Little (1982) found that the successful schools were characterized by frequent teacher evaluation and feedback, teachers communicating consistently with one another about teaching, teachers working together to design their classes, and teachers mentoring each other about teaching. All these collaborative practices were notably absent in failing schools.

The characteristics of school administration differences can be revealed by the strengths and weaknesses of their professional learning communities (Coburn, Mata, & Choi, 2013). School administrators' roles and formal definitions contribute to the functionality of how the school administrator's role and relationships unfold. School administrators fulfilling their work-related responsibilities for the school and its learners should be based on the circumstances and as needed (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Suppesu, & Easton, 2010). Justifying the values of forensics to administrators can be difficult because the activity does not fit within standard assessment (Rogers & Rennels, 2008). To support all teaching disciplines, judicious leaders possess self-awareness of alternative tactics essential to selecting appropriate tools for adequate support (Van Driel & Berry, 2012).

A school's capacity for professional learning communities is strengthened when social trust is a cornerstone of the school's administrator (MacKie, 2014). According to Khan (2017), when stakeholders establish trust and shared ownership for student learning, student achievement is increased. The research studies demonstrated that school administrators contribute to this success when they distribute the influence for decision making related to professional development and school improvement (Park & Choi, 2016). According to Benoliel and



Schechter (2017), trust is established when conflict resolution skills are employed by school administrators and teachers' work is supported consistently.

### **Professional Learning Communities and Forensics Coaches**

Professional learning communities' platforms cultivate professional growth and student achievement simultaneously (DuFour & Fullan, 2013). In a collaborative environment, assumptions are challenged, ideas are tested, and information is processed simultaneously. This collaborative environment is founded on the belief that teacher quality, teacher professional development, and collaborative working matters most to teachers' learning (DuFour et al., 2005).

Neumerski (2012) suggested two factors necessary to establish sustainable professional learning communities in schools: school administrators ought to possess the ability to distribute authority and delegate tasks without disrupting the learning environment. Nearly two decades ago, Rogers (2002) warned the forensics community of the current state of working conditions many forensics coaches experienced. New coaches were surveyed to identify critical challenges for which they felt underprepared to address as they began their coaching careers. In a qualitative study, using open-ended questions, researchers sought information regarding the specific training forensics coaches had received in preparation for assuming the duties of coaching, issues and concerns they faced for which they felt inadequately prepared, and how they dealt with those issues.

Freeman and Rogers (2013) conducted a study analyzing the unique ways in which a university's competitive academic teams successfully advanced the mission statement, which was then provided to the administration as usable data for training and assisting new coaches. The current circumstances of educational accountability may increasingly require the forensics community to link the educational mission of the curriculum with the information needed to

champion their program (Williams & Gantt, 2005). Brand (2000) asserted that for knowledge to go forward, one must build upon the investigation of published research in a specific area of discipline. Bartanen (2006) issued a warning to forensics professionals to publish scholarly writings for the advancement of forensics academia. Without current literature, the foundation for exploration within forensics is lost (Compton, 2012). A plea for the profession to produce exceptional scholarly research in the field of forensics is, woefully, not the first call for action (Brand, 2000; Rogers, 2002). Bartanen (2006) noted that a small number of rewards exist for forensics scholarship in the communication discipline at large; therefore, forensics scholarship tends to be tossed to the side. The deficiency appears to be merely taking the next steps in the scholarly process. Forensics coaches continuously work with their student competitors to review their judge's feedback to improve speech interpretation performance. Holm and Miller (2004) asserted that forensics professionals should apply the same work ethic and expertise to forensics scholarship by publishing research.

### **Professional Development**

Professional development is often commensurate with staff development and teacher in-service (Dodor et al., 2010). Focusing on shared professional development closely connected to teaching and learning, school administrators encourage teachers to search for ways to enhance their personal growth and development as an essential function of their job responsibilities. However, there remains an ongoing need to convey the significance of continuous sustainable learning and development for teachers, both individually and collectively.

Park and Choi (2016) asserted that the process of engaging teachers creatively, and the additional component of building the capacity for reflection, strengthens teachers when offered through professional development learning opportunities. Brand (2002) suggested that forensics

workshops rooted in reliable training infrastructure or mentoring programs across the forensics circuit would be a step toward effectively linking scholarship, theory, and teaching practices. Kelly and Richardson (2010) explained linking back to scholarship not only maintains the history of education forensics but also helps to justify forensics programs to school administrators by linking to the institution's academic goals.

Forward-thinking educational policymakers, researchers, and practitioners conclude that professional development reform is necessary to move forensics education into the next millennium (Freeman et al., 2017). Kerber and Cronn-Mills (2005) argued that without a focus on training and education for the next generation, forensics would not have the tools to grow and evolve. According to Stanley (2011), there is a direct correlation between student learning and development with teacher learning and growth; school administrators must understand this. As school administrators help teachers integrate what they learn in professional development, teachers are empowered to share their classroom application of those teachings. Researchers contended that teachers value individual and collaborative discernment more than forced rules or unsustainable procedures (Neumerski, 2012). Most importantly, when members collaborate, they take responsibility for their learning and development, which should be considered the norm of every school's culture.

## **Support**

DuFour and Fullan (2013) claimed that providing encouragement and emotionally supportive leadership aid in sustaining healthy professional learning communities within schools. According to Rogers (2002), forensics coaches feel supported and express a sense of comfort when their administrators understand their job functions and acknowledge their efforts, encouraging them and inspiring them to keep moving forward. School administrators make

personal contributions to the overall well-being and emotional development of teachers when they know that supporting these basic human needs undoubtedly affects teachers and students.

Change occurs in schools that nurture teachers to become leaders who can effectively transfer their body of knowledge to their students (Elmore & Wisenbaker, 2000). If forensics coaches can receive support from their school administrators and are involved in the decision-making process, they are more likely to avoid burnout or leave the profession (Freeman et al., 2017). Schnoor and Kozinski (2005) suggested that school administrators ought to motivate the community to forge relationships that nurture schools for the individual or specific, student, and teacher needs. This type of encouragement from school administrators increases student participation in community involvement. As Rogers and Rennels (2008) argued, forensics teams need to work within a variety of systems and subsystems on campus, off campus, and in forensics communities to gain the support necessary to keep a program afloat.

When an educational institution values the lived experiences of all stakeholders, administrators, students, teachers, and staff, this makes all stakeholders feel relevant and connected. Through this level of connectedness, stakeholders share their beliefs about schooling and learning. This process cannot take place without proper training and development of all stakeholders.

### **Chapter Summary and Organization of the Study**

Chapter 2 provided the theoretical framework, the evolution of leadership theory, the full-range leadership model theory, and leadership styles measured by the full-range leadership model, which includes transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire (Avolio, 1999; Burns, 1978). This chapter provides a vivid description of the role of school administrators, forensics coaches' perceptions of leadership, current school administrator and forensics coach

relationships, and forensics coaches' professional development and the optimum supportive working environment for forensics coaches.

Throughout Chapter 2, the evolution of leadership theories, notably within the field of forensics coaching, were discussed. Chapter 3 provides a comprehensive discussion regarding research design and methodology. The targeted population and setting offer a vivid description of the participants in this study and data collection. Also, data analysis, the role of the researcher, reliability, and validity provides details regarding the research and accuracy of the findings. At the end of Chapter 3, a summary is included, followed by an outline of Chapter 4.

### **Chapter 3: Research Method**

The purpose of this study was to analyze forensics coaches' perceptions of administrators' leadership styles that impact their professional learning communities in northeast Texas. In a basic interpretive approach, an effort is made to acquire data that produces rich, balanced interpretations, and accounts of actions taken in observable local contexts (Creswell, 2013). Stake (2010) stated that the qualitative method provides insight into participants' beliefs, attitudes, experiences, and interactions. The research questions that guided the stages of inquiry for this study were (a) What are the forensics coaches' perceptions of administrators' leadership styles who work in their schools? and (b) How do those perceived leadership styles impact their professional learning communities? The overarching purpose was to increase our knowledge through the lens of forensics coaches' perceptions in class 5/A-6/A UIL when allowed the opportunity to express their personal views.

Chapter 3 highlights the methodological procedures for this study. These procedures include the research design and methodology, strategies for data collection, the population and setting, materials used for research, data collection, and data analysis. The chapter also discusses the role of the researcher, ethical considerations, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. At the end of Chapter 3, a summary is included, followed by an outline of Chapter 4.

#### **Research Design and Method**

This study used a basic interpretive qualitative design. Yin (2015) declared basic interpretive qualitative research as the best method used to study lived, real-world context through processes, such as semi-structured interviews and observations of participants obtained through researcher reflective field notes. The qualitative research involved the responses of 5/A-6/A high school forensics coaches in Texas. Creswell (2013) posited that qualitative research

could provide abundant, descriptive findings from audio-recorded interviews. Patton (2002) stated that these characteristics of triangulation strengthen the quality of the trustworthiness of qualitative studies.

Denzin and Lincoln (2012) reported that qualitative research seeks to capture judicial interpretations of the phenomena derived from the introspection of meanings, beliefs, values, and experiences of participants. Open, modifiable, and exploratory semi-structured interviews were selected because they allowed for new ideas to be brought up during the interview as a result of interviewee responses (Yin, 2015). Seeking to understand the phenomenon of forensics coaches' perceptions of their administrators' leadership styles and the impact within professional learning communities, I served as the primary instrument for data collection and data analysis.

### **Population**

The participants in this study were selected through purposeful sampling. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2012), purposeful sampling requires selecting individuals or groups of individuals based on their abilities to attest to lived experiences of a situation or phenomenon. A list of 84 forensics high school regional speech and debate participants in classes 5/A or 6/A from the university interscholastic league (UIL) website (University Interscholastic League, 2018) was used to identify high school forensics coaches as potential participants for this study. The email addresses for these participants were obtained through the UIL website and publicly available individual personal emails (University Interscholastic League, 2018).

Leavy (2017) declared the number of interviews needed for a qualitative study to reach data saturation was a number that he could not quantify; however, he suggested selecting a sample size that presents favorable opportunities for the researcher to achieve data saturation. Since there is no magic number that is suitable to reach data saturation, researchers contended

data saturation is obtained when there is adequate information to duplicate the study, and no new information or themes emerge (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

In efforts to achieve maximum variation, my selection criteria included male and female participants of varying ethnicities and ages coaching in similar geographic school settings and forensics coaches with three or more years of coaching experience. These participants were contacted through email to inform them about the study and the requirements for participation. A draft of the email is found in Appendix A. Participants interested in participating in the study responded by email or phone.

**Recruitment of participants.** After obtaining permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB; see Appendix B) of Abilene Christian University to start the recruitment process, I obtained the contact information for 84 forensics coaches through the UIL website (University Interscholastic League, 2018) to inform forensics coaches about the study and the criteria for participation: three or more years of coaching experience in class 5/A-6/A. I sent individual recruitment emails to 84 forensics coaches who met the criteria. Two weeks later, I completed a second effort to solicit participants (see Appendix A).

### **Setting**

Before the start of each face-to-face interview, each participant selected the time and location. Participants were provided an explanation of the study, the purpose of the research, the interview process and procedures, and details concerning the steps I would take to protect participant confidentiality, adhering to ethical considerations. I provided each participant with a consent form with details about the study and procedures to protect their anonymity and confidentiality of their identity.

Also, participants were advised their participation was voluntary, and withdrawal from



the study was permissible at any time. After obtaining a signed consent form, each participant was assigned a number and asked permission to audio record the interview. Research participants determined the time scheduled and off-campus locations for the interviews. Interviews were audio-recorded. According to Creswell (2013), conducting audio-recorded interviews protects the quality of the data provided by the participants.

### **Data Collection**

The methodology rested upon the claim that adequate qualitative research includes details about how the data were collected (Leavy, 2017). In this study, the mode of data collection was through planned, semi-structured interviews where both the interviewer and the interview questions served as instrumentation used in this study. Saldana and Omasta (2018) posited that semi-structured interview questions allow participants the opportunity to openly share their constructed views, thoughts, experiences, and opinions about their community.

Fourteen forensics coaches responded with a positive interest in the study. From these fourteen respondents, further contact was initiated via email and phone to schedule an interview and determine a meeting location based on their preferences; three of the respondents did not reply. After several phone calls and emails, interviews were scheduled with convenient locations for participants who did reply and expressed an interest in voluntarily participating in the study. However, one participant did not meet the criteria of three years of forensics coaching experience in class 5/A-6/A UIL. Ten high school forensics coaches consented, volunteered to participate, and completed face-to-face interviews.

Before each interview, I informed the participants about the process. Participants signed consent forms with details about the study, anonymity, and confidentiality of their identity and responses. Participants were advised their participation was voluntary, and withdrawal from the

study was permissible at any time. After each participant signed a consent form and received a number assignment, and they were encouraged to ask questions at any time during the interview. I asked participants for permission to audio record interviews.

Patton (2002) posited that the initial step in conducting the interview process is to establish an interview protocol. Creswell (2013) stated that the written questions must be appropriately formulated and adapted to the purpose of the research study so that the researcher may find some understanding of the phenomena. The standardized open-ended format used to guide the interviewing process is found in Appendix C.

I submitted the interview questions to an expert panel of content knowledgeable forensics coaches and training experts to critically examine the interview questions (see Appendix D). According to Meyrick (2006), an expert panel is a group convened to provide specialized expertise and to review the relevancy and appropriateness of the interview questions. The interview protocol ensured that the same lines of inquiry were maintained with each participant. The interview protocol consisted of an initial statement of inquiry informing the interviewee about the intent of the study. The interview protocol included definitions of transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership. DeVault (2017) stated that definitions inform participants about the terminology discussed during the interview.

After discussing the terminology, each participant was asked if they had questions before the interview started. Once participants granted permission to audio record the interviews, each interview was recorded. Patton (2002) asserted that participants' perceptions recorded through audio-recorded interviews provide rich and meaningful data. Participants' interviews were audio-recorded while I took field notes and observed nonverbal behavior, expressions of feelings, or physical characteristics of participants for collecting data in qualitative research studies (Patton,

2002). On average, interviews lasted about 45 minutes.

**Fieldnotes.** There are two primary types of field notes: descriptive and reflective. Descriptive, explanatory field notes offer detailed descriptions and representations of specific settings and events, as well as the participants, activities, observable behaviors, and exchanges that depict these contexts (Patton, 2002). However, reflective field notes encompass thoughtful observations. They are fixated on the role or bearings of the researcher to the location and contributors, providing the chance for the researcher to focus on the setting and explore instances of uneasiness or disjointedness and reflect on moral quandaries (Creswell, 2013).

**Observations.** Researchers use a variety of observation methods in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). These methods provide researchers with ways to observe individuals in their natural setting (Patton, 2002), but where to begin looking depends on the research questions. Merriam (1998) posited that the most crucial component in deciding what a researcher should pay close attention to is the researcher's primary focus for conducting the study.

### **Data Storage**

Data collected were stored on an external hard drive and kept in a locked filing cabinet to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants in this study. Copies of the raw data emailed to Abilene Christian University were de-identified and will be stored for three years.

I took precautions to protect the identity of each participant providing minimum risk to all participants following the internal review board guidelines and expectations.

### **Data Analysis**

In qualitative research, data analysis co-occurs with data collection. While conducting the data analysis, it is essential to become familiar with the contents of the transcription. According to Ivankova (2014), familiarization occurs by listening to audio recordings immediately after the

interview, confirming participants' exact words, verbatim, and ensuring the accuracy of the data. Before the start of each interview, I informed participants that field notes would be shared at the end of the interview to support the veracity of the audio-recorded interviews. Participants confirmed the field notes were accurate representations of statements they provided.

Gale, Heath, Cameron, Rashid, and Redwood (2013) suggested the framework method is the most suitable for analyzing data obtained from interviews, and it is useful for generating themes made by comparisons within and between conversations. The following seven-step outline embodies the process of the framework method.

**Step 1. Transcription.** During the first step, I audio recorded each interview. After listening to the interviews, I transcribed each interview.

**Step 2. Familiarization with the interview.** After each transcribed interview, the transcriptions were meticulously paired with field notes collected during each interview. I used this reflective process to discern the importance of the field notes and ensure the accuracy of each transcription. This process was repeated for each interview.

**Step 3. Data coding.** After familiarization with the interview, I conducted a thorough review of the transcript and field notes. I utilized open coding. Open coding is defined by Patton (2002) as breaking down the data into primary and secondary concepts. I used various colors of highlighters for coding and identifying primary and secondary concepts. I assigned specific codes created for values, beliefs, phrases, structures, and nonverbal characteristics.

**Step 4. The working analytical framework.** The working analytical framework was developed after coding the first four transcripts. This representation of the working analytical framework was not complete until the remaining six transcripts were also added.

**Step 5. Analytical framework applied to the data.** Then, using the working analytical

framework, the remaining six transcriptions were also added, utilizing the existing codes and categories. I used various highlighters to indicate the codes that were previously identified. Each transcript was coded using this process until no new information was identified.

**Step 6.** Charting data into the framework matrix. I charted data into the framework matrix, illustrating a summarization of each transcript into the chart.

**Step 7.** Data interpreted. Once the coding matrix was created, I explored the characteristics of the categories and subcategories from the data. Themes from the data emerged.

In qualitative research, Patton (2002) suggested using more than one type of coding. I used simultaneous coding over the transcriptions to include descriptive coding (identifying themes in content autonomy, competence, and relatedness). In-vivo coding places emphasis on the actual spoken words of the participants describing their lived experiences and patterns coding to identify emergent themes.

### **Trustworthiness of Data**

In quantitative studies, the trustworthiness of data is attributed to the validity and reliability of the study (Creswell, 2013). However, in qualitative studies, DeVault (2017) stated the reliability and trustworthiness or thoroughness of a study is more ambiguous because it indicates the scope of certainty in the interpretation of the data and the methods used by the researcher can persuade readers that their research findings are worthy of attention (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Leavy (2017) asserted there are four components of data trustworthiness considered standards of quality and verification that measure things that a number and statistics might not be able to identify. These components include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility establishes the validity and accuracy of the findings and interpretations of the

research study through the eyes of the participants (Creswell, 2013). It is through the lens of the participants that qualitative research seeks to understand the phenomena of interest (Creswell, 2013) confronted with the experiences as participants see it (Patton, 2002).

One strategy for establishing credibility is member checking (Creswell, 2013).

During the process of member checking, I asked each participant to carefully review field notes and observations of data collected during the interview process. DeVault (2017) suggested allowing participants to review their responses and any notes the researcher may have taken during the interview process. Participants reviewed this information and verified the accuracy of the data collected.

Transferability testifies to the relevancy of the study's findings (Creswell, 2013). Other contexts can mean similar populations or situations. I used thick descriptions to illustrate the findings within the study that could be applied to other situations.

Patton (2002) claimed that the dependability of a study is established when other researchers could repeat the findings of the study. This process yields consistency in the research. Patton (2002) suggested that if other researchers elected to duplicate this study, there should be ample information from the results of the research gathered related to the findings, as this study did.

Leavy (2017) described confirmability as the extent to whether the researcher interfered with the outcome of the study findings. He stated that research findings are established by participants' responses, not the hidden biases of the researcher. Before and after each interview, I actively observed and documented participants' facial expressions, nonverbal cues, and expressions of the responses.

Patton (2002) stated that self-reflective journals allow the researcher the opportunity to

examine thoughts, motives, and actions before and after interviewing participants carefully. As an added layer of assurance, I provided participants with copies of their interview transcriptions to ensure their responses captured accurate reflections of their perceptions. Also, I highlighted the steps taken during the data analysis process while justifying these actions.

### **Role of the Researcher**

In qualitative research, the lens of the researcher, as the data collection instrument, is an integral part of a study (Jackson, 1990). This study sought to answer a plea from the forensics profession to pursue the production of advanced scholarly published writings for the advancement of forensics academia (Compton, 2012). I am a woman with six years of professional teaching experience as a former forensics coach in public schools in Texas. I have participated in UIL debate competitions and attended district, regional, and state tournaments.

As a former forensics coach, I formed professional relationships with a few of the interview participants. Through the study of current literature, professional contacts, and personal experience, I am quite cognizant of the challenges in leadership confronted by forensics coaches in Texas, as well as in other parts of the United States. I experienced various leadership styles characterized by school administrators, and through this study, expressed the desire to gain a deeper understanding as to which leadership styles are most common in the field of forensics coaching.

During the height of the debate season, I led teams to the district, regional, and state competitions, discovering a winning formula tailored to the specific skill sets and talents of the individual debate team participants and the tactics used by the opposing team that by applying an adaptable situational approach produced the best results. By better understanding how school administrators utilize their leadership styles, educational institutions can use the results of

this study to help administrators analyze their leadership styles as a tool to impact forensics coaches' professional learning communities positively and advance students' content knowledge. The researcher recognizes the role as the primary instrument of data collection is imperative so that the interpretation of the phenomena represented that of the participants and mitigated any concerns during data collection (Patton, 2002). Denzin (2009) claimed a researcher operates between multiple worlds while conducting research, including the constructive world of the study participants as well as the world of one's perspective. How one addresses and mitigates a personal lens or worldview during data collection and analysis is a concern during data collection (Creswell, 2013). I practiced keeping self-reflective journals before and after each interview. I had the opportunity to examine the thoughts, motives, and actions before and after interviewing participants carefully (Patton, 2002).

### **Ethical Considerations**

After approval of the Abilene Christian University Institutional Review Board (IRB; see Appendix B) to conduct this study and all interviews, eligible participants were provided with written and oral information about the study, and all participants gave written consent to participate. I provided participants with details about the purpose of the study, anonymity, and confidentiality of their identity and responses. Participants were assigned numbers and advised their participation was voluntary with no known risks or costs associated with study participation, and withdrawal from the study was permissible at any time. I purchased a separate external hard drive to store all raw dissertation data securely, and it was filed in a locked filing cabinet for the three years required by the IRB. This information was outlined in the letter of consent, which describes the collection of recorded data and the electronics in secure locations for three years.



## **Assumptions**

I assumed that the selected participants answered the interview questions honestly and candidly. I assumed the participants volunteered for this study and wholly understood withdrawal from the study was permissible at any time without facing any consequences. Also, I assumed that participants were appropriate for this study by utilizing the UIL website's listing of class 5/A-6/A high school forensics coaches. Finally, I assumed that the selected participants had a sincere interest in participating in the research and did not have any other motives. This assumption was justified by making sure that participants knew their participation was voluntary, and there was no promise of compensation, remuneration quid pro quo, inferred or implied, or ramifications for their answers or their withdrawal from the study.

## **Limitations and Delimitations**

This study has both limitations and delimitations. This study included a relatively homogeneous sample of forensics coaches' in class 5/A-6/A UIL municipality. A more heterogeneous group might bring other aspects to light. Creswell (2013) claimed that limitations are circumstances outside of the researcher's control. One limitation was the method of data collection. I opted to conduct face-to-face interviews, and there were situations where phone interviews might have been used; however, I wanted consistency in how the interviews took place. I proactively anticipated limitations and took precautionary measures. Another limitation was the small size of the sample. However, this study was designed to gain a deeper understanding of forensics coaches' perceptions of administrators' leadership styles and the impact within their professional learning communities. Through this personal analysis, administrators could positively impact the forensics coaching profession and advance students' content knowledge.

Delimitations are choices the researcher deems appropriate for the study (Patton, 2002). While there are numerous leadership theories explored in education, I elected to focus on transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and laissez-faire leadership theories.

### **Chapter Summary and Organization of the Study**

By identifying possible themes, trends, and concerns, this study aimed to contribute additional knowledge to improve the quality of leadership and the overall advancement of the forensics coaching profession. Chapter 3 provides a detailed description of the methodological procedures suggested for this study. Using this basic interpretive qualitative method, I, as the primary instrument of this study, sought to understand the phenomenon of forensics coaches' perceptions of their administrators' leadership styles that impact their professional learning communities (Creswell, 2013). These procedures include the research design and methodology, strategies for data collection, the population and setting, research materials, and data collection and analysis. This chapter also includes the role of the researcher, ethical considerations, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. Chapter 4 provides the results and analysis of this study. An in-depth analysis of the data collected identifies common themes. At the end of Chapter 4, a summary is included, followed by an outline of Chapter 5.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of forensics coaches' perceptions of administrators' leadership styles and the impact within their professional learning communities. A qualitative methodology was used to collect and analyze data from high school forensics coaches in class 5/A-6/A UIL.

The purpose of this chapter is to report the results of the analysis of data collected from 10 semi-structured interviews, observations, and field notes. Through the analysis of these data, this chapter addresses how the data collected answered the research questions. Chapter 4 is organized as follows: the introduction of emerging themes from the interview, presentation of findings, participant demographics, and a summary. Triangulation was used for data analysis to ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the data collection. The triangulation process consisted of semi-structured interviews, observations, and field notes. Vignettes from interviews were used to develop and validate themes that emerged.

### Summary of Research Focus and Processes

This basic interpretive qualitative study used semi-structured interviews designed to answer the following research questions:

**Q1.** What are the forensics coaches' perceptions of administrators' leadership styles who work in their schools?

**Q2.** How do those perceived leadership styles impact their professional learning communities?

The data were collected utilizing 10 high school forensics coaches who volunteered to participate in this study. Participants were assigned numbers to protect their anonymity.

I obtained the contact information for 84 forensics coaches through the UIL website

(University Interscholastic League, 2018) to inform forensics coaches about the study and the criteria for participation: three or more years of coaching experience, in class 5/A-6/A. Two weeks later, a second effort to solicit participants was completed (see Appendix A). Fourteen forensics coaches responded regarding their interest in the study. From these 14 respondents, further contact was initiated via email and phone to schedule an interview and determine a meeting location based on their preferences; three of the respondents did not reply. After several phone calls and emails, interviews were scheduled with convenient locations for participants who did reply and expressed an interest in voluntarily participating in the study. However, one participant did not meet the criteria. Ten high school forensics coaches consented, volunteered to participate, and completed face-to-face interviews.

Participant information was collected (see Table 1). Participants varied in age, race, sex, and years of experience. However, all participants had a minimum of three years of teaching experience and a bachelor's degree. Three of the ten participants had advanced degrees. Further, all participants were certified by the state of Texas to teach speech.

Table 1

*Participant Profiles*

	Gender	Race	Class	Academic Background	Years of Experience
Participant 1	Female	White	6A	Bachelors	30
Participant 2	Female	Black	5A	Bachelors	3
Participant 3	Female	White	6A	Masters	21
Participant 4	Female	White	5A	Bachelors	40
Participant 5	Male	White	5A	Bachelors	16
Participant 6	Female	White	6A	Bachelors	11
Participant 7	Male	White	6A	Doctorate	14
Participant 8	Male	White	6A	Bachelors	19
Participant 9	Male	White	5A	Bachelors	7
Participant 10	Male	White	5A	Doctorate	7

**Presentation of the Findings**

A basic interpretive qualitative research methodology was used for this study. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2012), qualitative research seeks to capture judicial interpretations of phenomena about the derived meanings, beliefs, values, and experiences of participants that are best served by qualitative research. Analyzing the experiences of forensics coaches' perceptions of their administrators' leadership styles and the impact within their professional learning communities was conducted through the form of semi-structured interviews.

A coding matrix (see Appendix E) was developed to detail and encapsulate the broad meaning of participants' reflections and the issues implicated. The first column indicated four

themes discovered through the data analysis. Themes are noticeable recurrences of features within the study. The next column indicated the emerging categorical themes from the participants' responses. Categorical themes are a measure of reliability and used to compute agreement and interconnectedness of codes. The third column is a descriptor and an indicator of the categories that further enrich the data analysis and expand upon the emerged themes. Descriptors and indicators are a subcategory of categorical themes. Descriptors are quoted narratives based upon the participants' categorization of their experiences. Indicators further this narrative by providing an enriched accounting of the participants' experiences, indicating practical significance to assist in determining the importance of commonalities. The final column of evidence and subcategories reflect participants' direct quotes related to the themes, categories, and descriptors. This column has direct quotes from the interviews. These direct quotes are pertinent to the themes and emerged through in-vivo coding. These direct quotes are excerpts from transcripts and further evidence of the coding process, which developed the themes. Within these quotes, subcategories are underlined to highlight the direct connection to the themes and categories.

Patton (2002) suggested using simultaneous coding over the same passages of text to include descriptive coding and in-vivo coding. Descriptive coding techniques coded for content from each participant looking for themes of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In-vivo coding involves textual descriptions of forensics coaches' perceptions of administrators' leadership styles by using examples from the interviews and the data extracted from the 10 interviews. Gale et al. (2013) suggested that the seven-step framework method is the most suitable for analyzing data obtained from interviews. It is useful for generating themes made by comparisons within and between conversations. I followed the seven-step framework method

and the in-vivo coding and analysis process described above.

### **Themes From Findings**

Through systematic data analysis, five themes emerged as the most prominent: (a) professional learning communities, (b) multi-styled leadership, (c) mentorship, (d) self-efficacy, and (e) funding. Each of these themes was developed through the careful aggregation of codes and categories. The categories allowed an in-depth analysis of the participants' responses developed through manual coding.

**Professional learning communities.** This study explored the concept of a professional learning community (PLC) through the synopsis of the participants' responses. Each of the participants conveyed their perspectives about professional learning related to speech and debate away from their campus. This theme was notably observed as a reoccurring theme during the process of data analysis. The idea that forensics often work in a professional learning environment specific to speech and debate is an on-going problem (DuFour et al., 2005; Shepard et al., 2012; Sindberg, 2014), and the data collected from the participants' interviews echoed this sentiment. These were the categories consistently used by most of the participants throughout the interview process: a family-like professional environment with like-minded educators who collaborate, a shared common interest, frequently meet to share expertise and work to improve their teaching skills in an assigned role, and informal training. Nine out of 10 participants identified an authentic, functional learning environment exclusive to forensics coaches without outside influence from other disciplines as a significant concern for their professional learning. They agreed and reported they would like more meaningful opportunities to collaborate with peers on specific needs about their teaching discipline. Forensics coaches' desire to collaborate with their peers and administrators was evident from all participants, with an overwhelming

majority of participants defining this as a specific need for professional growth. Professional learning communities with opportunities for content selection, attendance, and facilitation by forensics coaches were explicitly named as a category or subcategory. Participant 1 identified this with the following,

It is better to put a debate coach in a PLC with the coach across town at another school or ISD ... that would be a more authentic PLC, even if they [forensics coaches] only meet digitally or remotely ... or at tournaments ... that would be a more authentic PLC than lumping the debate coach in with the English department or the CTE department.

In addition to more meaningful opportunities for collaboration, four participants articulated that professional learning communities on campus and within their district were challenging to find. Participant 2 indicated she would value working within a variety of systems off-campus to access the training and support necessary to allow her to collaborate with other forensics coaches. She stated,

I would think it would probably be pretty difficult to find something at a school district ... I think it would have to be something that was sort of ... you know, a region-wide event that takes all the forensics coaches within our region and has us all come together.

Three participants identified their desire for forensics coaches teaching and leading professional development. When asked about the components of a competent professional learning community, the participants felt that when members collaborate, they are allowed to take responsibility for their learning and development. Participant 3 noted, "Some professionals get more out of doing the training than receiving the training because they have to reflect and go a little more in-depth as to what it is that they are doing that is working for them." These opportunities in teaching and leading allowed forensics coaches to suggest the content to work with and provide expertise in the decision-making process rooted in reliable training infrastructure across the forensics circuit and linking theory to teaching practices. Participant 1 explained this process: "Attending sessions and judging and participating in meetings with



colleagues and debate coaches who present at those [training sessions], and that becomes my best professional development.” Two participants furthered this notion by indicating they wanted to see how other forensics coaches teach their classes, acknowledging the need to collaborate in environments where information and learning are processed simultaneously. One participant stated, “I did find it helpful to go and see how other people were teaching ... that certainly did, you know, benefit what I was doing.”

Participants were focused on time to collaborate and the family environment shared between forensics coaches. They felt that within their current schools where there were only one or two qualified forensics coaches, the opportunities for collaboration regarding student learning, shared work-related problems, challenges, and best practices are limited, significantly reducing the amount of time forensics coaches could work together. Three participants expressed their desire for informal learning. One participant expressed,

Every time I turned up at a tournament, I knew she [forensics coach] would be there because she [forensics coach] was at all the tournaments in the area. I would find her [forensics coach] wherever she [forensics coach] was ... and ask her question after question.

Similarly, another participant reported that informal teacher learning and contact between coaches at tournaments presents opportunities for collaborating: “We may sit at a tournament and brainstorm.” Participants in this study reported that the family environment shared between forensics coaches and their contributions to their overall well-being and emotional development helps to forge relationships that nurture their individual or specific teacher needs.

**Applying multiple styles of leadership.** Participants were not hesitant about sharing their perspectives on transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles used by their high school principals. Primarily, these categories emerged to formulate this theme describing their principals’ qualities of leadership styles: motivational, inspirational, proactive,

performance-based, reactive, hands-off, nonexistent, visionary, visible, flexible, delegatory, humble, and adaptable to a situation. Seven out of 10 participants identified the concept of applying multiple styles of leadership and discussed the significance of administrators applying multiple leadership styles based on a situation. The following statement from Participant 10 highlights this theme:

They [school administrators] delegate things well. He [principal] will let me explain so, it's not laissez-faire to the point where they don't want to be part of it. Maybe, it is more trans ... transformational to a degree. They want me to succeed. They are going to inspire me and help me get to that level, but they are not going to interfere and make everything happen in a specific way, which has been honestly amazing.

When asked about the different leadership styles that high school principals use, three participants reported their principals use various kinds of leadership styles but believed that successful leaders are transformational leaders, and they felt that their principals acted in ways that teachers could trust and admire them. Participant 3, discussing principals' leadership styles, noted, "She [principal] was very supportive of speech and debate and me ... and was good about making me feel like she cared about what I was doing, and she trusted what I was doing, but she was not micromanaging me."

The hands-off or avoidance style of leadership often does not align with forensics coaches' needs. Three participants agreed and reported that hands-off or avoidance leadership styles are barriers often not aligned to meet the needs of their current situation. Participant 2 indicated that she would value instances where her principal would interject in conducting affairs where she needed her to be more involved: "There was an instance where I had a little bit of a mistake where she [principal] did get involved, but even through that mistake, she was not as involved as I would like her [principal] to be." Further, two participants identified transactional rewards based on their work performance and the opportunities teachers are afforded. They

provided forensics coaches with days off or incentives to meet organizational needs.

An interesting development from this theme reported by participants was adjusting the style of leadership to fit the situation. The participants in this study expressed how they desired a leader who changes leadership styles based on their needs. Forensics coaches in this study desired visionary, flexible, proactive, inspirational leaders. Participant 7, discussing high school principals' leadership styles, described a leader who is willing to achieve things that have not been achieved before or were outside of existing institutional priorities: "Those [principals] were my favorite to work with ... they give you license and flexibility where needed with the understanding that the institution as a whole headed in a different direction ... trying to achieve things that had not achieved before."

Another participant indicated that her high school principal supports her overall professional development through a shared vision of a high school where a debate team is significant. This type of leader demonstrates the importance of creating a shared vision for what they want the organization to look like and how it includes all teaching disciplines within this shared vision. Participant 1 spoke about the kind of vision where leaders see individuals as versions of themselves: "Seeing the self in others, or having, you know, this kind of vision where you look at someone as another version of yourself, that kind of seeing, not just counting them as a demographic or monitoring them." The forensics coaches expressed a desire to be led by visionary, proactive leaders.

**The significance of mentorship.** The significance of mentorship was an overarching phrase used in this study to describe a supportive principal, a trusted leader, an admirable leader, forensics coaches mentoring forensics, and time set aside for collaboration by the participants in this study. Responses related to mentorship where forensics coaches serve as both mentor and

mentee were pervasive throughout their discourse of professional learning. Despite a combined experience of over 150 years of forensics coaching experience, the need for quality mentoring from administrators and peers was frequently mentioned. Each participant was asked what the most valuable qualities a high school principal should possess are, and eight out of 10 participants mentioned the significance of mentorship for both new and seasoned forensics coaches.

Two participants summarized the perspectives about what makes a good leader.

Participant 2 indicated she would value an understanding and supportive leader:

A leader that [actually] understands the people that they are leading, and they need to be aware of what it takes to ... you know what you need to be doing. Like they need to be trained in forensics in the processes as well so that when I go to them for support, they're aware of my needs, and they know how to handle that because they can't fully support if they do not know what they're supporting.

Participant 6 further expanded and spoke about the experience her principal had received in preparation for his role as her administrator and noted, "He [Principal] is a former speech and debate person, so he gets what we are doing." Each of the participants expressed a desire for a supportive administrator who understood the job duties and responsibilities as forensics coaches. They felt it was important for their administrators to understand their job functions so that administrators would know how to best support them.

Participant 3 expressed that high school principals who trust the people they hire to do their jobs are those she admired as leaders.

You cannot be successful if people don't trust you. And, so they [school administrators] have to trust the leaders have to trust the people that they put in place for different jobs. But the people that are in those jobs also [have] to trust that leaders, and that's not an easy thing.

Three participants shared further detail as to what they admired about high school principals as their instructional leaders. An example of this follows for each of the forensics

coaches in this study. When asked what he admired about his high school principal, Participant 9 enthusiastically spoke of what it is like to have a principal show up at a tournament. He described how he sent an invitation to a principal to show up at a tournament:

Because they never do ... only the ones that have been former coaches appreciate the significance of that. I've invited principals and board of trustees from our district to come to a tournament, and they all turned me down and never showed up ... not one of them came.

Similarly, Participant 6 stated, "Take the principal with you on these trips. Make him get up in the morning when you get up, make him go to bed at night when you do. Show him."

Participant 6 shared furthered this proclamation as to what she admired about her high school principal,

It was important to me that he let me communicate with other people who'd not been out of the loop, which had been doing it for a long time and to let me bring people in and have conversations with them about what it was going to look like.

Participant 5 shared multiple aspects of what he admired about high school principals who have led him, emphasizing the importance of time to collaborate with other coaches and stated:

I did have one a few years back who said, "Instead of doing all this other stuff that we're doing which doesn't benefit you, I'm going to give you time to go visit another debate coach in a different school" and that was good because I got to go see how they taught.

While mentorship from administrators ranked highly with participants, two participants discussed the significance of the role of the forensics coach to forensics coach, as mentor and mentee. Participant 4 discussed how she felt when she was a new forensics' coach and shared her perspective as a veteran coach:

If I were a new coach, I would have wanted somebody there to point me in the direction of how to find material, where to go online, maybe having in a tournament, you know, just all those basic things. As you get older, you know all that stuff, and so I hate to say this, but I don't necessarily think it's that important after you've had 15-20 years because you kind of know all of that.

Likewise, Participant 5 shared in this sentiment and stated, “Having that mentor just to help you understand better, not only the different components that go within [a] debate.”

**Self-efficacy.** Another theme that emerged from participant’s responses was the significance of personal growth as a forensics coach to add a higher degree of leadership for their teams, with one participant saying, “You’re working together to reach a common goal, but you also have individual input into that, that can strengthen one teacher’s ability to do their job the right way ... to be their better self.” Self-efficacy fits under the overarching phrase used in this dissertation to describe forensics coaches attending conferences, presenting at conferences, leading professional development, and peer-shadowing. Nine out of ten participants described two general ways to better themselves. One way was attending conferences, both within; UIL, and other circuits. These forensics coaches emphasized the importance of being able to attend UIL conferences as well as conferences on other circuits. Other forensics coaches preferred flexibility in terms of professional learning, such as being able to attend conferences and lead professional development aspects about forensics.

Two participants assertively encapsulated the essence of the participants’ responses when asked what in ways do their high school principals support their overall professional development. Participant 9 stated,

I think he [principal] is...he and others [administrators] have been pretty good and flexible about letting me go to professional conferences, as both the presenter and usually like a board member or something...you know there has never been a requirement that I present to be able to go, they have always been open.

Participant 3 emphasized a similar perspective about conference attendance and presentation, as she found it strengthened the teacher’s ability to do their job. She stated,

I think there comes a time for some professionals when they get more out of doing the training than receiving the training because they have to reflect and go a little more in-depth as to what it is that they are doing that is working for them.

Participant 1 shared multiple ways that her high school principal supports her overall professional development, expanding to colleagues presenting professional development sessions.

I get many hundreds of hours of professional development by attending sessions and judging and participating in meetings with colleagues and debate coaches who present at those, and that becomes my best professional development.

Three participants shared further detail as to ways their high school principal supports their overall professional development. Participant 5 stated,

Principals that would help me do, I would say, “Hey, UIL and TFA [Texas Forensics Association] are doing these super-conferences that I can go to Austin, or are there would be regional ones at Sam Houston and other places, can I go to these, can I have time off to go to these, and will you help me with doing that?” Those are where I learned something ...cause; it was specific to what I was teaching...it was being presented by people that had already been in that role, it was not some consulting firm, these were people that lived this day in and day out.

When asked in what way does your high school principal motivate you to collaborate with other forensics coaches on your campus, district, and beyond, Participant 6 spoke about taking three years off and reflected about peer shadowing. She described how peer shadowing adds to her growth as a person and a coach.

You know I can’t necessarily go to their classrooms and see how they’re coaching, but I can see what their kids are getting, and then, sort of, what’s that word when you reverse engineer it to see how I can make that happen in my classes. I need to see what other people know, and how they do it in order to grow as a person, and grow as a coach, and mainly after I took my three years off, I was very lost in how to coach what I was doing and how much the events had changed since I’d last done them.

**Funding for speech and debate programs.** Seven out of 10 participants mentioned funding for speech and debate programs. Participant 8 stated, “Everybody says they want to have

a good debate team ... but there is a difference between saying you want to have a good debate team and then being willing to devote the resources to do that.”

Three participants captured the essence of the participants’ perspectives when asked to describe their principal’s leadership style. Through the analysis of the data, the category of budget cuts emerged. Participant 1 reflected, “[Principal] removed about \$25,000 worth of funding from our program and had never met me before, had never had a conversation with me.” Participant 8 furthered this with the following, “I wanted to go to a conference, but I was not given any funding that year.” Finally, Participant 5 reiterated the significance of the budget,

Following that [redacted] did UIL academics is you had a laundry list, if you wanted to do One-Act Play, you had to commit to \$3,500. If you want to do debate, it costs \$1,800. So, every event had a price on it, so you could cherry-pick which events you wanted to participate in.

Two participants discussed the costs of circuits outside UIL. When asked what the most valuable qualities that a high school principal should possess, Participant 4 remarked,

We had a situation one time about going to the TOC, Tournament of Champions, at the last minute ... we couldn’t, he didn’t approve it. We had to do all this stuff, and it was real expensive for their parents.

Participant 3 discussed how her principal supported her overall professional development: “And that’s great support for us to get to the TFA Convention every year, or TSCA, Texas Speech Communication Association Convention.”

Four participants discussed professional learning communities and the components they felt were beneficial as a forensics coach. Participant 10 indicated hiring assistant forensics coaches as a beneficial component for his program. Participant 10 stated, “I mean, in a perfect world, they [principals] would hire me two more coaches because my program is almost hitting a 100 right now, and we’re struggling. Just on the staff end.” Participant 6 shared aspects of professional learning communities and the components that she felt are beneficial as a forensics



coach, expanding the emphasis to working with kids: “He [principal] has also been really great about letting us hire people who knew what they were doing to come and work with our students, and while they’re working with them, I can learn from them and what they’re doing.”

One participant emphasized the need to purchase classroom resources, and when asked what the different leadership styles that principals use, Participant 2 discussed how she felt about her principal’s response regarding purchasing technology for the debate team: “I had a desire to get laptops for research and prep for the debate team, and there were only 13 kids, I think, on the debate team at that time, and his first response was frustrating.”

Two participants talked about their relationship with their high school principals and how they dealt with fundraising and booster clubs for their speech and debate programs. Participant 5 spoke about a specific example, where forensics coaches rely on fundraising for their programs. Participant 8 explained how communities support speech and debate programs, but parents and administrators have to get out and ask. “Most communities will support, but somebody ... has to get out and ask,” stated one participant.

Participant 1 echoed the concept of funding through booster clubs for her speech and debate program when she spoke about a meeting she had with her principal discussing program funding: “He and I had an agreed-upon plan that over time the booster clubs were going to increase their support, and that was on track.” The money generated from booster clubs would provide additional funding for the speech and debate program, including participation in UIL events. Similarly, Participant 5 shared more details about the questions he had about funding his speech and debate program and stated, “How do you collect data so that you can sell the program to your school? How do you raise money? How do you do fundraisers?”

Table 2 summarizes the findings of this study. The data collected from each of the

interviews were restricted to nonparticipant observations. The data collected included the interaction and levels of collaboration between forensics coaches. Observations were recorded manually. Tally marks were used to record the frequency of collaborative opportunities between the observed forensics coaches. Observations were conducted during the height of the UIL tournament season and on two separate days during the same time to aid the observer with the comparability of data. The anonymity of the participants was achieved since no identifying information was collected or recorded.

Table 2

*Covert Observation Results*

Participants	Role of Participant	Frequency of Observed Interactions with Peers	Observable Peer Actions	Type of Collaboration
Participant 1	Team Coach/Judge	3	Feedback to forensics coaches, upcoming schedule/events, current tournament design, student scholarship	Limited
Participant 2	Judge	3	Interacted with all forensics coaches at least once, has all forensics coaches contact information	Limited
Participant 3	Judge	4	Provides feedback to forensics coaches to improve the program (student outcomes)	No collaboration
Participant 4	Judge	5	Minimal engagement with peers, provides feedback to forensics coaches	No collaboration
Participant 5	Judge	4	Minimal engagement with peers, provides feedback to forensics coaches	No collaboration
Participant 6	Team Coach/Judge	3	Greet all forensics coaches and teams at least once, greet all judges, tournament improvement feedback	Minimal collaboration
Participant 7	Team Coach/Judge	6	Upcoming schedule/events, current tournament design, student scholarship	Limited
Participant 8	Team Coach	6	Upcoming schedule/events, current tournament design, student scholarship	Limited
Participant 9	Team Coach	3	Current tournament	No collaboration
Participant 10	Tournament Director/Host	19	Greet all forensics coaches, manage hospitality room throughout the day	No collaboration

The ability of forensics coaches to collaborate with their peers in a structured setting is essential to the growth and development of the forensics coaches, their students, and the speech and debate programs within their schools. Forensics coaches that participated in this study identified administrators who can apply multiple styles of leadership as a characteristic they preferred in their instructional leader. Four categories were noted before this theme emerged.

The categories included transformational, transactional, laissez-faire as preconfigured codes from the full-range leadership model, and situational leadership. This was furthered by Participant 8, stating, “And those were my favorite to work with because, again, they were ... these principals who were transformational ... were able to give you license and flexibility where you need it.”

The ability of leaders to discern which leadership style to employ was further expressed by respondents sharing they prefer a leader that not only exhibits a variety of leadership styles but understands which circumstances to apply a specific leadership style to appropriately. The occurrence of this by several participants allowed for the additional category of situational leadership. Situational leadership was not a preconfigured code but appeared through participant data analysis. The category of situational leadership was defined separately and through the employment of transactional, transformational, and laissez-faire leadership styles. Participant 10 explored this construct:

At any time that I had a situation that I don't know how to navigate myself ... because I have no idea ... he [principal] will let me explain, so it's not laissez-faire to the point where they don't want to be a part of it, but they will give me the ability to choose to lead my program the way that I see fit, so maybe it is more of a mix.

As participants delved into their perceptions of their administrators' leadership styles, the convergence of mentoring was evidenced through several responses. Several categories led to the conclusion of mentoring as a theme. Categorical data for mentorship included principal to

forensics coach mentoring, peer mentoring, and dedicated time forensics coaches' professional development. Further, the construct of mentoring was expounded upon when the participants described the qualities they found to be most beneficial in leaders. These qualities included a leader they admire, found trustworthy, and felt was supportive.

Self-efficacy as a theme emerged from participants' responses about the significance of personal growth as a forensics coach to add a higher degree of leadership for themselves and their teams. Forensics coaches are stoic about attending, leading, and presenting at conferences. Additionally, in this study, some forensics coaches categorically detailed peer shadowing. Peer shadowing encompassed having the opportunity to follow a peer and learn from them in their professional environment. The exploration of this was supported by Participant 4, stating, "I did find it helpful to go and see how other people were teaching, so, and that certainly did, you know, benefit what I was doing." Funding for speech and debate emerged as a theme. The significance of this emerged, with 70% of participants reporting the importance of funding for their program. Seven categories were configured when grouping the participants' responses. Four participants indicated budget cuts as a hindrance to the prosperity of their program. Two respondents indicated adequate funding for their program and the opportunities this affords them to deepen their understanding of forensics coaching as a discipline and the opportunities the students are afforded. Providing students with adequate resources to sustain a UIL team is essential to the sustainability and success of the program.

Forensics coaches shared a plethora of experiences regarding their perceptions of their administrator's leadership styles and their views and experiences with professional learning communities. Administrators' ability to provide professional learning communities, employing multiple styles of leadership, mentoring forensics coaches, forensics coaches' perceptions of

self-efficacy, and adequate funding will improve the productivity of forensics coaches on their campus. Forensics coaches can play a vital role in the development and enhancement of elective programs. University interscholastic league participation provides opportunities for citizenship and scholarship. The themes that emerged from this data analysis will further the discussion for the training and development of forensics coaches.

### **Chapter Summary**

Chapter 4 began with a brief discussion of the study and the guided research questions. An overview of the research focus and processes utilized followed in addition to an in-depth analysis of the questions asked during the participants' interviews, post analysis, and major themes that emerged from the raw data collected. A step-by-step process detailing how the data collected provided answers to the guided research questions. Chapter 5 includes a detailed discussion of the summary of the findings, implications for practice, recommendations for future research, and a conclusion of the study.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The study examined forensics coaches' perceptions of administrators' leadership styles and the impact within their professional learning communities. This basic interpretive qualitative study included an analysis of data collected from high school forensics coaches with three or more years of forensics coaching experience in class 5/A-6/A UIL. The data collected through semi-structured interviews, field notes, and covert observations were analyzed and interpreted based on the seven-step framework method and in-vivo coding analysis. This collection of data led to the emergence of themes provided in this study.

While their academic backgrounds and years as forensics coaches may differ between participants, these five common themes were noticeable aspects in their perceptions of administrators' leadership styles and the impact within their professional learning communities. Each of the five themes serves as a representation of the voices of the participants in this study. Forensics coaches' perceptions of administrators' leadership styles that work within their schools and the impact within their professional learning communities were comprised of five themes: (a) professional learning communities, (b) multi-styled leadership, (c) mentorship, (d) self-efficacy, and (e) funding. Each of these themes was developed through the careful aggregation of codes and categories. The categories allowed an in-depth analysis of the participants' responses developed through manual coding, providing answers to the research questions.

### Interpretation of the Findings

**Research question 1.** What are forensics coaches' perceptions of administrators' leadership styles that work within their schools?

Theme 2 (applying multiple styles of leadership) provided an answer for research question 1. While each participant expressed ownership in their chosen profession, across all

academic backgrounds, ages, and demographics, participants noted the context of the situation is dependent on the nature of the leadership style their leader should exhibit. Moreover, the results of this study included four sentiments: (a) transformational leadership, (b) transactional leadership, (c) laissez-faire leadership, and (d) situational leadership. Underlying sentiments were an inference to trust in the forensics coach and administrator relationship.

The emphasis on the application of multiple leadership styles is consistent with the literature regarding studies related to the full-range leadership model. Cusick (2014) claimed leaders in the education sector need to equip themselves with the foundation of skillful leadership in order to implement change. In efforts to maintain the competitiveness of educational institutions, the leader's aptitude to influence should always be preserved. This study's conclusion emphasized the importance of forensics coaches to communicate their individual needs to their administrators and for administrators to understand that needs are unique to the individual. Understanding the individual's needs, too, is in line with the literature that applying leadership styles varies according to each individual. It is essential for administrators to focus on the leader and the subordinate. Bass and Avolio (1994) noted that these relationships rely heavily on the personal characteristics of those involved that they can mold and shape, as opposed to just providing extrinsic motivators. Seven out of 10 participants discussed the significance of administrators applying multiple leadership styles based on the situation. These codes determined the application of multiple styles of leadership as a theme.

Participant 10 captured the essence of this theme:

It depends on what part of my job you are looking at. Any time I have a situation that I do not know how to navigate myself, I bring them in. I have had different times even in the past few months that I have had to make a decision, and I have gone into the head principal's office and went hey [redacted], what do I do here because I have no idea. He will go ok, ah, what all is going into it and he will let me explain, so it is not laissez-faire to the point where they do not want to be a part of it, but they will give me the ability to



choose to lead my program the way that I see fit, so maybe it is more of a mix. They want me to succeed. They are going to inspire me and help me get to that level, but they are not going to interfere and make everything happen in a specific way, which has been honestly amazing.

Participants further cited the ability of leaders to discern which leadership style to employ. Participants shared they prefer a leader that not only exhibits a variety of leadership styles but understands which circumstances to apply a specific leadership style appropriately.

The relationship between administrator and teacher differs according to the school location and the number of teachers in each school (Amanchukwu et al., 2015). While a forensics coach can demonstrate skill and ability expressing a desire to move in a certain direction within a specific school setting, the school administrator provides instructional leadership (Hoy & Smith, 2007). Moreover, in creating organizational contexts, it is critical to establish connections between teachers, allowing for cohesion and improved collaboration (Park & Choi, 2016). Equally, examining the forensics coach and administrator relationship through the lens of a forensics coach, the administrator has a vested interest in forging relationships while building the reputation and competence of his or her coaches, encouraging cooperation, and working collaboratively (Balyer, 2012).

Theme 3 (the significance of mentorship) addressed research question 1. The significance of mentorship (principals to forensics coaches, forensics coaches to forensics coaches, veteran forensics coaches to new forensics coaches, and students to students), addressed the significance of mentorship. Outzen and Cronn-Mills (2012) indicated that the association of forensics coaches affirmed they would benefit significantly if they work closely with speech department administrators. As these forensics coaches' move forward in their careers, receiving professional feedback from their administrators concerning their work performance motivates and empowers them (Bistodeau, 2015).

The results suggest that several categories led to the conclusion of mentoring as a theme. Categorical data for mentorship included principal to forensics coach mentoring, peer mentoring, and dedicated time for forensics coaches' professional development. Further, the construct of mentoring was expounded upon when the participants described the qualities that they found to be most beneficial in leaders. These qualities included a leader they admire, found trustworthy, and felt was supportive.

The literature highlighted the significance of establishing trust in the forensics coach-administrator relationship regarding mentorship, mainly when related to qualities that participants found to be most beneficial in leaders. According to Jensen and Jensen (2007), new forensics coaches value themselves higher and have higher expectations of their administrators. Historically, forensics coaches exit the profession because of experiencing burnout, leaving the next generation of coaches with the same principles and methods of forensics education and training, creating a void for adequate progress (Carmack & Holm, 2015). According to Freeman, Rogers, and Hopkins (2017), in the United States, forensics coach burnout continues to be significant without the support of their school administrators or involvement in the decision-making process results in coaches exiting the profession. Each of the participants expressed a need for training opportunities specific to their subject matter. Park and Choi (2016) asserted that the process of engaging teachers creatively with an additional component of building the capacity for reflection strengthens teachers when offered through professional development learning opportunities.

Theme 5 (funding for speech and debate program) addressed the importance of funding. This study's finding that funding for speech and debate programs is essential to success aligns with previous literature justifying the value of forensics to administrators can be difficult because

the activity does not fit within standard assessment (Rogers & Rennels, 2008). According to Kuyper (2011), understanding the differences between debate and individualized competition is more difficult for people outside of the debate and forensics community. Participant 5 summarized this theme:

If a kid does speech and debate, there are test scores ... their ability to communicate on paper and essays is going to increase this much. And, if you can bring that data to them [administrators], and there is plenty that [data] out there ... once they see that, I think that helps motivate them. It's just the costs sometimes get in the way.

Participant 1 stated, "She [principal] removed about \$25,000 worth of funding from our program and had never met me before, had never had a conversation with me." This forensics coach added,

I was used to meeting with my previous principal each spring, talking with him about budget, looking at what the Booster Club was providing, showing him numbers for every event, how much participation, how much cost, what percentage of that the Booster Club was doing. He and I had an agreed-upon plan that, over time, the Boosters were going to increase their support, and that was on track. Everything that I had agreed with him about money and policies was working toward a plan.

Kelly and Richardson (2010) explained linking back to scholarship not only maintains the history of education forensics, but it also helps to justify forensics programs to school administrators by linking to the institution's academic goals. Throughout the process of gaining insight into the shared understandings of participants in this study, funding for speech and debate emerged as a theme. The significance of this emerged with 70% of participants indicating the importance of funding for their program. Participants indicated budget cuts as a hindrance to the prosperity of their program.

Respondents indicated adequate funding for their program was essential and affords them opportunities to deepen their understanding of forensics coaching as a discipline to benefit students. Providing students with adequate resources to sustain a UIL team is essential to the

sustainability and success of the program. Linking back to scholarship not only maintains the history of education forensics, but it also helps to justify forensics programs to school administrators' by linking to the institution's academic goals.

**Research question 2.** How do those perceived leadership styles impact professional learning communities?

Professional learning communities are critical to forensics coaches' perceptions of administrators' leadership styles and the impact within the community. This study aligned with historical literature indicating professional learning communities serve as a team of like-minded educators' who collaboratively share a common interest, meet frequently, share expertise, and work to improve teaching skills and students' academic performance (DuFour et al., 2005). Nine out of 10 forensics coaches identified an authentic, functional learning environment exclusive to forensics coaches without outside influence from other disciplines as a primary concern for professional learning. Participant 1 summarized this theme by stating,

I would say it is better to put a debate coach in a PLC with the coach across town at another school or the three coaches in your ISD. As a PLC, that would be a more authentic PLC, even if they only meet digitally or remotely ... or see each other at tournaments a few times a year that would be a more authentic PLC than lumping the debate coach in with the English department or the CTE department.

Neumerski (2012) suggested two factors necessary to establish sustainable professional learning communities in schools: school administrators ought to possess the ability to distribute authority and delegate tasks without disrupting the learning environment. Brand (2000) suggested that forensics workshops rooted in reliable training infrastructure or mentoring programs across the forensics circuit would be a step toward effectively linking scholarship, theory, and teaching practices. Forensics coaches cited a desire to collaborate with their peers and administrators, with an overwhelming majority of participants defining this as a specific

need for professional growth. Professional learning communities, with opportunities for content selection, attendance, and facilitation by forensics coaches, were explicitly named as a category or subcategory. Forward-thinking educational policymakers, researchers, and practitioners concluded that professional development reform is necessary to move forensics education into the next millennium (Freeman et al., 2017).

In this study, participants emphasized attending conferences or serving as facilitators at conferences. Even those forensics coaches who did want to facilitate, articulated emphasis on other forensics coaches as facilitators, particularly as it pertains to who delivered their training sessions. Throughout many of the interviews, the participants expressed their desire to collaborate in a structured setting with their peers. The ability of forensics coaches to collaborate with their peers in a structured setting is essential to the progression and development of the forensics coaches, their students, and the speech and debate programs within their schools.

In theme 3 (the significance of mentorship), participants in this study identified different relationships (principals to forensics coaches, forensics coaches to forensics coaches, veteran forensics coaches to new forensics coaches, and students to students) as important to mentorship. Outzen and Cronn-Mills (2012) indicated that forensics coaches benefit significantly if they work closely with speech department administrators. As these forensics coaches' move forward in their careers, and receiving professional feedback from their administrators concerning their work performance motivates and empowers them (Bistodeau, 2015).

In theme 4 (self-efficacy), each of the participants identified ways they could become better versions of themselves, such as attending and presenting at conferences, leading professional development, and peer shadowing. Each of the participants expressed a need for training opportunities specific to their subject matter. According to Rogers (2002), forensics

coaches feel supported and expressed a sense of comfort when their administrators understand their job functions, acknowledge their efforts, and encourage and inspire them to keep moving forward. Park and Choi (2016) asserted the process of engaging teachers creatively with an additional component of building the capacity for reflection strengthens teachers when offered through professional development learning opportunities.

One primary difference between the results of this study and those of previous studies was the importance for forensics coaches to both attend and present at conferences for professional development outside of UIL circuits versus the emphasis on merely attending and presenting at conferences within UIL, as previously written in the literature. There is an on-going need for continuous, sustainable learning and development for teachers, both individually and collectively (DuFour & Fullan, 2013). Few participants in this study expressed interest in peer shadowing and learning how other forensics coaches implement best practices in their classrooms, sharing they preferred opportunities that not only allow them to observe other forensics coaches but also have the support of their administrators in dedicating adequate time for collaboration with other coaches. This study is congruent with the literature that noted the impact of the school administrator providing instructional leadership (Hoy & Smith, 2007) that is critical in creating organizational contexts, establishing connections between teachers, allowing for cohesion, and improving collaboration. Further, participants cited the desire for self-efficacy helped them improve their coaching practices and team obligations; however, administrators were not often cited as catalysts who assisted them in moving toward increased self-efficacy. School administrators were generally cited as the principal agents participants needed in helping them grow in their profession.

According to Jensen and Jensen (2007), new forensics coaches value themselves higher

and have higher expectations of their administrators. As forensics coaches move forward in their careers, receiving feedback from their administrators concerning their work performance motivates and empowers them (Bistodeau, 2015). While a forensics coach can establish skill and competence while expressing a desire to move in a specific direction within a school setting, Rogers (2002) claimed forensics coaches feel supported. He noted there is a sense of comfort when their administrators understand their job function and acknowledge their efforts. Conversely, examining the forensics coach and administrator relationship through the lens of a forensics coach, the administrator has a vested interest in building the reputation and competence of his or her teachers, as their work symbolizes that of the administrators.

Theme 5 (funding for speech and debate programs) addressed research question 2, exploring the importance of funding a speech and debate program. The participants discussed budget cuts, budgets for circuits outside of UIL, hiring assistant forensics coaches, debate camps for forensics coaches and students, purchasing classroom resources for competitions, and fundraising. Kerber and Cronn-Mills (2005) argued that without focused training and education for the next generation, forensics would not have the tools to grow and evolve. According to Stanley (2011), there is a direct correlation between student learning and development with teacher learning and growth; school administrators must understand this. Several participants identified a desire for an exchange in dialogue between administrators and forensics coaches about budgets for speech and debate programs. Participant 1 stated, “She [principal] removed about \$25,000 worth of funding from our program and had never met me before, had never had a conversation with me.” This forensics coach added,

I was used to meeting with my previous principal each spring, talking with him about budget, looking at what the Booster Club was providing, showing him numbers for every event, how much participation, how much cost, what percentage of that the Booster Club was doing. He and I had an agreed-upon plan that, over time the Boosters were going to

increase their support, and that was on track. Everything that I had agreed with him about money and policies was working toward a plan.

Kerber and Cronn-Mills (2005) argued that without a focus on training and education for the next generation, forensics would not have the tools to grow and evolve.

Previous research failed to provide data on how to best support the collaborative needs of forensics coaches and their leaders in building a culture of professionalism and plausibility required in academic standards (Kuyper, 2011). Further, there has been no exploration of forensics coaches' perceptions regarding administrators' leadership styles that impact professional learning communities within their schools (Van Driel & Berry, 2012). The findings of this study expand upon previous studies, representing the combined voices of participants identifying professional learning communities, multi-styled leadership, mentorship, self-efficacy, and funding.

### **Implications in Forensics Coaching**

The implications for change in the forensics coaching profession and speech and debate programs are a direct result of the findings of this study. Chapter 2 included descriptions of the full-range leadership model. The full-range leadership model focuses on various workforce situations where the leader's behavior is distinguished between three styles of leadership: transformational, transactional, or laissez-faire. The full-range leadership model characterizes the leader's level of engagement (Avolio & Bass, 1991).

The results of this study aligned with the full-range leadership model linked to various workforce situations. Researchers investigated the effectiveness of the full-range leadership model and noted how it propels leaders and subordinates towards a lifetime journey of empowerment (Judge et al., 2004).

First, forensics coaches' desire to collaborate with their peers and administrators was



evident from all participants, with an overwhelming majority of participants defining this as a specific need for professional growth. Researchers contended that teachers value individual and collaborative discernment more than forced rules or unsustainable procedures (Neumerski, 2012). Professional learning communities with opportunities for content selection, attendance, and facilitation by forensics coaches were explicitly named as a category or subcategory. Rogers and Rennels (2008) argued forensics teams needed to work within a variety of systems and subsystems on campus, off-campus, and in forensics communities to gain the support necessary to keep programs afloat. The ability of forensics coaches to collaborate with their peers in a structured setting is essential to the professional development and personal growth of the forensics coaches, their students, and the speech and debate programs within their schools. If forensics coaches can receive support from their school administrators and are involved in the decision-making process, they are more likely to avoid burnout or leave the profession (Freeman et al., 2017).

Second, forensics coaches who participated in this study identified administrators who can apply multiple styles of leadership as a characteristic they prefer in their instructional leader. Anderson (2017) stated that leadership styles have five main characteristics, including having mutual trust, fostering the leadership abilities of others, goal setting, visualizing, and the capability of supporting the professional development of teachers. If a school administrator shifts the educational paradigm in a school, the administrator must radiate specific characteristics to implement change and move away from failed systems of the past. The categories identified by participants included transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire as preconfigured codes from the full-range leadership model.

As forensics moves into the 21st century, the issues confronting the activity will require

leaders who are capable of managing the challenges (Bartanen & Littlefield, 2015). The ability of leaders to discern which leadership style to employ was further expressed as a leader who not only exhibits a variety of leadership styles but also understands in which circumstances to apply a specific leadership style appropriately. Kurland et al. (2010) asserted that an administrator's leadership style determines the amount of support and guidance provided to their teachers, affirming Burns' (1978) full-range leadership model. When applied appropriately, leaders achieve success (Burns, 1978). The frequency of this allowed for the additional category of situational leadership. Situational leadership was not a preconfigured code but emerged through data analysis.

Third, as participants delved into their perceptions of their administrators' leadership styles, the convergence of mentoring was evidenced through several responses. Brand (2000) suggested that forensics workshops rooted in reliable training infrastructure or mentoring programs across the forensics circuit would be a step toward effectively linking scholarship, theory, and teaching practices. Categorical data for mentorship included principal to forensics coach mentoring, peer mentoring, and dedicated time for forensics coaches' professional development. Forward-thinking educational policymakers, researchers, and practitioners conclude that professional development reform is necessary to move forensics education into the next millennium (Freeman et al., 2017). Further, the participants stated the qualities that they found to be most beneficial in leaders and mentors include a leader they admire, found trustworthy, and felt was supportive. According to Rogers (2002), forensics coaches feel supported and expressed a sense of comfort when their administrators understand their job functions and acknowledge their efforts when they are encouraged and inspired to keep moving forward.

Fourth, self-efficacy was supported through the categorization of participants' responses regarding attending, leading, and presenting at conferences. Kerber and Cronn-Mills (2005) argued that without a focus on training and education for the next generation, forensics would not have the tools to grow and evolve. According to Stanley (2011), there is a direct correlation between student learning and development with teacher learning and growth; school administrators must understand this. Additionally, in this study, some forensics coaches categorically detailed peer shadowing. Peer shadowing encompassed having the opportunity to follow a peer and learn from them in their professional environment. Most importantly, when members collaborate, they take responsibility for their learning and development, which should be considered the norm of every school's culture (DuFour & Fullan, 2013).

Finally, participants identified the need for funding of their speech and debate programs as a critical component. They face budget cuts, budget for circuits outside of UIL (TFA/NSDA), hiring assistant coaches, debate camp for students, debate camp for forensics coaches, classroom resources for competitions, and fundraisers and booster clubs. The current circumstances of educational accountability may increasingly require the forensics community to link the educational mission of the curriculum with the information needed to champion their program (Williams & Gantt, 2005). These were all described as crucial factors in speech and debate programs staying afloat. Respondents indicated adequate funding for their program was essential. Kelly and Richardson (2010) explained that linking back to scholarship not only maintains the history of forensics, but it also helps to justify forensics programs to school administrators by linking to the institution's academic goals.

Providing students with adequate resources to sustain a UIL team is essential to the sustainability and success of the program. Caskey and Carpenter (2012) claimed that

collaboration is acquired when teachers and administrators work as partners, sharing their knowledge, contributing ideas, and developing plans to reach educational and organizational goals.

Forensics coaches shared a plethora of experiences regarding their perceptions of their administrators' leadership styles and their views and experiences with professional learning communities. Administrators' ability to provide professional learning communities, employing multiple styles of leadership, mentoring forensics coaches, forensics coaches' perceptions of self-efficacy, and adequate funding will improve the productivity of forensics coaches on their campus. Forensics coaches can play a vital role in the development and enhancement of elective programs. University interscholastic league participation provides opportunities for citizenship and scholarship.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

As a result of the findings, the following recommendations for future research are suggested. First, researchers might consider expanding this study beyond northeast Texas to other parts of the state and country. Exploration of this issue in different areas of the country might increase knowledge and understanding of forensics coaches' perceptions of administrators' leadership styles and the impact within their professional learning communities. Through the inclusion of the forensics coaches' frontline experiences and engagements with their students, such a study could spark a discussion that educational institutions could utilize to help administrators analyze their leadership styles.

Second, researchers might explore the role of the mentee in the development of administrators' leadership styles. A vast majority of the participants identified the importance of mentorship in supporting the needs of forensics coaches. The participants in this study repeatedly

discussed the mentoring relationship between new and veteran forensics coaches with an emphasis on veteran coaches helping new coaches navigate through coaching duties, such as registering their teams for tournaments, hosting events, gathering classroom resources, and staying abreast of the current trends related to forensics. Gaining insight into best practices that improve the mentor/mentee relationship could be a useful tool for shaping organizational culture and developing mentoring programs—creating a more in-depth exploration of exactly how mentors influenced the leadership styles of their mentees—and providing a framework for attracting and retaining high-potential talent and accelerating leadership development and readiness.

The third recommendation is that researchers explore administrators' perceptions of forensics coaches' attitudes towards professional learning communities to offer an alternative perspective or a comparative analysis of the current study. Each of the participants in this study identified the significance of professional learning environments structured to the specific training forensics coaches had received in preparation for assuming the duties of coaching, the issues and concerns they faced, which inadequately prepared them, and how they dealt with these issues. A more in-depth exploration of administrators' perceptions of forensics coaches' attitudes towards professional learning communities focusing on shared professional development closely connected to teaching and learning might encourage school administrators and teachers to search for ways to enhance their personal growth and development as an essential function of their responsibilities. Allowing administrators to offer their perspectives might create opportunities for forensics coaches and administrators to exchange ideas and expectations.

The fourth recommendation is to conduct a comparative analysis of administrators' perspectives of their leadership styles. In examining the participants' responses, future research

can bridge the gap between leadership and forensics coaches' expectations regarding professional learning communities. Further, this analysis can be used to strengthen the professional development of forensics coaches. During the covert observations, minimal collaboration time was noted. Participants indicated that UIL events provide much-needed collaboration time.

However, during observations, the converse of this was expressed. Administrators have the responsibility to provide dedicated time for the professional development of forensics coaches. This dedicated time should occur separately and apart from speech and debate competitions.

Forensics coaches are engaged in meaningful planning, and last-minute preparation during UIL student competition events may give coaches some knowledge that is not the purpose of the competitive event. Such a study could provide a framework for the expansion of professional learning communities and opportunities for professional development designed to promote the growth and development of the forensics profession.

## **Reflections**

More than four decades ago, McBath (1975) argued that the core of research in the forensics profession is improving education and providing incentives for teachers. Researchers contended providing opportunities for teachers to collaborate within a content-specific learning community provides a solution from isolation these teachers might experience (DuFour & Fullan, 2013; Stanley, 2011). Carmack and Holm (2015) argued that many forensics coaches who experienced the burnout of coaching typically exit, leaving the next generation of coaches with the same principles and methods of forensics education and training, creating a void for adequate progress.

The current circumstances of educational accountability may increasingly require the forensics community to link the educational mission of the curriculum with the information needed to champion their program (Williams & Gantt, 2005). Brand (2000) asserted that for knowledge to go forward, one must build upon the investigation of published research in a specific discipline. Through the inclusion of forensics coaches' frontline experiences and engagements with their students, this study sought to spark a discussion that educational institutions could utilize to help administrators analyze their leadership styles.

Educational institutions could employ the research found in this study to help administrators analyze their leadership styles to positively impact the forensics coaching profession and advance students' content knowledge. By identifying possible themes, trends, and concerns, this study aimed to contribute additional knowledge to improve the quality of leadership and the overall advancement of the forensics coaching profession. When systems are created that are not sustainable or viable for healthy long-term professional participation, we need to consider not what we are doing, but how we do it (Carmack & Holm, 2015, p. 34).

Forensics coaches in Texas face unsustainable systems viable for long-term professional participation. This study sought to analyze forensics coaches' perceptions of administrators' leadership styles and the impact within their professional learning communities.

## **Conclusion**

Unlike educators who coach high school sports, forensics coaches work behind closed doors under the bright lights of a different stage on Friday nights, rarely, if ever, collaborating with colleagues about ways to enhance coaching and teaching practices to improve student success (Carmack & Holm, 2015). This study used interviews and covert observations to understand the phenomena of forensics coaches through the voices of the participants in

northeast Texas who tirelessly give of themselves, day after day, tournament after tournament, season after season, through victory and defeat. During the interview, each of the forensics coaches shared an overwhelming desire to develop and sustain relationships with their administrators, peers, students, and community. Through this analysis, administrators could positively impact the forensics coaching profession and advance student content knowledge.

I used self-reflective journals to critically examine personal motives and thoughts in efforts to discern the presence of biases and exclude them while thoughtfully and intentionally interpreting the data collected through the analysis process. With six years of professional teaching experience as a former forensics coach in public schools in Texas, previous professional relationships existed between two of the interview participants. It is conceivable that these two forensics coaches in this study answered with bias. I have striven to curtail biases (values and beliefs) that could affect the overall tone of the interview or the interpretation of the data.

Over 20 years ago, scholars echoed a plea for professionals to publish scholarly writings for the advancement of forensics academia (Carmack & Holm, 2015). This basic interpretive qualitative research study sought to answer this plea by providing a voice for high school forensics coaches who selflessly serve their students in class 5/A-6/A UIL in Texas. Without current literature, the progression of exploration within the field of forensics academia is lost (Compton, 2012), continuing to silence the voices of forensics professionals who teach, protect, coach, and serve future forensics coaches.



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## Appendix A: Sample Email for Forensics Coaches Voluntary Participation

Greetings, Forensics Coaches:

My name is Kenyatta D. Farmer, and I am a doctoral candidate at Abilene Christian University. I am currently conducting a basic interpretive qualitative study, and I need your participation.

The purpose of this study is to identify school administrators' leadership styles, as perceived by forensics coaches, and the impact within their professional learning communities, with emphasis on forensics coaches' in class 5/A-6/A university interscholastic league.

I am seeking to interview participants that are willing to share their lived experiences as forensics coaches. As a former forensics coach, I realize how important it is to share information and resources within the professional forensics' community. Please share your voices. If you are interested in participating in this study, please [REDACTED] or call [REDACTED].

As a participant in this study, your identity will remain confidential. The researcher, as the primary instrument for data collection and data analysis, hopes this proposed study could spark a discussion that educational institutions can utilize to help administrators analyze their leadership styles as a tool to impact forensics coaches' professional development positively, and advance students' content knowledge. Thank you for your consideration. I sincerely value your time.

Debate Life,

Kenyatta D. Farmer

## Appendix B: IRB Approval

**ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY**  
*Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World*  
**Office of Research and Sponsored Programs**  
320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103  
325-674-2885



January 24, 2020

Kenyatta Farmer  
Department of Graduate & Professional Studies  
Abilene Christian University

Dear Kenyatta,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled "A Qualitative Study: Forensic Coaches' Perceptions of Administrators' Leadership Styles and the Impact within Their Professional Learning Communities",

(IRB# 19-154 ) is exempt from review under Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects.

If at any time the details of this project change, please resubmit to the IRB so the committee can determine whether or not the exempt status is still applicable.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

*Megan Roth*

Megan Roth, Ph.D.  
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs

## Appendix C: Interview Protocol Interview Guide

Research project title:  
 Research investigator:  
 Interviewee Information  
 (Background) Date:  
 Name:  
 School:

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of the above research project. The purpose of this basic interpretive qualitative study is to identify school administrators' leadership styles, as perceived by forensics coaches that impact their professional development within their schools, with emphasis on forensics coaches in class 5/A-6/A university interscholastic league. The researcher, as the primary instrument for data collection and data analysis, hopes this proposed study could spark a discussion that educational institutions can utilize to help administrators analyze their leadership styles as a tool to impact forensics coaches' professional learning communities positively, and advance students' content knowledge. The interview will take 45 minutes. There are no risks associated with your participation. Your participation is voluntary, and you have the right to stop the interview or withdraw from the research at any time.

As a participant in this study, we will take the utmost measures to ensure confidentiality. During the interview process, the interview will be recorded and transcribed. Post interview, you will be sent a copy of the transcript. Please review the transcript for accuracy. After the transcript has been reviewed, the transcript of the interview will be analyzed by Kenyatta D. Farmer as a research investigator. The following definitions should provide clarity on the research topic. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask.

**Transformational leadership:** Transformational leaders inspire followers to achieve unexpected or remarkable results. Transformational leaders appeal to a personal sense of duty, or higher calling, rather than personal gratification. Transformational leaders allow followers the autonomy to make their own decisions about their jobs. The transformation leader addresses the individual needs of their subordinates and acts in ways to get their subordinates to trust and admire them.

**Transactional leadership:** Transactional leaders focus on results while conforming to the existing organizational structure. Transactional leadership rewards followers through a rewards and punishments system. The transactional leader provides rewards to followers' contingent upon their performance. The follower receives praise or punishment based on the needs of the organization, as the leader deems necessary.

**Laissez-faire leadership:** Laissez-faire leaders avoid leading their followers. The laissez-faire leader takes a hands-off approach to leadership. Laissez-faire leaders make very few decisions while allowing their followers to choose what is best for them. Followers are allowed the opportunity to make their own choices and facilitate independent decision making.

## Interview Questions

### **Part 1: Background Information**

1. What is your academic background?
2. What types of UIL activities have you coached? How Long?
3. Please describe your relationship with your high school principal.
4. How long have you worked with your high school principal?

### **Part 2: Forensics Coaches Interview Questions**

1. In your opinion, what are the components of an effective professional learning community?
2. Please tell me about professional learning communities in your school district. How does your campus use PLC, and what are the components you feel are beneficial as a forensics coach?
3. In what ways does your high school principal motivate you to collaborate with other forensics coaches on your campus, district, and beyond?
4. What are the most valuable qualities a high school principal should possess?
5. What are the different leadership styles that high school principals use?
6. What have high school principals who have led you done that you admired?
7. How would you describe your high school principal's leadership style?
8. In what ways does your high school principal support your overall professional development?
9. What makes a good leader?

This concludes the interview process. Thank you for your time. Enjoy your day!



## Appendix D: Expert Panel and Feedback

Dear Dr. \_\_\_\_\_,

I am a doctoral candidate at Abilene Christian University. I am conducting a basic interpretive qualitative study. The purpose of this basic interpretive qualitative study is to identify school administrators' leadership styles, as perceived by forensics coaches that impact their professional development within their schools, with emphasis on forensics coaches in class 5/A-6/A university interscholastic league. The researcher, as the primary instrument for data collection and data analysis, hopes this proposed study could spark a discussion that educational institutions can utilize to help administrators analyze their leadership styles as a tool to impact forensics coaches' professional learning communities positively, and advance students' content knowledge.

Qualitative researchers strategically select a small number of experts who have expert knowledge about the population and research topic to ensure that the questions they develop for interviews are valid and reliable by reaching out to experts. I am kindly requesting expertise and experience in order to ensure that all relevant questions developed for individual interviews are valid and reliable. Please provide feedback regarding the interview questions asked and the style of questions concerning the focus of the study. Below, you will find the proposed interview questions for this study. If you agree to be a member of the expert panel, please reply to this email. I sincerely look forward to hearing from you. Thank you so much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
 Kenyatta D. Farmer  
 Doctoral Candidate  
 Abilene Christian University

I have participated in the content validation of Kenyatta Farmer's interview questions for her study 'A Qualitative Study: Forensic Coaches' Perceptions of School Administrators' Leadership Styles And The Impact Within Their Professional Learning Communities' and approve them from a content perspective.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: January 27, 2020

Contact Information: \_\_\_\_\_

I have participated in the content validation of Kenyatta Farmer's interview questions for her study 'A Qualitative Study: Forensic Coaches' Perceptions of School Administrators' Leadership Styles And The Impact Within Their Professional Learning Communities' and approve them from a content perspective.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: UIL Director \_\_\_\_\_

Date: January 27, 2020

Contact Information: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E: Interview Coding Matrix

Research Question #1: What are forensics coaches' perceptions of administrators' leadership styles who work in their schools?

Themes	Category	Descriptors	Evidence & Subcategories
#2. Applying Multiple Styles of Leadership	Knowing when to use a hands-off or laid-back approach	Participants referring to non-existent relationships with principals as an indication that their program is invisible	"She was really, as far as debate was concerned, <u>hands off</u> , you know, as long as I was doing my job, then everything was fine. <u>There was an instance where I had a little bit of a mistake where she did get involved</u> , but even through that mistake, <u>she wasn't as involved as I would like her to be.</u> "
	Laissez-faire leader (hands-off, laid back, little guidance, complete freedom)	Participants referred to hands off approach and doing what they wanted to do.	" <u>My principal last year was very hands off and I could do whatever I wanted</u> , but I didn't necessarily feel like how my kids did affected him or the school in any sort of way.
	Mindfulness about an avoidance of building relationships	Participants referred to avoidance of forensics coach principal relationships	"It is almost <u>non-existent</u> . We've met <u>one time face-to-face</u> . I think that it means that <u>we are an invisible program</u> . I think she believes the public <u>doesn't see us</u> , and she doesn't have a vision of a high school where a debate team is significant and so <u>we're a detail she doesn't have time to attend to.</u> "
	Transformational leader (visionary, goal setter, risk takers, flexibility, self – management, proactive)	Participants referring to being rewarded with exchange days for meeting required professional development	"And those were my favorite to work with because, again, they were ... <u>these principals who were transformational had the ... were able to give you license and flexibility</u> where you need it, with the understanding that the institution as a whole was headed in a different direction, and trying to achieve things that hadn't been achieved before."
	Situational leadership (depending on the context of the situation)	Participants referring to parts of their job that may require a mixture of different leadership styles	" <u>It depends on what part of my job you are looking at</u> . At any time that I <u>have a situation that I don't know how to navigate myself</u> , I

			<p>tend to bring them in. I've had <u>different times</u> even in the past few months that I've had to <u>make a decision</u> and I've gone into the head principal's office and went hey [redacted], what do I do here because I have no idea. He will go ok, ah, what all is going into it and he will let me explain so it's not laissez-faire to the point where they don't want to be a part of it, but they will give me the ability to make the choice to lead my program the way that I see fit, so maybe it is more of a mix.</p> <p>They want me to succeed. They are going to inspire me and help me get to that level, but they're not going to interfere and make everything happen in a specific way which has been honestly amazing."</p>
	Transactional leader (rule follower, inflexible, focused on short-term gain, rewards performance)	Participants referring to being rewarded with exchange days for meeting required professional development	<p>"<u>We're given exchange days</u> ..... we have one day where if we do the required professional development on our own in the summer then we get to <u>take the day off.</u>"</p>
#3. The significance of mentorship	A principal who understands what I do	Participants were referring to having principals who understand forensics and the time that goes into it	<p>"And, so, I think that it's really nice <u>to have somebody who understands what we're doing</u> and understands the hours that go into it and <u>continues to push me</u> without also telling me I can't do these things."</p>
	A leader I admire	Participants referring to principals they admire who recognize the significance of showing up for tournaments and judging a round	<p>"<u>Show up at a tournament.</u> Because <u>they never do</u> ...only the ones that have been former coaches appreciate the significance of that...even when we host tournaments...there's only been one time that I've had a principal judge a round and that's because we specifically asked."</p>
	Principals to forensics coaches to principals (buy- in, suggestions)	Participants referring to principals who included electives, ultimately allowing faculty to make decisions and buy-in	<p>"So, in the fall of 2003 it was, <u>the principal there put together a team, I was included,</u> there were 5 of us, and so I was representing the electives, and then the 4 others were core subject</p>

people. When the principal introduced the PLC to the faculty, he did this research and everything, he told the faculty at [redacted] High School in the late fall of 2003 or early 2004, he told them, he said, "This is something I want to introduce, and I'm going to bring it in slowly, and setting up these communities," but he said, "ultimately we're going to try this for a period of time, and then you as a faculty will decide if we go further. I'm not going to make that decision, you're going to make the decision, and hopefully I'm going to present enough information and facts and research that you'll buy into it."

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Mentorship (Forensics coaches to forensics coaches)	Participants referring to having mentors to help understand different components of debate and provide support for what's best for the coach and team.	"Having that <u>mentor to just help you understand better, not only the different components that go within debate like congress, Lincoln Douglas, ahh, you know, the extemporaneous speaking, all of those things, understanding those different components, but also knowing just little things, like, okay, how do I sign up for a tournament? You know, that support is so important to have that, and if you don't, you're left in a position where you're maybe not doing what's best for you and the team as a whole.</u> "
Veteran forensics coaches' mentor new forensics coaches	Participants referring to years of experience in coaching forensics wouldn't hurt to have somebody there to vent to or plan with.	" <u>As you get older, you know all that stuff, after you've had 15-20 years because you kind of know all of that. Wouldn't hurt to have somebody there just to vent to, or if you're doing something in the school to plan.</u> "
Mentoring (student to student)	Participants referring to using experienced seniors and returning students to help with new students	"We're going to help you, and you'll use <u>our kids, our seniors and stuff and we'll use them to help come in and help with your newbies too.</u> Cause I had <u>two</u> returning students, when I took

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			over the program, I had a junior and a senior that had any experience at all, and if I hadn't had those two kids it wouldn't have been much help.
#5. Funding of speech and debate program	Budget cuts	Participants referring to administration removing funding from programs without having conversations about budget cuts	"She [principal] removed about \$25,000 worth of funding from our program and had never met me before, had never had a conversation with me. And I believe that she did it because the accountant complained."
	Budget for circuits outside of UIL (TFA/NSDA)	Budget overage due to additional circuits outside of UIL that had success.	"One of the reasons our budget was over was because we went to state, and we went to nationals, and we went to region, and we...you know, we had success.
	Hiring assistant forensics coaches	Participants referring to administration hiring assistant coaches due to the growth in program.	I mean in a perfect world they [administration] would hire me two more coaches because my program is almost hitting a 100 right now and we're struggling."
	Debate camp for Students	Summer debate camps for debate students	Normally, the kids attend the camp, but if you're a really motivated coach, you sort of quickly realize you have to have been to understand
	Debate camp for forensics coaches	Summer debate camps for forensics coaches	what's happening with your higher-level coaching skills that you need to really get a team to state, or get a team to be competitive, state or nationally."
	Classroom resources for competitions	Purchasing laptops for research for the debate team	"I had a desire to get laptops for research and for prep for the debate team, and there were only 13 kids, I think on the debate team at that time, and his first response was frustrating, was, "Well, we'd have to give laptops to every club on campus, it's just a club." I said, "No, it's a class."
	Fundraising/Booster clubs	Participants referring to resources for speech and debate program	"Everybody says they want to have a good debate team...but there's a difference between saying you want to have a good debate team and then being willing to devote the resources to do that."

Research Question #2. How do those perceived leadership styles impact their professional learning community?

Themes	Category	Descriptors	Evidence & Subcategories
#1. PLC	Off-site	Forensics coaches within a professional learning community	“It is better to <u>put a debate coach in a PLC with the coach across town at another school or ISD...</u> that would be a <u>more authentic PLC</u> , even if they {forensics coaches} only meet <u>digitally or remotely...</u> or at tournaments... that would be a more authentic PLC than lumping the debate coach in with the English department or the CTE department.”
	Open to other districts (professional development)	Forensics coaches within the region	“ <u>I would think it would probably be ‘pretty difficult’ to find something at a school district. I think it would have to be something that was sort of, you know, region wide event that takes all of the forensics coaches within our region and have us all come together.</u> ”
	Dialogue – (forensics coaches to forensics coaches/forensics coaches to principals)	Participants referring to being able to communicate and collaborate	The best reason to use <u>PLCs...</u> to make sure that <u>communication is happening to ensure that people are collaborating.</u>
	Content specific training for speech and debate coaches	Participants referring to professional learning opportunities designed for speech and debate coaches.	“We were given a list of <u>multiple different workshops that we could do online.</u> There were a few campus based workshops that we could do, <u>but there was just a multitude of different places we could go to get these hours of professional learning,</u> but it was not very helpful as a forensics coach because <u>there’s just not a lot out there that is designed for people that coach speech and debate.</u> ”
	Forensics coaches teaching/leading professional learning	Participants referring to forensics’ coaches leading professional learning workshops	“ <u>Some professionals get more out of doing the training than receiving the training, because they have to reflect and go a little more in-depth as to what it is that</u>

			they are doing that's working for them."
	Forensics coaches shadowing each other	Participants referring to opportunities to shadow other forensics coaches	"In fact, I would love to ...there are definitely people in this area that <u>I would love to shadow.</u> "
	Supportive leadership (allowing time to collaborate)	Participants referring to the importance of having time to collaborate	" <u>It was important to me</u> that he <u>let me communicate with other people</u> who'd not been out of the loop who had been doing it for a long time, and to let me bring people in and <u>have conversations with them about what it was going to look like.</u>
	Family environment of forensics coaches	Participants referring to the authenticity of an engaged, emotionally supportive plc	"It's <u>emotionally supportive.</u> I had one of our coaches, <u>his mother passed away,</u> and we <u>supported him through that process with everything</u> from food to lesson plans, and all <u>those kinds of things that you want an effective PLC</u> to be, is that <u>authentic, legitimate, engaged PLC.</u> "
	Assigning roles	Participants referring to Forensics coaches have respect for each other and appropriate roles within the plc.	"There was <u>respect for my ideas</u> even though I was the new person on the team ...and <u>I was given an appropriate role</u> for the new person on the team."
#3. The significance of mentorship	A principal who understands (supports what I do)	Participants were referring to having principals who understand forensics and the time that goes into it	" <u>I think that it's really nice to have somebody</u> who understands what we're doing and <u>understands the hours that go into it and continues to push me</u> without also telling me I can't do these things."
	A leader I trust	Participants referring to building relationships with leaders they trust	" <u>You cannot be successful if people don't trust you.</u> And, so, they [have] to trust ... the leaders [have] to trust the people that they put in place for different jobs. But the people that are in those jobs, also [have] to <u>trust that leaders, and that's not an easy thing.</u> "
	A leader I admire	Participants referring to principals they admire who recognize the significance of showing up for tournaments and judging a round	" <u>Show up at a tournament.</u> Because they never do ...only the ones that have been former coaches appreciate the significance of

			that...even when we host tournaments...there's only been one time that I've had a principal judge a round and that's because we specifically asked."
	Mentorship (Forensics coaches to forensics coaches)	Participants referring to having mentors to help understand different components of debate and provide support for what's best for the coach and team	"Having that mentor to just help you understand better, not only the different components."
	Veteran forensics coaches' mentor new forensics coaches	Participants referring to years of experience in coaching forensics wouldn't hurt to have somebody there to vent to or plan with.	" <u>As you get older</u> , you know all that stuff, after you've had <u>15-20 years</u> because you kind of know all of that. Wouldn't hurt to have somebody there just to vent to, or if you're doing something in the school to plan."
	Mentoring (student to student)	Participants referring to using experienced seniors and returning students to help with new students	"We're going to help you, <u>and you'll use our kids</u> , our seniors and stuff and we'll use them to help come in and help with your newbies too. Cause I had <u>two returning students</u> , when I took over the program, I had a junior and a senior that had any experience at all, and if I hadn't had those two kids it wouldn't have been much help."
#4. Self-efficacy	Forensics coaches attending conferences	Participants referring to flexibility in attending professional conferences	"I think he is...he and others have been pretty good and <u>flexible about letting me go to professional conferences</u> ...as both the presenter...and usually like a board member or something...you know...there's never been a requirement that <u>I present to be able to go...they've always been open</u> ."
	Forensics coaches presenting at conferences	Participants referring to having flexibility to present at conferences	"I get <u>many hundreds of hours of professional development by attending sessions and judging and participating in meetings with colleagues and debate coaches who present at those</u> and that becomes my best professional development."



	Forensics coaches leading professional development	Participants referring to the benefits of in-depth summer professional development that works for them	I think there comes a time for some professionals when they really <u>get more out of doing the training than receiving the training</u> , because they have to reflect and go a little more in-depth as to what it is that they are doing that's working for them.
	Time for peer-shadowing	Participants referring to the benefits of seeing how other forensics coaches teach	"I <u>did find it helpful</u> to go and see how other people were teaching, so, and that certainly did, <u>you know, benefit what I was doing.</u> "
	Program recognition	Participants referring to recognition of specific to team accomplishments	" <u>When we won the state championship</u> for policy and LD...and like overall academic sweepstakes, they [actually] <u>have a phone system that they call everyone in the district</u> and let them know that we've won so it was [really] cool."
#5 Funding for speech and debate program	Budget cuts	Participants referring to administration removing funding from programs without having conversations about budget cuts.	" <u>She, [principal] removed about \$25,000</u> worth of funding from our program and had never met me before, had never had a conversation with me. And I believe that she did it because the accountant complained."
		Budget overage due to additional circuits outside of UIL that had success.	" <u>One of the reasons our budget was over</u> was because we went to <u>state</u> , and we went to <u>nationals</u> , and we went to <u>region</u> , and we...you know, we had success."
	Hiring assistant coaches	Participants referring to administration hiring assistant coaches due to the growth in program	'I mean in a perfect world they [administration] <u>would hire me two more coaches because my program is almost hitting a 100 right now and we're struggling</u> . I have two assistant coaches right now, but one is a history teacher and the other is a physics teacher and they are very much core teachers so as far as like the coaching of the program it all comes down to me. They're there for like chaperoning and like being supportive adults, which is great I couldn't do it without them but <u>I think in</u>

		<p><u>order for me to get any substantial value out of a PLC I would need more people like on the ground like coaching speech and debate....argumentation type stuff.”</u></p>
Debate camp for students	Summer debate camps for students.	<p>Normally the kids attend the camp, but if you’re a really motivated coach you sort of quickly realize you have to have been to camp to understand what’s happening with your higher level coaching skills that you need to really get a team to state, or get a team to be competitive, state or nationally.</p>
Debate camp for forensics coaches	Summer debate camps for forensics coaches	<p><u>I normally work at a debate camp in the summer, and so when I’m at that debate camp, my job is to supervise the dorms and manage the dorms, and then help with judging. And so since I usually make a deal with my summer program at [redacted] or [redacted] or [redacted] or wherever I go that I’ll manage the dorms but if I want to attend any of the session, I can for free and they give me a certificate.</u></p>
Classroom resources for competitions	Participants referring resources for classrooms	<p>“I had a desire to get laptops for research and for prep for the debate team, and there were only 13 kids, I think on the debate team at that time, and his first response was frustrating, was, “Well, we’d have to give laptops to every club on campus, it’s just a club.” I said, “No, it’s a class.”</p>
Fundraisers/Booster clubs	Participants referring to fundraises for programs	<p><u>Everybody says they want to have a good debate team...but there’s a difference between saying you want to have a good debate team and then being willing to devote the resources to do that.”</u></p>