
The Perceptions of Wyoming Principals to Predict Superintendent Motivating Language Use: A Blockwise Regression Study

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Abstract: *This 2019 NRMERA conference proceeding shares the results of a blockwise regression study focused on the degree to which the Motivating Language Antecedents [Behavioral Integrity and Source Credibility Dimensions – Competence, Goodwill, and Trustworthiness] predict superintendent’s Motivating Language use based upon the perceptions of their principals through the lens of Motivating Language Theory as the foundation for superintendent talk. Significant results from this study indicate that principals prioritize superintendent goodwill as a necessary primary precursor over competence and prioritize the dimensions of source credibility before behavioral integrity thus supporting a redefinition of superintendent credibility from the current research field.*

Key Words: Leadership communications, Motivating Language Theory, Superintendent talk, Credibility, Behavioral Integrity

INTRODUCTION

Wyoming is a state of excellence in education in the Western United States based upon a top-ten ranking in the 2018 Quality Counts rankings (“Quality Counts,” 2018). One of the key drivers behind this excellence are superintendents and their impact on student academic outcomes (Myers, 2011) in their role as instructional leaders. Copeland (2013) identified five core roles of a Western, rural superintendent as manager, planner, listener, communicator, and community involvement. Copeland (2013) stated it was vital for superintendents to have “comprehensive communication skills” (p. 9). According to Kowalski (2005), superintendents could not do the work of the superintendency without using their talk to accomplish their work. Holmes (In Press) found that superintendents communicate orally over 74% of the time to do the work of the superintendency. In short, superintendent talk is the medium of superintendent administrative practice. Therefore, the objective of this study is to determine the degree to which Behavioral Integrity, Competence, Goodwill, and Trustworthiness predict superintendent’s Motivating Language use based upon the perceptions of principals through the lens of Motivating Language

Theory (MLT) (Holmes & Parker, 2018; Mayfield & Mayfield, 2018) as the foundation for superintendent talk.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

According to Yildiz (2016), MLT is a powerful tool and path of inquiry for the study of administrative talk in educational leadership as MLT centers on administrator-to-employee talk as a strategic driver of individual employee and educational organization outcomes (Alqahtani, 2015; Hindman, Seiders & Grant, 2009; Holmes, 2012; Holmes & Parker, 2018). MLT is comprised of the following: assumptions, antecedents, constructs (Direction-giving language, Empathetic language, and Meaning-making language) which come together as manifest variables to form Motivating Language (ML) (a latent variable), and outcomes, which can be examined at the individual and the organizational level. The ML Model utilized in this study is illustrated in Figure 1 (see Holmes & Parker, 2018 for additional information).

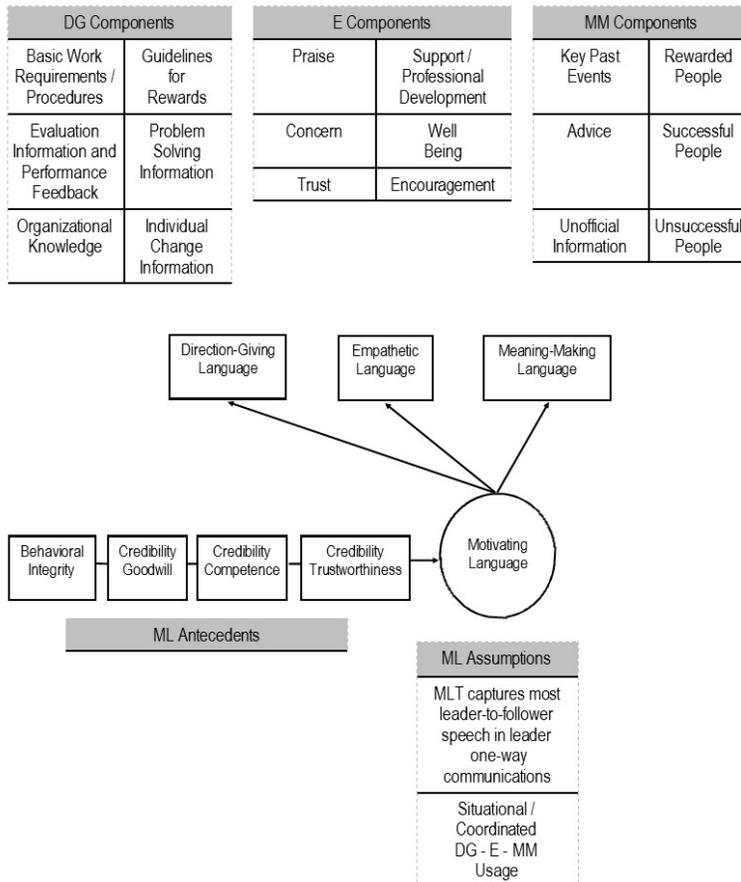


Figure 1. The ML Model.

Two assumptions guide the accurate perception of ML by educational employees (Holmes & Parker, 2018). First, administrators strategically utilize administrative talk in the form of ML as Direction-giving (DG), Empathetic (E), and Meaning-making (MM) Language constructs in a coordinated manner best suited to the situational conditions present as they communicate with individuals or groups (small or large). Second, the utilization of MLT by administrators center on one-way communication from administrator-to-employee(s) inclusive of feedback and inherent in the process view of interpersonal communication (DeVito, 2007) inclusive of most forms of leader communication (Holmes & Parker, 2018).

As prerequisites for the implementation of ML, the antecedents of ML are necessary for the successful strategic execution of ML by the administrator (Holmes & Parker, 2018). The ML antecedents are Behavioral Integrity (Simons, 2008) and the dimensions of Source Credibility (McCroskey & Teven, 1999) [Goodwill, Competence, Trustworthiness]. The ML antecedents must be implemented positively or ML cannot be executed successfully (Holmes & Parker, 2018) as they support receptivity and believability of a leader's words. Previously, Holmes and Parker (2018) determined that principal walk and talk alignment consisted of walk and action agreement and promise keeping – the elements of Behavioral Integrity, and caring, expertise, and trust/honesty in the form of Source Credibility. Behavioral Integrity can be thought of as actions and values combined. For example, a principal says they are going to be visible in classrooms and then rarely is seen there and espouses the belief in site based decision making but then makes all decisions in their office alone without any input from teachers or staff. Within the superintendent literature, Kowalski (2013) defined credibility as say and do agreement using a definition taken from Kouzes and Posner. A clear definition of walk and talk alignment was absent from the literature.

Direction-giving language (DG) is geared towards the reduction of uncertainty and improvement of clarity so that employees and the organization as a whole benefit from a clearer focus, improved flow of information, better appreciation for immediate sense of urgencies as well as long term aims, and enhanced cohesive processes as opposed to fragmented ones. As administrators use DG, they assist educators with role clarity; prioritization; understanding of vision, goals, and objectives; clarification of misconceptions; establishment of expectations; and performance feedback.

Empathetic language (E) places a value on the people who work in schools as opposed to viewing them as a commodity. As administrators use E, they provide strategic individualized praise and authentic encouragement, demonstrate concern for employee job satisfaction and engagement, provide support for individualized professional development and career advancement, express support for employee well-being not only on the job but at home and in life as a whole, and extend trust and confidence to the employee and their abilities.

Meaning-making language (MM) is organizational in nature and communicated through stories, metaphors, verbal illustrations and examples, and the use of symbols to transfer contextual knowledge and information from the administrator to the employee(s). As administrators use MM, they strengthen the induction of new employees, enhance the process of change and transformation, shed light on the formal and informal rules of school culture, clarify organizational expectations, and help educators connect their personal goals and visions to school/district goals and visions.

Motivating language [ML] is formed when the three ML constructs [DG, E, and MM] come together in a consistent, coordinated, strategic, sustained, and statistically significant manner. It is this elevated usage of the constructs over a long period of time in a fashion that is advantageous

to the accomplishment of goals and outcomes that maximizes the constructs' impact and gives rise to ML. This is opposed to implementation that contradicts one construct against another or only using the constructs in isolated situational incidents fragmenting their impact and limiting their cohesive power.

METHODOLOGY

The goal of this study was to examine superintendent talk as perceived by principals through the lens of Motivating Language Theory (Holmes, 2012; Mayfield, Mayfield, & Kopf 1995; Sullivan, 1998) and the Motivating Language (ML) Model (Holmes & Parker, 2017, 2018; Mayfield & Mayfield, 2002, 2018). Regarding superintendents, the research questions were

1. To what degree do behavioral integrity, competence, goodwill, and trustworthiness predict superintendent's motivating language use?
2. To what degree do competence, goodwill, and trustworthiness, and then behavioral integrity, predict superintendent's motivating language use?
3. To what degree do behavioral integrity, and then competence, goodwill, and trustworthiness predict superintendent's motivating language use?

PARTICIPANTS AND SETTING

In total, 284 principals in Wyoming were asked to respond to an online survey. Of these, 113 principals responded, which resulted in a 40% response rate covering 37 out of 47 districts in the state. See Table 1 for participant demographic information.

Table 1
Description of Principal Participants by Demographics and School Characteristic

Characteristic	Percentage (%)
Gender	
Male	73
Female	27
Race	
Caucasian	96
American Indian	2
Asian	1
African American	1
Age (in years)	
26–30	1
31–35	5
36–40	14
41–45	19
46–50	21
51–55	20
56–60	15
61–65	4
66–70	2
Level of Education	
Master’s Degree	85
Ed.S.	12
Ed.D.	4
Student Count in District	
1–750	20
751–500	24
1501 +	56

DATA COLLECTION AND PROCEDURE

Principals in Wyoming were asked to complete an online survey representing the Motivating Language Toolbox (Holmes & Parker, 2018; Sharbrough, Simmons, & Cantril, 2006). The survey consisted of: (1) the Motivating Language Scale (Mayfield, Mayfield, & Kopf, 1995), (2) the Behavioral Integrity Scale (Dineen, Lewicki, & Tomlinson, 2006), and (3) the Source Credibility Scale (McCroskey & Teven, 1999). Within the Source Credibility Scale, the

dimensions of Competence, Goodwill, and Trustworthiness exist. Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from .86 to .96. See Table 2 for scale range, number of items, and Cronbach's alpha coefficients for each of the scales.

Table 2
Correlations, Reliability and Descriptive Statistics of Analysis Scales

	ML	BI	CC	CG	CT
Motivating Language (ML)	.964				
Behavioral Integrity (BI)	.594**	.899			
Competence (CC)	.585**	.600**	.861		
Goodwill (CG)	.650**	.627**	.655**	.883	
Trustworthiness (CT)	.598**	.671**	.786**	.809**	.949
Mean	73.41	15.92	36.30	33.05	35.93
Std. Dev.	20.04	4.28	5.94	7.51	7.25
N of Scale Questions	24	4	6	6	6
Scale Range	24–120	4–20	6–42	6–42	6–42

Note: ** $p < .001$ and reliabilities on the diagonals in bold.

DATA ANALYSIS

Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation coefficients, multiple regression and block entry multiple regression were used. The following analyses were performed with (1) Credibility variables as independent variables and Behavioral integrity in a block and (2) with Behavioral integrity as the as independent variable and Credibility variables in a block. The blocks were interchanged in order to isolate the variables and better examine the order of antecedent sequence. In each instance, preliminary analyses were conducted to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity. To handle missing values, cases were excluded listwise. An alpha of .05 was used to determine statistical significance.

RESULTS

The mean and standard deviation of each of the variables are provided. A low mean indicates lower ratings and contrarily a higher mean is indicative of higher ratings for the respective variable. The correlations ranged from moderate (e.g., $r = .60$) to strong $r = .81$ and were statistically significant ($p < .001$) between each pair of variables. See Table 2.

MULTIPLE REGRESSION

A multiple regression was conducted to determine if the antecedent variables (e.g., goodwill, behavioral integrity) predict superintendent ML use. The multiple regression was statistically significant, $F(4, 100) = 25.16$, $p < .001$. Of the four independent variables, three

(behavioral integrity, competence, and goodwill) contributed significantly to the prediction of ML. This regression model accounted for 48.2% of the variability in ML.

BLOCK-WISE MULTIPLE REGRESSION

Two block entry multiple regression analyses were conducted to further the analyses. Given that credibility consists of (1) competence (2) goodwill, and (3) trustworthiness these were examined as independent variables with behavioral integrity in a block. The results revealed that the variables competence and goodwill were statistically significant predictors of motivating language, $F(3,101) = 30.75, p < .001$ and explained 46.2% of the variance in motivating language. With the behavioral integrity variable added, the model was also statistically significant, $F(4,100) = 25.16, p < .001$. The addition of behavioral integrity increased the variance explained to 48.2%.

Next, to further examine the ML model, a block-wise regression was conducted with behavioral integrity as the independent variable and competence, goodwill, and trustworthiness in one block. While behavioral integrity was a statistically significant predictor of Motivating language, $F(1,103) = 56.08, p < .001$, it only accounted for 34.6% of the variance in Motivating Language. When the variables competence, goodwill, and trustworthiness were added not only was the model statistically significant, $F(4,100) = 25.16, p < .001$, the amount of variance accounted for increased to 48.2%. Behavioral integrity, competence, and goodwill were the statistically significant predictors. See Table 3.

Table 3
Regression Model predicting Motivating Language Use

Model		<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>R</i> ²
Multiple	(Constant)	22.51	15.37		1.47	%
	Behavioral integrity	-1.12	.51	-.22*	-2.21	
	Competence	.84	.38	.24*	2.18	
	Goodwill	1.11	.34	.41*	3.28	
	Trustworthiness	-.20	.44	-.07	-.47	48.2
Block-wise	(Constant)	22.51	15.37		1.47	
	Competence	.84	.38	.24*	2.18	
	Goodwill	1.11	.34	.41*	3.28	
	Trustworthiness	-.20	.44	-.07	-.47	46.2
	Behavioral integrity	-1.12	.51	-.22*	-2.21	48.2
Block-wise	(Constant)	22.51	15.37		1.47	
	Behavioral integrity	-1.12	.51	-.22*	-2.21	34.6
	Competence	.84	.38	.24*	2.18	
	Goodwill	1.11	.34	.41*	3.28	
	Trustworthiness	-.20	.44	-.07	-.47	48.2

Note: Statistical significance: * $p < .05$

DISCUSSION

First, 48% of the variance was explained by the antecedents in the ML Model consisting of behavioral integrity and the dimensions of source credibility [RQ1]. While this amount of variance was lower than previous studies (see Holmes and Parker, 2018), the amount of total variance accounted for was approximately half of the total amount. A review of literature indicates authentic leadership may be a direction of future research to expand this variance (Leroy, Palanski & Simons, 2011).

Second, when compared to the results of prior study (Holmes & Parker, 2017) behavioral integrity moves to a subordinate position in comparison to credibility and its dimensions [RQ2]. Consistent with the Holmes & Parker (2018) results, the dimensions of source credibility are sequentially similar - goodwill followed by competence. Goodwill is the strongest credibility dimension, thus signaling its critical importance to educational administrators at any level and providing a new direction for future research in the superintendency. Goodwill consists of three leader behaviors: empathy, understanding, and responsiveness (Myers & Martin, 2015). These are three key signals principals are sending to superintendents in terms of their needs. Principals refocusing superintendent credibility on goodwill and caring is a tectonic shift away from expertise

and honesty as well as the credibility definition put forth by Peterson & Short (2001) which is better suited with superintendent accountability/evaluation. This prioritization of goodwill is consistent with Richmond, McCroskey, and McCroskey (2005) assertion that goodwill may be the most important element in source credibility.

Finally, with Kowalski (2013) previously defining credibility as say and do agreement this new insight into credibility as goodwill/caring and competency/expertise provides greater contextualization and depth into superintendent credibility as well as separates credibility from walk and talk alignment. This area for future research is reflective of the block-wise multiple regression results particularly when behavioral integrity operates as the independent variable [RQ3].

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