

K-12 Organization-Wide Book Study
A Quantitative Action Research Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this quantitative action research study was to evaluate the effectiveness of an organization-wide book study in the K-12 environment. A growing charter school network was working towards an improved organizational culture to meet its mission. This study examined whether an organization-wide book study can make a difference in workplace belongingness, one of the core beliefs of the network. Bloom's Revised Taxonomy shaped the design of three distinct format options for the book study: facilitated, book club, and asynchronous. The study compared participants and non-participants in workplace belonging. Workplace belonging was measured using the Jena and Pradhan Workplace Belongingness Scale. Additionally, the study analyzed how the three different formats are more or less effective according to the Kirkpatrick Four-Level Model of Evaluation. The book study format effectiveness was measured using a modified version of the Lau, Henry, and Ebekozen training survey. Results were mixed. There was no significant difference found in workplace belonging among the three formats, and there was no significant difference found between the control group and experimental group. Significant difference was found in the facilitated format's overviews and discussions when compared to the asynchronous group. Significant difference was also found in the book club's discussions when compared to the asynchronous group.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my two daughters, Maxine and Beatrix Fowler. I hope that seeing me try something challenging inspires you to recognize your own strengths and talents and to know you can do hard things. Know that the pride I feel in completing this journey of a doctoral program pales in comparison to the pride I feel being your mom.

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Start by doing what is necessary, then what is possible, and suddenly you are doing the impossible.

—St. Francis

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Culture eats strategy for breakfast.

—Peter Drucker, qtd. in *Forbes*, 2018

This famous quote attributed to Peter Drucker has become popular with organization leaders in business, but the point has resonated in organizational cultures across many sectors, including education. Even with the best strategic plan, organizations will struggle to execute a vision when culture lags. Without strong and effective culture, a strategic plan cannot come to life or affect lasting change. *Forbes* Councils Member, Jacob Engel, (2018) even posed that organizational cultures are the reasons that employees stay or leave organizations.

Edgar and Peter Schein (2017) defined organizational culture as “the accumulated shared learning of that group as it solves problems of external adaptation and internal integration” (p. 6). For example, most large organizations welcoming new employees include some element of training and onboarding so that new employees can learn the culture. This emphasis on shared learning has held promise for organizations looking to change culture. When leaders ensure shared learning, there are opportunities for positively affecting culture (Schein & Schein, 2017). Schein and Schein describe Three Levels of Culture typified as *artifacts*, *espoused beliefs and values*, and *basic underlying assumptions*.

Artifacts are the “phenomena that [one] would see, hear and feel when you encounter a new group with an unfamiliar culture” (Schein & Schein, 2017, p. 17). What people might see could include both the physical structures and décor but also what

people wear in the organization. Additionally, this could include organization charts, instructional manuals, or policy handbooks that employees read and refer to in their work. Artifacts also encompasses specific language an organization uses, including acronyms or other particular vocabulary. What is important to note, according to Schein and Schein (2017), is that “this level of the culture is . . . both easy to observe and very difficult to decipher” (p. 18). To gain clarity, outsiders need to ask a member of the organization to decode the meaning of artifacts.

Espoused beliefs and values encompass the organization’s ideas about “what is right or wrong” and “what will work or will not work” (Schein & Schein, 2017, p. 19). There may be a number of values or beliefs circulating within an organization, but only those that have been “tested and continue to work reliably in solving the group’s problems will become transformed into assumptions” (Schein & Schein, 2017, p. 19). An example of this Schein and Schein (2017) provide is the belief that advertising increases sales. However, that belief will only become an assumption if it continues to work to solve an organization’s problems. These are conscious beliefs and values that are regularly visited in the organization (Schein & Schein, 2017). Espoused beliefs and values also are agreed upon in the process of what Schein and Schein call *social validation*, which means that “certain beliefs and values are confirmed only by the shared social experience of a group” such as when members of religious group continuously validate for one another the importance of their group (p. 20).

Finally, basic underlying assumptions describe what happens when values and beliefs become unconscious. These are much more difficult to change or even bring into awareness because they are entrenched in the culture. An example that Schein and Schein

(2017) use to illustrate comes from the field of engineering in which it is an underlying assumption that engineers should not intentionally design something that is unsafe (Schein & Schein, 2017). Issues can arise when espoused beliefs and values do not align to underlying assumptions and beliefs. For example, if an organization's stated value is teamwork but then individuals are rewarded or evaluated for their own contributions only, this could be a conflict between the stated value and the implied assumption that everyone must be prepared for measurement of individual success only. See Figure 1 for a brief overview of the three levels of culture.

Figure 1

Schein's Three Levels of Culture

1. Artifacts

- Visible and feelable structures and processes
- Observed behavior
 - Difficult to decipher

2. Espoused Beliefs and Values

- Ideals, goals, values, aspirations
- Ideologies
- Rationalizations
 - May or may not be congruent with behavior and other artifacts

3. Basic Underlying Assumptions

- Unconscious, taken-for-granted beliefs and values
 - Determine behavior, perception, thought, and feeling

Adapted from Schein & Schein (2017)

In the case of school or district settings, this organizational culture hierarchy holds relevance. Schein and Schein (2017) further described organizational culture as “the group’s sense of identity, which has both an external component of how the organization presents itself to the outside and in internal component of what its inner

sense of itself is” (p. 7). Schools operate as organizations with their own cultures and practices. Many districts have done the work of developing strategic plans or frameworks such as the Portrait of a Graduate, which is a framework that describes what all graduates of a school will know and be able to do by the time they graduate from the school (Battelle for Kids, n.d.). Schools or districts possess artifacts such as mission statements and they propagate espoused beliefs and values with staff, students, and family stakeholders. Other artifact examples include school mottos, mascots, traditions like homecoming, or even student/parent handbooks. Examples of espoused beliefs and values include ideals such as personalized learning and back-to-basics conviction. In personalized learning, schools promise families to create educational experiences individualized for students’ interests and academic levels. In traditional academies, schools promise strict discipline and a focus on reading and mathematics above other subjects.

Conscious school leaders may also attend to the third level of Schein’s model: basic underlying assumptions. An example of underlying assumptions could be ideas around bias, which are entrenched beliefs that are not always brought into consciousness. There has been much work in recent years on diversity, equity, and inclusion in schools. This type of work supports employees’ reflecting on their implicit biases to understand what changes may be needed in how they serve diverse student bodies. When school leaders work to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion, this work is addressing basic underlying assumptions in the organizational culture. Another example of a basic underlying assumption is the idea that some groups of people are not good at mathematics. This basic underlying assumption is common in both children and adults

(Boaler, 2016). Working on the idea of “mathematical mindset” can help address this basic underlying assumption (Boaler, 2016).

The need for strategic leadership and attention to organizational culture has become even more important in the work of schools attempting to innovate with new models. Movements in K-12 toward competency-based models (Aurora Institute, n.d.) or blended learning models (Christenson Institute, n.d.) has required not just new strategies but also paradigm shifts in teaching and learning. For example, most states still leverage some sort of seat time funding models for schools; however, emerging competency-based models challenge the status quo, thus forcing school leaders and legislators to rethink the established concepts of traditional grade levels and semesters.

This type innovation or change, like the scale of competency-based models, can challenge basic underlying assumptions about what it means to be part of a school organization. Schein and Schein (2017) wrote, “basic assumptions, like theories-in-use, are generally non-confrontable and non-debatable and hence are extremely difficult to change” (p. 22). In order to change basic underlying assumptions, members of the organization require new shared learning to change deeply held cultural assumptions. New learning requires organization members to “resurrect, reexamine, and possibly change some of the more stable parts of [their] cognitive structure” (Schein & Schein, 2017, p. 22). This type of learning has been challenging for employees in organizations because it “destabilizes [their] cognitive and interpersonal world, releasing large quantities of basic anxiety” (Schein & Schein, 2017, p. 22). One key way that adult learning has taken place in workplace settings has been professional development in various formats and modalities, and that will be the focus of this study: how professional

development supports the difficult work of changing culture and increasing workplace belonging.

Local Context

In the case of one K-12 charter school network in the southwestern United States, the organization's leaders recognized the need for attention to culture alongside strategy in order to meet its mission: *design new models of educational success and ensure academic outcomes for all learners*. I will refer to the K-12 charter school network as *College Prep Network* throughout this dissertation both because of its focus in college going and because of its close affiliation with a university. College Prep Network has been through several leadership changes in the past four years as well as a full restructuring and strategic planning cycle. The goal of the restructuring and strategic planning was to create a more unified culture so that the entire network might draw from talent and resources to increase productivity, innovation, and success in meeting its mission.

Over the past two years, various teams completed work to unify artifacts such as brand guides, websites, building decor, and curriculum resources across the various modalities of learning (online, in-person, and hybrid) that College Prep Network offers. The Talent Management Team developed a new employee induction program to increase awareness of artifacts as well as understanding of the organization's espoused beliefs and values. The main components of the program included a two-day, in-person New Employee Orientation, which is a large investment of time and resources given that a number of employees do not live in the metropolitan area of College Prep Network's headquarters. For the duration of the first year of employment, new hires also engaged in

a series of “base camp” monthly induction sessions that continued the elements of culture that leaders introduced at the initial event.

In addition, the organization surveyed employees to define core values and core beliefs. See Figure 2 for College Prep Network’s mission, core values, and core beliefs that the leadership team adopted. These espoused values and beliefs permeated throughout the network through leadership decisions, shared vocabulary, visuals (e.g., inspirational posters in each classroom), meeting practices, and other practices such as honoring employees of the year who represent the values and beliefs. In addition to the staff surveys, a large growth of the network during the pandemic, specifically the digital school, as well as changes in management structure, meant changes for all in the organization. This growth in personnel and new management structure required integrating new staff and aligning to new organizational practices across in-person and virtual teams. Just because core values and beliefs were defined and dispersed did not mean that all members of the organization felt alignment towards them. For instance, results of the annual culture survey indicated lack of trust across the organization, which could be an obstacle for good organizational culture (Schein & Schein, 2017). With core values such as collaboration and disruption, trust would be particularly essential to effective organizational culture.

Figure 2

College Prep Network’s mission, core values, and core beliefs

Mission	Core Values	Core Beliefs
To design new models for educational success and to raise academic achievement for all learners.	Individuality	The future of learning is personalized.
	Collaboration	The future of learning is limitless.
	Disruption	The future of learning is real world.
	Curiosity	The future of learning offers pathways.
		The future of learning builds community.
		The future of learning fosters belonging.

College Prep Network is different than a typical school network in that it resembles more of an enterprise than a school system. Being an enterprise means that College Prep Network has a number of services it provides, including instruction of full-time students, instruction of partnership students for schools facing teacher shortages, developing and licensing digital curriculum, and providing professional development for a fee to other organizations. College Prep Network must ensure academic outcomes for its own learners but also reinvest any earnings from the other services it provides back into the university or into developing new curriculum or products. The organization of over 700 employees includes traditional school staff such as teachers and principals but also employs a full digital curriculum development team. In addition to serving close to 7,000 full-time students, the organization’s outreach and partnership teams have served over 60,000 enrollments either through providing online instruction or digital curriculum.

The organization also provides other professional services such as professional development and consulting. The “design new models” component of the mission (see Figure 2) implies new models in classrooms but also in the work with partner schools and

systems globally. In the process of substantial growth, due to COVID-19-related factors and several large grants for delivering professional development and math instruction, staff increased over two-fold in a short period of one year. Legacy staff and new staff, across multiple working modalities and even multiple geographic regions, had to come together in one workplace culture.

The Managing Director (similar to superintendent or Chief Executive Officer) of the unified organization, with both digital school and services alongside in-person schools, is experienced in growing and leading a large organization across multiple work modalities: in-person, full remote, and hybrid. The Managing Director believes in the practice of reading together as an organization in order to build culture and shared vocabulary. For her, book studies are an engaging form of professional development for adult learners. This practice aligns well to the ideas presented in Schein's Levels of Culture (Schein & Schein, 2017) because a book study simultaneously is an *artifact* and represents *espoused beliefs and values* of the K-12 charter network. The goal of book study is to help improve organizational culture, or, in Schein and Schein's notion of culture, is an opportunity to create a "shared product of shared learning" (2017, p. 6). Further, this shared learning is an opportunity to provide group "identity formation and cohesion" and is intended to aid in defining the organization's "reason to be" (Schein & Schein, 2017, p. 6).

I am College Prep Network's Head of Schools. This is a multi-faceted role that includes supervising a portfolio of strategic projects, grants, and new models as well as supporting the leadership of our schools. While the changes to my title and some added responsibilities are recent (effective February 2023), I have led many of the same key

projects in my portfolio for the past three years. New models are concepts such as an honors program within the digital school, “microschool” satellite campuses of the network that serve small school populations of approximately 100 or fewer students, and custom-designed program offerings for partnerships. As part of my role, I also help oversee the Professional Development Department. The professional development team of eight full-time staff and 25 additional contractors was responsible for designing the Arizona Virtual Teacher Institute in 2020 (ASU Prep Digital, n.d.), an initiative that trained over 18,000 teachers in Arizona, so we are accustomed to leading virtual professional development. Although my daily responsibilities do not include delivering trainings regularly, I still occasionally lead sessions as needed. As added context, I also have been a member of the organization since 2012 and appreciate any opportunity to support work around organizational culture.

In 2022, the network leader presented me with the opportunity to lead the new organization-wide book studies, and I agreed to work alongside my team to design and implement this new practice and professional development series. Along with several members of the professional development team, and in coordination with the Talent Management Team, we launched the first year of the book study shared learning experience in the 2022-23 school year. The book study participation was required for all 700 plus employees. To ensure access to the book, logistics included a \$40 stipend paid to each employee, no matter their role, so that everyone could purchase a copy of the selected book. During the first year of the book study, the organization read Stephen M.R. Covey’s *The Speed of Trust*, which directly related to feedback on the previous year’s culture survey where staff indicated that trust was an area of concern in the

organization. Only one format for the book study was offered, which was a facilitated model.

The facilitated model included a blend of short, synchronous Zoom lectures followed by opportunities for discussion, in breakout rooms or whole group format, or other short writing or reflective activities. This occurred in three 45-minute sessions over a three-month period. Participants could select which quarter of the school year they wanted to participate in the book study, and there were a number of time options to select from to accommodate different time zones and schedules. Sessions averaged approximately 20 people and were not capped. Breakout rooms aided in making the experience more collaborative, and participants worked with the same small group of one or two partners throughout the duration of each session.

Year one of the book study focused on designing the processes for registration and facilitation of the initiative for the organization-wide professional development. No formal program evaluation took place in the first year to measure effectiveness of the book study. My own perception was that the engagement and participation levels were promising during the live sessions. Participants shared positive feedback about the opportunity to meet others in the organization. However, there were several issues brought to the attention of the book study facilitators about the timing of the book studies, which took place before or after school hours in Arizona time. Some teachers in brick-and-mortar roles staff felt burdened by the format because it required arriving early to campus or staying late to participate. The book studies also followed a format similar to other organization-wide professional development Zoom sessions but did not necessarily align to research-based frameworks on book studies. Year one left room for improvement

in the format and the need to determine if book study participation was moving the College Prep Network closer to its goal of a stronger organizational culture.

Problem of Practice

My problem of practice is the need to improve and then evaluate the effectiveness of the organization-wide book studies for College Prep Network. In year two of implementation of the book studies (2022-2023), there is an opportunity to align better to research-based frameworks that inform how people learn collaboratively and how book study can affect dispositions. There is also a need to create several different book study formats (e.g., asynchronous, facilitated) to allow greater flexibility and simultaneously assess the effects of the different formats. I will particularly focus on examining the effects of book study on the organizational culture construct of workplace belongingness.

Purpose of Study

The first purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which the organization-wide book study experience affects workplace belonging. This was important to measure because workplace belonging relates specifically to College Prep Network's core values and beliefs, which are key aspects of organizational culture. In addition, workplace belonging was closely connected to the concept of Schein and Schein's (2017) organizational culture because employees who belong to an organization have a sense of ownership of the three levels of organizational culture.

The second purpose of this study was to evaluate how effective different formats of the book study are according to the first three levels of the Kirkpatrick model for evaluating training (Kirkpatrick, 1994). The first level of the Kirkpatrick model is *reactions*. These are the participant impressions and overall satisfaction of the experience

and facilitators. The second level of the Kirkpatrick model is *learning*. This includes the knowledge and understanding about the training objectives and focus. The third level is *behavior*, which focuses on the implementation (or intent to implement) of the learning from the training into practice.

I designed the different book study formats using Bloom's Revised Taxonomy as a framework (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). These book study formats included a facilitated model, a book club model, and a fully asynchronous model.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided my investigation. The first research question focused on workplace belongingness. The other three questions focused on the effectiveness of the different formats of the book study as measured by the Kirkpatrick model.

RQ1. To what extent does book study participation affect workplace belongingness?

RQ2. To what extent are there differences in participant reactions across book study formats?

RQ3. To what extent are there differences in participant learning across book study formats?

RQ4. To what extent are there differences in participant behavior across book study formats?

Chapter 2

Literature Review

A literature review was conducted to form the basis of the theoretical framework for this dissertation study. This literature review is divided into four key points. First, I explain how social constructivism underpins the idea that learning happens best in social, collaborative experiences such as a book study. Second, I describe how book studies, as socially constructed experiences, contribute to workplace belongingness. Next, I describe the literature related to book studies as professional development. Finally, I briefly address the literature related to the design and measurement of the book studies.

Social Constructivism

The very nature of a book study relies on the idea of social constructivism—that learning happens best in a group. This theory of social constructivism, or social learning, was developed by Lev Vygotsky. According to Vygotsky (1978), “Every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level and, later on, on the individual level...all the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals” (p. 57). In other words, learning happens first based on humans’ social contexts and in relationships. In particular, Vygotsky also emphasized the role of discussion in learning, especially in the higher psychological functions (1978). The nature of discussion is that it occurs with more than one person, in groups. Although Vygotsky’s foundational work dealt more with classroom settings, his ideas form the basis of several studies about the group discussions (i.e., learning) that take place in book studies (e.g. Alghamdi, 2022; Childress & Friedkin, 2012; Scheffel et al., 2018; Stover & Elston, 2017).

Social constructivism principles fit book studies well because the theory positions that learners develop their own ideas, which happens both during the reading of the book and in the process of discussion with colleagues. Learners also draw from personal experiences to develop connections that promote new understandings; Stover and Elston (2017), for example, wrote: “Book study discussions allow participants to test their ideas and integrate others’ opinions to better understand the content” (p. 96). The theory also suggests groups collectively formulate new ideas together from shared examples related to their own experience in the discussion. Ideally, well-executed social constructivist engagement supports participants developing new personal knowledge and shifting underlying assumptions and beliefs toward common interpretation (Stover & Elston, 2017; Vygotsky, 1978).

Social Constructivism in Book Study Literature

Several specific studies highlight the basis for social constructivism in a book study environment. In Childress and Friedkin (2012), the researchers examined social constructivist settings as a book study by looking at 18 book groups in the United States that took place in organizations, neighborhoods, or other community settings. These book groups read a historical fiction book, and the researchers conducted pre-to-post evaluations of the book’s content based on the learning that takes place in the social setting. Although not formally drawing from social constructivism, the study focused heavily on social learning through networks. The relevant findings were that there was significant growth in understanding the book’s content from pre to post (Childress & Friedkin, 2012, p. 59). This supports the idea of social learning taking place and influencing the perceptions of the book through this learning.

Scheffel et al. (2018) also examined social constructivist settings of a collaborative book club for teacher candidates. The book club studied included seven teacher candidates and one professor, and Vygotsky's work was a part of the theoretical foundation. The format of the book club was both (a) synchronous, in-person, during the university school year and, (b) asynchronous via mail and a traveling journal in the summer. This was a participatory action research study, and researchers used a case study approach. Data sources included journals, emails, discussion transcripts, notes and other artifacts (Scheffel et al., 2018). The relevant findings were both around the value of book clubs for shared group learning and expanding new teachers' awareness about new children's literature for the classroom. Book studies also helped build confidence and opportunity for reflection and new thinking.

In the study by Alghamdi (2022), the researcher explored the role of book clubs as collaborative learning for professional development for teachers in Saudi Arabia. In the qualitative study, thirteen teachers engaged in the social learning opportunity of book studies. Relevant results included the conclusion that the book clubs helped to form supportive learning communities that validated participants' personal understanding (Alghamdi, 2022, p. 1). This use of professional book clubs aligns with social constructivism in that the teachers, through their collaborative book clubs, created new meaning and learning for themselves and their teacher community.

Social Constructivism in the Online Setting

Social constructivism is relevant in online learning environments with special attention to design based Vygotsky's theory. Vygotsky also introduced the concept of scaffolding meant encouraging "a more complex socio-collaborative process whereby

social interaction and communication in the form of conversation is prevalent, ideally with all participants contributing equally” in the process of shared knowledge building (Bryceson, 2007, p. 192). Put another way, the shared contributions of members of an online learning community that engages in discussion may scaffold the formation of new learning.

Archambault et al. (2022) included constructivism in the framework they posit for online learning, and two pillars of online pedagogy in their framework correspond directly with the design of online book studies: “Pillar 1: Build Relationships and Community” and “Pillar 2: Incorporate Active Learning” (p. 183). Pillar 1 emphasizes the importance of social learning and belonging to an online community. A book study format allows for getting to know others in the collaborative professional learning and fosters belonging across the organization, which would help to create the elements of social learning and community expressed in the first pillar. Pillar 2 suggests that engaging online learning should include active participation such as discussion or making one’s own meaning from the learning. In a well-executed book study, participants actively connect new learning with experiences. With the advancement of online meeting tools like Zoom for synchronous interaction and video discussion tools like Flipgrid, it is possible to recreate the discussion necessary for social constructivism in the online setting.

Quite relevant to my study, Stover and Elston (2017) scrutinized the value of an online book study as a professional learning experience. The social constructivism-based study included intentional design for 122 participants to develop a learning community build around reflective discourse (Stover & Elston, 2017). It included elements of

optional synchronous, asynchronous, or a blend of both. The first finding regarding the reactions to the book study was that the online format was an effective learning environment that allowed for satisfactory collaboration. Second, the participants opined the new book study learning would positively affect their personal, collegial, and student interactions.

Another study, Jordan et al. (2020), explored virtual book clubs in the workplace. For this particular study, the participants were 15 interns in emergency medicine. Like education, the medical field requires regular professional development for maintaining of licensure. The results of the study were that the majority of the interns found the virtual experience to be positive. As it relates to social constructivism, the study also concluded that the book club enabled bonding and engagement with both peers and the program (Jordan et al., 2020).

Workplace Belongingness

Belongingness Defined

Although College Prep Network is a K-12 system, it differs in that it employs positions outside of the traditional school district. The variety of positions is expansive. While there are traditional teachers, principals, counselors, and other school office staff, there are also curriculum developers, software engineers, and business development staff. When considering how to measure the impact of any intervention on organizational culture, I first considered the basic need of human beings to belong (Maslow, 1954). This was consistent with Schein and Schein's argument that in order to change the third level, *basic underlying assumptions*, the most difficult work of organizational culture must happen (2017). They point out that new learning requires the change of some parts of stable cognitive structures (Schein & Schein, 2017). In order to feel safe and motivated to make that type of change, members of the organization must feel a part of the organization in a meaningful way.

Other foundational work on belongingness defines it as a need to build and maintain relationships and feeling part of a system or network. Baumeister and Leary (1995) hypothesized, "the need to belong is a fundamental human motivation" (p. 520). Their empirical literature review's relevant findings were that belonging created positive emotions and brain patterns. On the contrary, failure to attach can have serious effects on health and well-being. Thus, belonging is an important part of a positive human experience and creating desirable conditions.

In the case of psychiatric nursing, Hagerty et. al (1992) determined belonging was important to the well-being of patients and noted that people experience this belonging

with relationships, groups, organizations, or spirituality. Their work hypothesized that belonging was two-fold. First people belong through organization value of them, and, second, they belong as related to the concept of “fit” or “congruence” within “people, groups, objects, organizations, environments or spiritual dimensions” (Hagerty et al., 1992, p. 174). Therefore, in order to belong, a person must be valued and fit.

Belongingness Versus Workplace Belongingness

Understanding belongingness and workplace belongingness as separate ideas is newer to the research. Leary and Cox (2008) clarified different groups require different ideas for belonging including “villages, work groups, sexual relationship, kin relationship and supportive friendship” (as cited in Jena & Pradhan, 2018, p. 452). This defines the workplace as its own social setting with a specific need for belonging separate from other concepts of belonging.

The work of Cockshaw et al. (2013) positioned that workplace belongingness must be analyzed separately from general belongingness. In a study they conducted, 369 participants completed the Sense of Belonging Instrument - Psychological which looked at the relationships between general belongingness, workplace belongingness, and depression. Relevant to this study was the result that workplace belonging is specific and distinct from general ideas of belonging (Cockshaw et al., 2013). Although workplace belongingness scholarship does relate to general belongingness, this study emphasized the need to research the idea of workplace belongingness as its own discipline.

The purpose of Jena and Pradhan’s (2018) study was to develop and test a new belongingness scale specific to workplace belongingness. Jena and Pradhan (2018) pointed out the importance of work in the lives of employees who spend most of their

time engaged in the endeavor. Because workplaces greatly affect employees lives, relationships, and well-being, belonging to workgroups are critical to overall life satisfaction (Jena & Pradhan, 2018). A major contribution from their study was the development of a Workplace Belongingness Scale.

Affecting Workplace Belongingness

Several researchers have examined how feelings of belonging in the workplace can be affected. First, Kachchhap and Horo's (2021) study of school teachers' sense of belonging defined factors that contribute to belonging in educational workplaces. The researchers found that teachers who work together in a coordinated capacity as part of the school culture have a sense of belonging (Kachchhap & Horo, 2021, p. 775). In their study of 186 teachers, the researchers concluded that organization support and climate were predictors of sense of belonging, with climate being the stronger of the two (Kachchhap & Horo, 2021). In my reflection on this study, I conclude that book studies may contribute to the structures of organizational support and climate in the workplace.

Next, Bilginoğlu and Yozgat (2022) explored the concepts of social climate and workplace friendships on belonging. This study on the financial sector surveyed 403 employees in Turkey. The relevant findings were that "social climate is positively associated with a sense of belonging" and "sense of belonging and workplace friendship are negatively associated with intention to leave the organization" (Bilginoğlu and Yozgat, 2022, p. 1). Book studies may therefore provide an opportunity to encourage a positive social climate and the meeting of new people through discussion, both of which may contribute positively to belongingness at work.

In a further relevant study, related to books and belonging, Kasahara-Kiritani et al. (2015) considered the effect of reading books and watching films on ideas of suicide among 3,256 adolescents. The study, while not specifically related to workplace belongingness, addressed the connection between low belonging and risk for suicide. The relevant findings were that those youth who reported the highest numbers of books read had the highest levels of belonging. Kasahara-Kiritani et al. (2015) discussed some of the possible reasons for their findings could be character role models in books or the escape books provide from everyday life stress. This study was not based on social learning but does provide an interesting point regarding the possible influence of reading itself.

Workplace Belongingness Scale

The Jena and Pradhan (2018) Workplace Belongingness Scale drew from the three previous belongingness scales: “Sense of Belonging Instrument-Psychological (Hagerty and Patusky, 1995), General Belongingness Scale (Malone et al., 2012), and Need to Belong Scale (Leary et al., 2013)” (2018, p. 453). Table 1 outlines each of these scales that led to the development of the Jena and Pradhan instrument (2018).

Table 1

Influences on workplace belongingness scale

Instrument	Authors	Brief Description
The Sense of Belonging Instrument-Psychological	Hagerty & Patusky (1995)	“Proposed sense of belonging instrument a developmental study in behavioral science” (Jena & Pradhan, 2018, p. 454).
The General Belongingness Scale	Malone et al. (2012)	“Offered a general belongingness scale” (Jena & Pradhan, 2018, p. 454).
The Need to Belong Scale	Leary et al. (2013)	“Offered need to belong scale assessing the motivation to be accepted by others” (Jena & Pradhan, 2018, p. 454).

Adapted from Jena & Pradhan (2018)

Jena and Pradhan found their newly created scale confirmed the “unidimensionality of workplace belongingness” as a construct and was found to be highly reliable (2018). I will use their validated Workplace Belongingness Scale in this study as an indicator of the extent to which participants in a book study feel a sense of belonging to the organization.

Connection to Organizational Culture

Book studies offer an opportunity for shared learning as an outcome. According to Schein and Schein (2017), organizational culture is a product of shared learning. I propose that book studies as an organizational tool can provide opportunities for improving all three aspects of Schein's *Three Levels of Culture*. The first level is *artifacts*, which encompasses "visible processes and observed behavior" (Schein & Schein, 2017, p. 18). Book studies could become a regular, observed behavior or process in the organization.

The second level, *espoused beliefs and values*, includes "ideals, values, and ideologies" (p. 18). Book studies can provide the opportunity to explore the organization's values and mission based upon the book selection and design of the study to be collaborative in nature. Cluff's study (2022) on community and belonging in the workplace pointed out that a "collective mind-set is rooted in the belief that together we are stronger and can achieve more together than alone" (p.278). It is my belief that the book study's discussion format and organization-wide participation can help create a shared vocabulary and such a collective mindset.

Finally, the third level is *basic underlying assumptions*, which includes "unconscious, taken-for-granted beliefs and values" (p. 18). The ways to change underlying assumptions is through learning (Schein & Schein, 2017). Book studies have the potential to change underlying assumptions if the adult participants change or modify their beliefs and values as part of the book study participation. In a study of how apprenticeships in the workplace contribute to belonging, Chan (2016) posed that individual people need a sense of belonging to a group and thus its objectives and

structures. Although, not apprenticeships, book studies do open up the opportunity for new learning or shared understanding from organization members' various levels of expertise.

Book Studies

Book studies have occurred in a variety of formal and informal settings. Outside of the workplace, communities sometimes engage in large book clubs or community reading events. In reviewing the literature on book studies, it was found that several studies followed pre-service teachers; others discussed the use of book studies in professional learning communities or other professional development settings. Not present in the literature are examples of organization-wide book studies and their effect on workplace belongingness.

Book Studies as Professional Learning

Book studies as a format align well with adult learning principles. Lawler and King (2000) recommended that adult learning include attention to these components: “create a climate of respect, encourage active participation, build on participant experience, employ collaborative inquiry, learn for action, and empower the participants” (as quoted in Blanton et al., 2020, p. 1014). Blanton et al. (2020) conducted a case study of educators participating in book studies over four years. The educators selected two book study titles per year (total of eight books). The researchers concluded that book studies served effectively as a means for professional development and learning than other traditional methods (Blanton et al., 2020).

Similarly, Burbank et al. (2010) explored the practice of book clubs as professional development. The population of their study was 24 preservice teacher

candidates alongside 12 practicing teachers (Burbank et al., 2010). The qualitative study specifically examined how book club participation was different for the different populations based on teaching experience and how book studies influence collaborative professional development. The researchers concluded that the book club setting discussions were especially valuable for preservice teachers because of the time spent listening to more experienced colleagues, and collaboration was a positive takeaway for both populations of new and experienced teachers.

Researchers examining book studies have also focused on the discourse happening within the groups that form. For example, Grenier et al. (2022) focused on book clubs as a social benefit for participants (p. 483). Their study particularly focused on book clubs as a place for creating “public pedagogy,” and opportunities for new shared learning. Book clubs, according to Grenier et al. (2022) “can be a means of critical consciousness raising within organizations” (p. 495).

Designing Book Studies

The focus and purpose of book studies as professional learning has been diverse across the literature both in design and selection of books. Porath (2018) explored the format of online book studies through professional learning networks common on social media platforms. The study included 26 participants belonging to an “affinity space.” This study was designed in a very flexible format with multiple modalities (i.e., videos, discussion threads, etc.). Relevant findings included that the participants appreciated diverse perspectives, connected it to their classroom applications, and enjoyed the connections with colleagues.

Further informing the design of online book clubs, Perkins (2022) studied undergraduate writers taking part in an online book club. The format included both synchronous and asynchronous elements in the design for flexibility. Findings included a positive sense of community among participants. Also, the virtual environment allowed participants to make connections over time zones and geography (Perkins, 2022). This informs the design of a cross-country, flexible book study format for an organization.

Another school-based study, Oakes et al. (2020), examined the practice of a book study for 61 middle school educators around classroom management and instructional practices. The study paired self-directed learning with in-person, synchronous sessions. Results indicated that educators gained knowledge and confidence in the strategies and believed that the book study supported the goals of the organization. The authors noted that the format of the book study allowed for collaborative interactions as part of the learning.

Finally, in a practical guide for book studies within Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), Keller et al. (2022) offered guidance for educational organizations looking to leverage the book study format for professional development. Although the original intent of the guide was for an in-person format, the authors offered specific tips on the design of book studies online. Namely, they suggested using tools such as collaborative whiteboards and breakout rooms. Keller et al. (2022) also emphasized the importance of setting norms for an online environment relevant to what active participation looks like for a book study.

Literature on the Design and Evaluation of Training

Bloom's Taxonomy

I leveraged Bloom's Taxonomy to ensure active learning in the book study interventions across different groups (Bloom, 1956). Bloom's Taxonomy was first developed in the 1950s as a way to describe and organize educational learning objectives on a hierarchical scale. Although the taxonomy was originally designed for children, studies such as those performed by Hrebin et al. (2020) confirmed its relevance with adult learners. Bloom's original taxonomy was divided into three different domains: cognitive (dealing with knowledge), affective (dealing with feelings and values), and psychomotor (accomplishment of physical tasks) (Hrebin et al., 2020).

For the book study design, I used the cognitive domain. Bloom's original cognitive domain includes knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Hrebin et al., 2020). Since Bloom's original work, Krathwohl updated the cognitive domain to be *remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate, and create* (Krathwohl, 2002, p. 214). Table 2 shows the gerunds associated with learning tasks in each level.

Table 2

Bloom's Revised Taxonomy

Remember	Understand	Apply	Analyze	Evaluate	Create
Recognizing	Interpreting	Executing	Differentiating	Checking	Generating
Recalling	Exemplifying	Implementing	Organizing	Critiquing	Planning
	Classifying		Attributing		Producing
	Summarizing				
	Inferring				
	Comparing				
	Explaining				

Modified from Krathwohl (2002)

In chapter 3, Methods, I outline in detail the intervention, and explain the engagement with Bloom's Taxonomy to ensure consistency in design across format and modality.

Kirkpatrick's Four Levels of Training Effectiveness

Kirkpatrick's evaluation model was developed in 1959 as part of his dissertation to evaluate a training program and has been used continuously in studies and other applications (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2016). The model is used to assess effectiveness of training on four levels: *reaction*, *learning*, *behavior*, and *results* (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2016). In his review of Kirkpatrick's work, Falletta (1998) wrote that users of the model leveraged it to "determine the extent to which participants are satisfied with a training program, whether participants learned from the program, whether participants were able to apply the learning on the job, and/or the impact on the organization" (Falletta, 1998, p. 259).

The first level of reaction is essentially the customer satisfaction level of training and addresses RQ2. It focuses on whether people find the training motivating, valuable, and engaging. This level is important because it is unlikely that participants will reach positive results in the other levels if they do not like the training and/or do not consider it valuable (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2016). The second level, learning, determines whether or not the goals of understanding the content of the training are successful—this parallels RQ3. The third level, behavior, measures the “transfer of training” to the job (Kirkpatrick, 1996, p. 56) and addresses RQ4. Finally, the fourth level, seeks to measure the results arising from the behavioral changes attributed to the training. Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick (2016) describes examples of results as “increased sales, higher productivity, bigger profits, reduced costs, less employee turnover, and improved quality” (p. 56). In education, fitting examples of results in this context are teacher or student retention, student learning outcomes, increased use of educational tools, or improved job satisfaction of teachers or leaders.

Chapter 3

Methods

This chapter addresses the setting, participants, role of the researcher, intervention, data collection and analysis strategies, and timeline for this study. Because the study took place in my local context at College Prep Network, I have designed it within the action research paradigm. Action research has become an important part of the education field (Anderson & Herr, 2005). Inspired by John Dewey's emphasis on generation of new ideas and learning, action research has encouraged the education field to build new knowledge and implement change (Anderson & Herr, 2005). In addition, Noffke (2009) wrote that action research "can bridge theory and practice, but also thereby generate new ways of understanding practice" (p. 10). The learnings from this study inform improvements that can take place in later book studies, true to the cyclical nature of action research (Dick, 2014). For this study, I was the sole handler of the data for registration, consent, and post-survey administration. In addition, I oversaw the team delivering the synchronous interventions and asynchronous elements.

Over 700 employees at College Prep Network were required to participate in the organization-wide book study; therefore, my total number of study participants was ample. This study was situated in a postpositivist research tradition (Leavy, 2017). In postpositivist research, "laws that govern the social world can be predicted and tested via hypotheses that investigate causal relationships or associations between/among variables" (Leavy, 2017, p. 92). Specifically, my design included a control group, which were the participants who opted for their participation in the study in the spring rather than fall. The study focused on assessing associations of the book study on *workplace*

belongingness and simultaneously determined relative effectiveness of three different book study formats.

Setting and Participants

Recruitment for the book study began in July 24, 2023, when College Prep Network launched the new school year. Recruitment continued through the end of August 2023. Each academic year, College Prep Network begins the year with a network-wide Zoom kickoff event, and I included book study registration information as part of the event. I also sent a follow-up email with the information for registration to increase participation. I collected registration using Google Forms, which is a common tool used by College Prep Network. Due to the practical considerations for administering the book study in a workplace setting, the design allowed participants to have choice in their book study format rather than being randomly assigned. The registration included two time-of-year options, fall or spring semester, and two format options, synchronous or asynchronous. Consent to participate in the study was collected as part of the registration form. All participants were adults. The first semester (i.e., fall) book study began September 2023. The second semester (i.e., spring) book study began January 2024. The fall participants comprised the experimental groups, and the spring participants comprised a delayed control group (Creswell, 2014).

Intervention

A network-wide book study was the intervention for this study. This included all employees reading the book that employees voted on from a curated list of three options. Managers at College Prep Network selected the options based on analysis of the annual culture survey and organizational progress towards annual goals. The selection of the

book occurred around May 2023 and was announced to staff ahead of the summer break. The content of the book aligned with the College Prep Network's mission, beliefs, and values. My examination of book study as an intervention was not dependent on the book selection because it will focus more on the design of the format than the content itself. This study was designed to determine the effectiveness of book studies and particular formats rather than evaluate the content of the book. The book selected was *Beyond Measure: The Big Impact of Small Changes* by Margaret Heffernan.

The book study was offered in two different modes, synchronous and asynchronous. The modes included either three sessions (synchronous) or three activities (asynchronous) aligned to the book's composition. A session was defined as a live professional development meeting on Zoom that covers a portion of the book. Each session lasted approximately 45 minutes. Asynchronous activities were also estimated to require about 45 minutes to complete. This target of 45-minute sessions and activities was based upon the practical nature of engagement with book study taking place before or after the school day schedule for many of the participants. However, the charter network ensured that all staff have time allotted for this during the regular work day, an improvement based upon feedback from year one.

At the time of registration, participants received all the relevant information about the book study including the title of the book, options for synchronous session dates and asynchronous activity due dates, and the reading assignment schedule. Participants were informed to read the book according to the reading assignment schedule before joining the synchronous sessions or completing the asynchronous activities.

Synchronous Book Studies

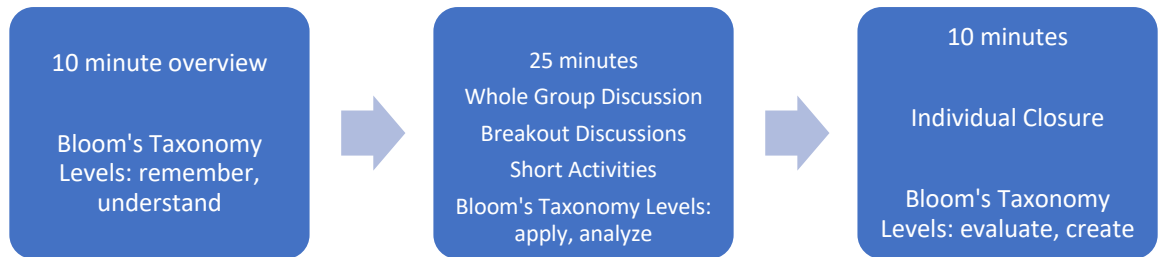
The synchronous book study mode was offered in two separate formats: *facilitated* and *book club* formats. Synchronous book study format was randomly assigned to ensure balance of participants between the two synchronous groups. During the live Zoom meetings for both formats, the professional development team provided approximately a 10-minute overview of the reading assignment aligned to Bloom's *remember* and *understand* levels. The overview helped participants to have a basic knowledge of the key details from approximately 1/3 of the book for each session. This was scripted to ensure content delivery is the same for both the facilitated and book club groups. The team also record the scripted 10-minute overviews for use with the asynchronous group. For both synchronous formats, there were three Zoom sessions.

Facilitated Group

Following the overview, for the facilitated group, I used Bloom's Taxonomy to guide a discussion and activities based on the assigned reading. I used a blend of whole group and breakout rooms with 2-3 partners. Short activities, such as discussing how to apply concepts from the book to the work environment or analyzing meaning of short excerpts (Bloom's *apply* and *analyze* levels), also engaged the participants during the whole group and breakout sessions. This blend of whole and small group activities took approximately 25 minutes in the middle of the three sessions. For the final 10 minutes, facilitated group participants completed an individual closure activity. The closure activity comprised two free-response questions aligned to Bloom's *evaluate* and *create* levels. During the last 10 minutes, the participants worked on their own for these levels. See Figure 3 for the flow of the facilitated group sessions.

Figure 3

Facilitated Design

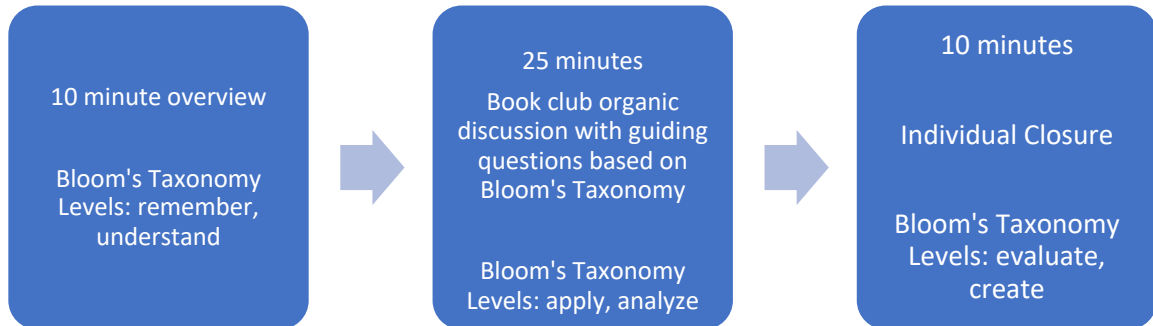


Book Club Group

Following the 10-minute overview, for the book club group, the professional development team randomly assigned participants to breakout groups of approximately 4-5 members; however, in the second and third sessions, the team used the same randomly created breakout groups from the first session. There, participants had a list of questions based on Bloom's Taxonomy *apply* and *analyze* levels. The groups self-monitored their progress through the questions similar to a traditional book club gathering. For the final 10 minutes, participants worked on their own to complete an individual closure activity. The closure activity was the exact same as it is for the facilitated format, comprised of two free-response questions aligned to Bloom's *evaluate* and *create* levels with the purpose of solidifying learning from the book and time together. See Figure 4 for the flow of the book club group sessions.

Figure 4

Book Club Session Flow

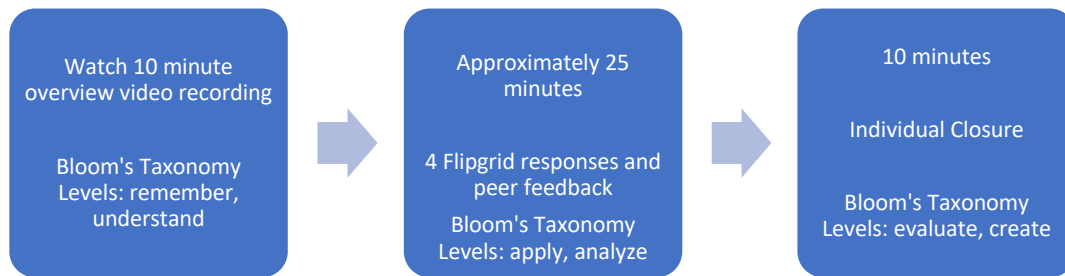


Asynchronous Book Study

The asynchronous study was designed using a private Google Site in the College Prep Network domain that required participants to log into their authenticated account. On the site, there were three activities, with one activity released each month of the study in September, October, and November. Each activity began with a 10-minute video overview of the reading assignment with the same scripted content as the synchronous mode and aligned to Bloom's *remember* and *understand* levels. The participants responded to four questions using Flipgrid, an interactive video discussion tool. Two questions were based on the *apply* level of Bloom's Taxonomy, and two questions were based on the *analyze* level of Bloom's Taxonomy. Participants were asked to respond via video or text to at least one other person per question using Flipgrid's commenting feature. The third part of activities included the same individual closure activity used in the synchronous sessions—two free-response questions in a Google Form aligned to Bloom's *evaluate* and *create* levels. See Figure 5 for the design of the asynchronous format.

Figure 5

Asynchronous Design



Instruments

I used two instruments to address the research questions. The first instrument, Workplace Belongingness Scale, as described in Chapter 2, measured *workplace belongingness* (RQ1) and was developed by Jena and Pradhan (2018). The Workplace Belongingness Scale addressed the first research question regarding the extent to which workplace belonging is different for participants (fall book study group) and non-participants (spring book study group). To determine baseline comparability of the two groups, the Workplace Belongingness Scale was administered to both groups prior to the commencement of the fall book study intervention. To support understanding relationships between book study participation and dispositions related to workplace belonging, the Workplace Belongingness Scale was administered a second time as a post-survey to both groups following conclusion of the fall book studies.

The second instrument, called the Book Study Format Evaluation, was a modified version of the survey developed by Lau et al. (2021) which assessed the different components of the Kirkpatrick 4-Level Model of Evaluation for training. The Book Study Format Evaluation assessed the first three levels of the Kirkpatrick model—reactions (RQ2), learning (RQ3), and behavior (RQ4), across the three different formats of the

intervention. Assessing reactions involved determining general satisfaction; assessing learning focuses on new knowledge the participants gain; and assessing behavior evaluates intention to apply into practice.

Workplace Belongingness Scale

The Workplace Belongingness Scale was developed and validated in 2018 by Jena and Pradhan for the manufacturing and service sectors. Although the sectors were different than education, the nature of the survey fit well in any workplace environment because of the focus on belonging and not the content of manufacturing or service. Jena and Pradhan's (2018) Workplace Belongingness Scale consists of 12 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). For my study, I used the same 5-point Likert scale. I administered this Workplace Belongingness Scale to both the experimental and control groups.

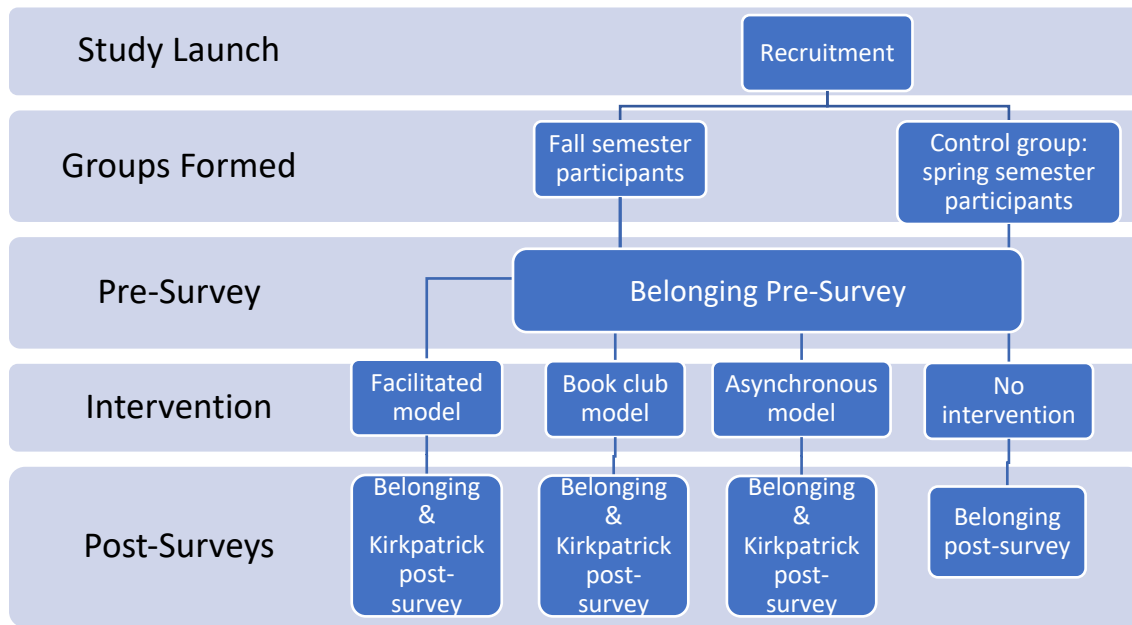
For the experimental group, I included the following additional questions on the post administration of the Workplace Belongingness Scale. The first of these questions was, "How many sessions did you attend/activities did you complete?" with a 0-3 range. The second question was, "How many years have you worked at the organization?" with a dropdown list of whole number options (the organization was only established 13 years ago, making the list manageable). See Appendix A for the Workplace Belongingness Scale.

During book study registration, I recruited participants from the experimental and control groups to complete the Workplace Belongingness Scale. The registration gathered the names and email addresses of the fall and spring participants along with their consent to complete the research survey. At this point I administered the Workplace

Belongingness pre-survey. In November, at the conclusion of the intervention, I sent a link to the surveys through email to remind those who consented to the research to complete the post-survey. The window to complete the survey remain opened until December 4, 2023. Figure 6 depicts the research design.

Figure 6

Pre-Post Design with Control Group



Book Study Format Evaluation Survey

The original version of the Kirkpatrick 4-Level Model of Evaluation survey that I based my instrument on for this dissertation was published in 2021 by Ebekozen et al. for use in evaluating training for quality improvement in public health. For my study, I modified the language of the survey to fit the education context. My modified version of the instrument addressed the constructs of reactions, knowledge, and behavior. For *Level 1 Reaction*, there were three items. For *Level 2 Knowledge*, there were three items. For

Level 3 Behavior, there were two items. Each question used a 5-point Likert scale following the scale that was also used in the original Lau et al. (2021) version.

The following were examples from my Book Study Format Evaluation Survey instrument. See Appendix B for the complete Book Study Format Evaluation Survey.

Level 1: Reaction

- (1) Participating in the book study was worth my time. (*very strongly disagree to very strongly agree*)

Level 2: Learning

- (2) How effective was your book study in helping you to understand the important concepts of the book? (*very ineffective to very effective*)

Level 3: Behavior

- (3) How likely are you to implement a small change in your work habits as embraced by *Beyond Measure* and as a result of you participating in your book study? (*not at all likely to very likely*)

The original Lau et al. (2021) survey included a *Level 4 Results* item, which tracked changes resulting from reported behavior shifts in *Level 3*. I did not use *Level 4* for my study because of the various roles of participants in the organization. For some, the results might have been related to student achievement. For others it might have been about interactions with employees due to behavior changes. *Level 4* also would also have to be tracked over time, which is outside of my scope and timeline.

At the time of registration, staff indicated research participation consent, as well as their preferred book study format and date. In November, at the conclusion of the third synchronous session or asynchronous activity, I sent the Book Study Format Evaluation

Survey to the participants via email. The window to complete the survey remained open until December 4, 2023.

Data Analysis

Workplace Belongingness Scale Analysis

I followed these steps for analyzing the Workplace Belongingness Scale data. First, for the Workplace Belongingness Scale survey items, I calculated a total score for each group (i.e., participants and non-participants) and book study subgroups (facilitated, book club, and asynchronous) for both the pre and post surveys. I determined the descriptive statistics for the experimental group (fall participants as a whole) and control group (spring participants who did not participate in the fall). I applied a t-test to determine if significant differences exist between the participants and non-participants on the Workplace Belongingness Scale. I also applied ANOVA tests twice for the independent groups (before the intervention and after the intervention).

Book Study Format Evaluation Survey Analysis

For the Book Study Format Evaluation Survey, I analyzed the data for each question on the survey by training format. I determined the percent responding to each question across the Likert scale. I also used an appropriate test for ordinal data comparison, specifically the Kruskal-Wallis test, to determine the relationship between each of the formats for each question of the survey.

Timeline

My action research project began in the spring of 2023 with my submission to IRB and the selection of the book title, *Beyond Measure: The Big Impact of Small Changes*. I designed session content over the summer of 2023, May through June. In

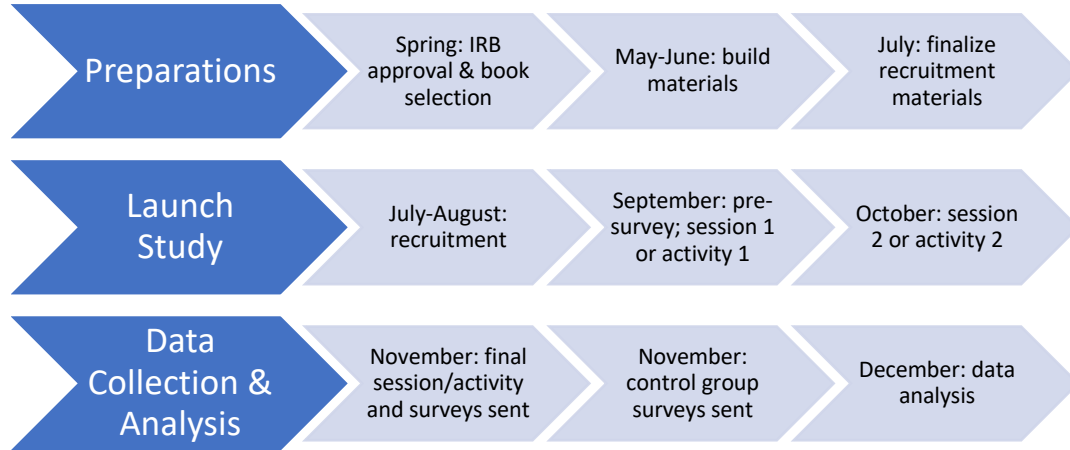
early July, I prepared all registration and recruitment materials. During the week of July 24, 2023, I presented to all the College Prep Network staff during our back-to-school Zoom kickoff event. This was the first distribution of registration materials. I also sent a follow-up email as well as two reminder emails after the event. Recruitment for fall ran through the end of August, 2023.

Once registration closed, I reviewed registration data to ensure my group sizes were spread evenly and determined I had adequate numbers. At this time, I administered the Workplace Belongingness Scale as a pre-survey. The book studies, both synchronous and asynchronous formats, launched approximately in mid-September and ran through October and November.

Within the week of November 27-December 4, 2023, at the conclusion of all book study activities and sessions, participants were prompted to complete both the Workplace Belongingness Scale and the Book Study Format Evaluation Survey (see Appendices A and B). Simultaneously, control group members were prompted to complete the second administration of the Workplace Belongingness Scale. Reminders went out to complete the surveys until they close December 4, 2023. After that time, I conducted the data analysis. Figure 7 shows the timeline for the book study.

Figure 7

Book Study Timeline for April-December 2023



Chapter 4

Results

This chapter begins with an explanation of the study sample. Subsequently, the chapter provides results from the study organized by the two instruments I used to address my research questions. Finally, I delve into additional noteworthy findings from the study.

The first instrument, the Workplace Belongingness Scale, addressed RQ 1. The second part of this chapter reviews the results from the Book Study Format Evaluation Survey, and this instrument was used to address RQ 2, 3, and 4. The Book Study Format Evaluation Survey focused on the effectiveness of the different formats of the book study as framed by the Kirkpatrick model. The following are the four research questions designated by instrument:

Workplace Belongingness Survey

RQ1. To what extent does book study participation affect workplace belongingness?

Book Study Format Evaluation Survey

RQ2. To what extent are there differences in participant reactions across book study formats?

RQ3. To what extent are there differences in participant learning across book study formats?

RQ4. To what extent are there differences in participant behavior across book study formats?

Study Sample

Two hundred seventy seven people completed the pre-survey. Of the 277 initial participants, 137 people opted for spring participation, making them the control group. The fall participants, the experimental group, totaled 140. The pre-survey was administered before any intervention took place.

At the end of the study, the number of participants dropped off from the initial pre-survey participants. First, for the control group, the survey completions went from 137 who completed the pre-survey to 61 completing the post-survey. Second, for the experimental group, the total went from 140 pre-survey completions to 78 completing the post-surveys. Further, the experimental group was divided into the facilitated group ($n = 28$), the book club ($n = 21$), and the asynchronous ($n = 29$). Therefore, complete data were available from 139 participants (61 control + 78 experimental).

Role in Organization

Questions on the survey also helped to define more about the participants in the sample. As expected in a K-12 school organization, the largest number of employees in the study were teachers, with nearly half of the participants in this role. The other half of the participants were in non-teacher roles throughout the organization. Table 3 provides the per-item-means of the post-survey Workplace Belongingness Scale by role. The sample sizes within each group are insufficient for conducting meaningful statistical comparisons. However, the information offers a qualitative understanding of the types of participants and their feelings about workplace belongingness.

The highest feelings of workplace belongingness were found in the network leadership, network staff, operations, and other management or leadership roles. The

lowest workplace belongingness feelings came from the curriculum and product development teams as well as the learning facilitators. When designing future professional development, it is useful to follow up with these roles for further insight into what might have worked well or not as well with the book study.

Table 3

Per-item-means and Standard Deviations by Role

Which best describes your role in the organization?	<i>n</i>	M	SD
Coach/Trainer	6	4.28	0.65
Curriculum/Product Development	7	3.63	0.26
Finance/Business	2	4.29	1.00
Learning Facilitator	5	3.52	0.88
Network Leadership	10	4.49	0.66
Network Support Staff	12	4.49	0.38
Operations	2	4.54	0.65
Other	8	4.28	0.50
Paraprofessional	2	4.00	0.12
Partnership Development	5	4.23	0.48
Project/Program Management	2	4.63	0.53
School Leader/Administrator	11	4.53	0.38
Teacher	67	4.06	0.71
Total	139	4.17	0.66

Years in Organization

Another question asked related to the sample, and also potentially important to workplace belongingness, was the length of time at the organization. An employee that has been part of the organization longer may be more aware of elements referenced in the Workplace Belongingness Survey (e.g. beliefs and values of the organization as compared to personal beliefs and values). Table 4 shows the average years in the organization (ranging from 0 to 16 years) by group as well as the standard deviation. An

analysis of variance test indicated that the differences in the means of each group's years in the organization were not statistically significant $F(3, 135) = 1.24, p = .30$.

Table 4

Years in organization

	<i>n</i>	M	SD
Book Group	21	4.33	2.97
Facilitated	28	3.32	3.86
Asynchronous	29	2.90	2.70
Control	61	2.98	2.59
Total	139	3.24	2.97

Workplace Belongingness Scale Results

The first instrument, the Workplace Belongingness Scale, measured to what extent the book study affected workplace belongingness, addressing RQ1. In total, 139 participants completed both the pre and post Workplace Belongingness Scale. I determined this by matching the pre and post test participant unique identifiers. Any participant who completed only one survey was eliminated from the analysis.

Pre-survey Analysis

Before examining pre-to-post growth and differences in post survey results between the experimental and control groups, I evaluated the pre-survey means to determine equivalence between the groups. The Workplace Belongingness Scale is comprised of 12 Likert-scale items, each rated on a scale of 1 to 5, from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. Data were maintained in the analysis if respondents answered at least 10 of the 12 questions. Since some respondents did not answer all the Workplace Belongingness Scale items, and because there was a desire to retain as many participant responses as possible, the individual scores were calculated as the average of all

answered questions on the Workplace Belongingness Scale. For example, if a respondent skipped one response, their score was the sum of responses to the completed questions divided by 11.

Table 5 shows the means by group, and analysis of variance confirms the groups are not significantly different, $F(3, 135) = .685, p = .563, \eta^2 = .015$. This meant that my experimental and control groups held equivalent dispositions about workplace belongingness at the onset of the study, establishing a baseline equivalence.

Table 5

Pre-survey, Mean-per-item, Workplace Belongingness Scale

Group	<i>n</i>	M	SD
Book Club	21	4.26	0.46
Facilitated	28	4.03	0.65
Asynchronous	29	4.03	0.66
Control	61	4.12	0.64
Total	139	4.10	0.62

Post-survey Analysis

With baseline equivalence established, a one-way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the relationship between book study participation and workplace belongingness. The four groups examined were the three treatment groups (book club, facilitated, and asynchronous) and the no-treatment control group. The dependent variable was *sense of belonging*, as measured by the Workplace Belongingness Scale.

The overall ANOVA test result was not significant using the $p \leq .05$ criterion, ($F[3, 135] = 2.33, p = .077$). The effect size of .05, as measured by *partial eta squared*, indicates that group assignment explained only 5% of the variance in workplace belongingness scores, which is a minimal effect. Additionally, the statistical power of the

F test was 0.58, which indicates low statistical power. This may imply that the modest sample sizes affected the result and would need to be greater to be a more powerful study.

Although there was no statistically significant effect found among the groups, post-hoc tests were applied to the post survey means to get a better sense of the differences between each set of groups and to determine if there was significance between group differences. Post-hoc comparisons of group post survey means (Table 6), using Fischer’s LSD procedure, indicated that the post-survey mean of the asynchronous group was substantially lower than all other post-survey means. The differences between the asynchronous group and the book club were significant ($p = .015$). The difference between the asynchronous group and the facilitated group ($p = .06$) and the difference between the asynchronous group and the control group ($p = .06$) were notable but not statistically significant. Clearly the asynchronous group had the lowest post-treatment mean compared to all other groups.

Table 6

Pre and Post-survey, Means-per-item, Workplace Belongingness Scale

Group	<i>n</i>	Pre-Mean	Post-Mean	Pre-SD	Post-SD
Book Club	21	4.26	4.37	0.46	0.49
Facilitated	28	4.03	4.24	0.65	0.66
Asynchronous	29	4.03	3.91	0.66	0.72
Control	61	4.12	4.19	0.64	0.65
Total	139	4.10	4.17	0.62	0.66

Next, I examined the pre-to-post test survey change. As seen in Table 7, the Cohen’s *d* effect sizes ranged from -0.17 for the asynchronous group to 0.54 for the facilitated group. The negative value -0.17 indicated a decrease in the overall Workplace

Belongingness Scale. Cohen’s *d* effect sizes are interpreted on a scale of small (0.2), medium (0.5), and large (0.8). The facilitated group effect size was medium while the other group effect sizes were small, which means the participants assigned to the facilitated group were more likely to increase in workplace belongingness. In fact, the facilitated group pre-survey per item mean was a 4.0 and went to 4.2. Essentially, this means that the facilitated group’s pre-survey per item mean was squarely at the *agree* level (4 out of 5), and their post-survey per item mean moved 0.2 up the Likert scale (4.2 out of 5) for a “stronger agree.”

Table 7

Cohen’s d Effect Sizes for Pre-Post Change in Workplace Belongingness Scale

Group	Cohen’s <i>d</i>	Lower 95% C.I.	Upper 95% C.I.
Book Club	0.31	-0.13	0.75
Facilitated	0.54	0.13	0.93
Asynchronous	-0.17	-0.54	0.20
Control	0.18	-0.08	0.43

Book Study Format Evaluation Survey Results

The second instrument, the Book Study Format Evaluation Survey, measured the reactions, learning, and behavior of participants who completed the book study, addressing RQ2, RQ3, and RQ4. The Book Study Format Evaluation Survey is comprised of eight, five-point Likert-scale items and was administered only to the experimental groups ($n = 78$) after the book study concluded. There were three constructs measured: *reactions*, *learning*, and *behavior*. The three different treatment groups were facilitated ($n = 28$), book club ($n = 21$), and asynchronous ($n = 29$). Because the survey

was short and the number of questions per construct were few, it made sense to report and analyze the results of each question by group.

For each of the eight questions in the survey, participants indicated their sentiments on a 5-point Likert scale, with a 1 corresponding to the most negative reaction and a 5 corresponding to the most positive reaction. For clarity and to enable straightforward comparisons across the groups, I aggregated responses into three categories, as seen in Table 8. For instance, I combined *disagree* and *very strongly disagree* (1s and 2s) into one column, maintained *neutral* responses (3s) in a second column, and combined *agree* and *very strongly agree* (4s and 5s) into a third column. This allowed me to better understand what percentage of participants generally disagreed or agreed with the survey's prompt. This format was followed for each question using the wording from the various Likert choices (e.g., *likely*, *effective*, *agree*).

Table 8*Percent Responses to Book Study Format Evaluation Survey by Group*

Truncated Survey Items					
Reaction Items		disagree/ very strongly disagree	neutral	agree/ very strongly agree	
	1. Participation worth my time	asynch	34	24	42
book club		20	29	53	
facilitated		11	21	68	
2. Valuable to my role in the organization		not valuable/ not at all valuable	neutral	valuable/ very valuable	
	asynch	35	28	38	
	book club	24	19	57	
facilitated	14	36	50		
3. Likelihood to share positive reaction about book study		Not likely/ not at all likely	neutral	likely/ very likely	
	asynch	20	17	62	
	book club	20	19	62	
facilitated	11	39	50		
Learning Items. <i>Effectiveness regarding...</i>		very ineffective	neutral	effective/ very effective	
	4. book study format in helping to understand important book concepts	asynch	20	17	62
	book club	10	33	57	
facilitated	11	18	72		
5. opening overviews in promoting understanding	asynch	14	34	62	
book club	10	14	76		
facilitated	11	11	82		
6. discussions in promoting understanding	asynch	27	31	41	
book club	8	10	81		
facilitated	8	18	75		
Behavior Items. <i>Likelihood to . . .</i>		not at all likely	neutral	likely/ very likely	
	7. implement small change in work habits	asynch	28	17	45
	book club	10	24	66	
facilitated	15	21	64		
8. implement a change in your work habits attributable to book study in next 3 months	asynch	31	10	58	
book club	10	33	57		
facilitated	18	21	61		

A Kruskal-Wallis test was performed on each question of the Book Study Format Evaluation survey to compare responses from the three treatment groups. The differences between the mean ranks for the three groups were significant for question 6, $H(2, n = 78) = 10.58, p = .005$. Considering the less stringent $p = .10$, question 5 showed significance, $H(2, n=78) = 4.56, p = .10$.

Post-hoc comparisons were conducted using Mann-Whitney Tests for questions 5 and 6. The difference between the book club and asynchronous groups was significantly different for question 6 ($z = -2.39, p = .02$). The difference between the facilitated and asynchronous groups were significant for both question 5 ($z = -2.09, p = .04$) and question 6 ($z = -2.96, p = .03$).

Question 5 inquired about the effectiveness of the opening overviews in promoting understanding of the book. The asynchronous group watched recorded overviews of a speaker presenting the same slides used in the overviews of the facilitated and book club groups. It was clear, though, that the overviews were not considered as effective for the asynchronous as compared to the facilitated group.

Question 6 asked about the effectiveness of the discussions in promoting understanding of the book. The discussions for the book club and facilitated groups both took place synchronously using Zoom breakout rooms. The discussions for the asynchronous group took place leveraging Flipgrid, an online video discussion board tool. Asynchronous participants posted initial responses using video and then replied to one other person via video or text comment for each discussion question. Survey responses indicated that the book club and the facilitated discussions on Zoom promoted better understanding of the book content than the asynchronous group.

Other Findings

The post-survey included one additional finding related to participant fidelity to the book study design. Fidelity to book study design was measured by number of sessions attended (facilitated and book study groups) or completed (asynchronous group) and percentage of book read. I included this data around fidelity to the study as additional data to consider because the results were consistent with a trend of the asynchronous group raising questions about the design of that choice of format for a book study.

Fidelity to Study Design

Two variables related to the participants' adherence to the fidelity of the study design were analyzed. These two variables were the number of sessions attended or completed and the percentage of the book read by group. The post-survey asked the question, "How much of the book study activities did you complete (attendance at live meetings)?" Participants responded from zero to three sessions completed. These responses were averaged to determine a group mean score. Table 9 shows the means for each group's attendance or completion. Analysis of variance showed the mean sessions attended was not significantly different among the groups, $F(2, 75) = 1.102$. $p = .338$. However, it is noted that the asynchronous group results were the lowest. In fact, throughout the results of the study, the asynchronous group had the lowest per item mean for workplace belongingness and statistically significant lower results on two questions related to how different aspects of book study format (i.e., overviews and discussions) were associated with understanding of the content.

Table 9

Sessions Attended/Completed by Intervention

	<i>n</i>	M	SD
Book Group	21	2.71	0.64
Facilitated	28	2.71	0.53
Asynchronous	29	2.48	0.78
Total	78	2.63	0.68

Finally, participants were asked how much of the actual book they read as part of the study. The question for this variable was, “How much of the book did you read?” Participants had four choices: 0-25%, 50%-75%, 75%-99%, or 100%. A mistake was made in the survey wording, leaving a gap in the options for percentage complete (missing 25%-49%). The asynchronous group had the lowest percentage of participants who read 100% of the book (62% of asynchronous participants). The facilitated group had the next lowest proportion of participants who read 100% of the book (71% of facilitated participants). The book club had the highest percentage who read 100% of the book (81% of book club participants). Analysis of variance showed the mean percentage of book read was not significantly different among the groups, $F(2, 75) = 1.145$. $p = .324$. Though statistically insignificant, this substantial gap between the asynchronous group and the other two warrants discussion which is provided in Chapter 5, alongside the importance of other results reviewed.

Chapter 5

Discussion

In this chapter, I summarize the key findings from the book study intervention and discuss the alignment of the findings to the four research questions. Following this summary of findings, I compare the results of the study to what was expected based upon the literature as well as articulate any limitations of the study. Finally, I discuss recommendations for both researchers and for practitioners based upon the book study intervention findings.

Summary

The study yielded mixed results about the book study format for professional learning. RQ1 asked, “To what extent does book study participation affect workplace belongingness?” The results indicated that workplace belonging was no different for College Prep Network employees who participated in any of the book study formats when compared to other employees who did not yet participate in a book study.

Comparison of pre to post survey results revealed both the book club and the facilitated groups did have a change in their workplace belongingness, but comparable change also occurred in the control group. Therefore, I could not attribute the change to the book study. More important to note for future book study design and other online professional development is that the asynchronous group’s post-survey results were consistently lower than the other two book study formats and lower than the control group. In fact, the asynchronous group’s workplace belongingness decreased from the pre to post survey.

RQ2 asked, “To what extent are there differences in participant reactions across book study formats?” The reactions construct measured the overall satisfaction with the book study and included questions 1-3 on the survey. The answer to the research question is that there were no significant differences among the overall feelings about participating in the book study among the three different groups.

RQ3 asked, “To what extent are there differences in participant learning across book study formats?” The learning construct measured reported new knowledge based on the design of the book studies and included questions 4-6. This construct was framed around how participants perceived the overall design and different elements of the professional learning as helpful in understanding the book content. The answer to RQ3 is that there was a significant difference across book study formats regarding perceived effectiveness of (a) book section overviews that took place before discussions, and (b) discussions.

Regarding the effectiveness of the book study overviews in promoting understanding (question 5), there was a significant difference between the facilitated group and the asynchronous group. Among the facilitated group participants, 82% indicated that the overviews were *effective* or *very effective* in promoting understanding of the book, compared to only 62% of the asynchronous group. The goal of the overviews was to highlight topics that were important to understand the assigned portion of the book and help prepare all groups to be ready for discussion. The overview content included the same set of presentation slides for all three groups. However, the asynchronous overviews were a recording of a trainer going through the slides; overviews for the facilitated and book club groups consisted of the trainer going through the slides

synchronously on Zoom. The asynchronous group did not find the overviews as helpful in understanding the book, especially compared to the facilitated group.

Regarding the effectiveness of the discussions in promoting understanding (question 6), there was a significant difference between the facilitated and the asynchronous group. There was also significant difference between the book club group and the asynchronous group. When asked about the helpfulness of discussions to promote understanding, 81% of the book club and 75% of the facilitated group responded that the discussions were *effective* or *very effective*. In comparison, only 41% of the asynchronous group responded that the discussions were *effective* or *very effective*. Overall, the asynchronous group did not find the discussions as helpful as did participants of the other book study formats.

The discussion questions used for each group were the same, but how participants engaged in discussion was different for each. For the facilitated group, discussions occurred intermittently between segments of the trainer-led presentation, incorporating both whole group and breakout room discussions. Conversely, the book club discussions took place continuously in the breakout rooms once the trainer completed the overview and provided discussion prompts and directions for the remainder of the session. Finally, the asynchronous discussions asked participants to respond to the same questions on Flipgrid and then reply to at least one other participant per question. The results showed that, in comparison to the other two experimental groups, the discussion format was perceived as the least helpful in promoting understanding of the book for the asynchronous group.

Finally, RQ4 asked, “To what extent are there differences in participant behavior across book study formats?” The behavior construct measured the intention of the participants to implement changes in their work life attributable to their participation in the book study. The answer is that there was no significant difference in participants’ intentions to change behavior across the book study formats. However, it is worth noting, despite no statistically significant difference, more participants in all three groups did indicate that they were *likely* or *very likely* to make a change in their workplace when compared to those who indicated *not likely* or *very unlikely*. Specifically, between half to two-thirds of the participants in each book study group expressed readiness for change, contrasting to approximately 10 to 30% who expressed they were not likely to implement changes at work related to the book content.

In summary, this research study focused on whether a book study format would result in significant differences in workplace belongingness. The results show that the book study did not affect workplace belongingness. This research study also examined whether the format of a book study affected its perceived value and significance, categorized by the three constructs of reactions, learning, and behavior. The results show there was significant difference in book study format among the three experimental groups in the construct of learning. Two specific areas, the book study overviews and discussions, were perceived to be more effective in promoting understanding by the facilitated group versus the asynchronous group. One specific area, the discussions, was perceived more effective in promoting understanding by the book club versus the asynchronous group.

Discussion

Though there were statistically significant differences among the groups related to the perceived value of the overviews and discussions, I contend that all three book study formats are adequate in supporting new learning. Across all eight questions from the Book Study Format Evaluation Survey, more participants selected positive responses (*agree/likely/valuable*) than negative responses (*disagree/not likely/not valuable*).

For example, question 4 asked whether the book study helped participants understand the book concepts better. For this question on effectiveness of the book study, 57% of book club participants, 62% of asynchronous participants, and 72% of facilitated group participants said the book study was *effective* or *very effective* in helping promote understanding of the book. All three of the book study formats were acceptable, as measured by the majority of participants indicating effectiveness, in delivering content to promote understanding for over half of the participants. At a basic level, most participants learned something new from the book study.

However, using book studies similar to this design to change workplace belongingness needs further exploration. The book study formats did not significantly affect workplace belongingness. The investment in book studies across the organization costs time and money, both for the purchase of materials but also for the time required by the training staff and the participants. If book studies do not positively influence workplace belongingness, it poses the question of whether they should be continued in such a large scale capacity and be required by all employees in the organization at College Prep Network. On the other hand, the fact that, overall, participants had relatively high belongingness at the start of the study should be considered. I assert a

belongingness ceiling effect may have been in play. That is, for a group that already exhibits a strong sense of belonging, it is challenging for any intervention to engender shifts in feelings related to workplace inclusion and community.

Also, the asynchronous format, whose participants consistently scored lower than the other two book study formats across all four research questions, was designed in response to employee feedback about needing more flexibility. Workplace belongingness actually decreased between the pre and post survey for the asynchronous participants. However, workplace belongingness did increase for the facilitated, book club, and control groups. If asynchronous book studies continue, greater attention must be given to their design, especially the element of discussions. The design of the asynchronous discussions was significantly less effective for the participants as compared to the other two group formats. I propose there is a place for fully asynchronous professional learning for basic training pieces, but, when it comes to activities meant to increase workplace belongingness, fully asynchronous may not be the best design.

The result of less effectiveness in the asynchronous format's discussions, compared to higher effectiveness of the book club and facilitated formats' discussions, underscored the relevance of social constructivism, namely shared meaning making, in learning (Alghamdi, 2022; Bryceson, 2007). The book club format best mirrored social constructivism with the book club's extended discussions allowing for the most time together for authentic relationship building while learning. The facilitated format, though different than the book club, also encouraged social learning, albeit more scripted than the book club. Participants in the book club and facilitated reported higher ratings of perceived learning in these formats than the asynchronous group. Still, the relatively

lower ratings from the asynchronous group were unexpected because the literature suggested that this type of design supported social learning (Keller et al., 2022; Porath, 2018). I speculate that although the asynchronous format attempted to mimic live discussion by leveraging Flipgrid, the format did not allow for the organic, unscripted discussion found in the other groups.

When considering the Schein Organizational Culture literature, I argue that the book club and facilitated formats, as compared to the asynchronous format, were more aligned to the idea of attempting to change what Schein & Schein (2017) referred to as “underlying assumptions.” Changing one’s assumptions requires shared learning. The book club and facilitated formats both allowed for more thorough discussion and reflection. Quality discussion and reflection create opportunities for new shared learning, which supports changing underlying assumptions.

What was clear from both instruments used in the study, is that the asynchronous format needs additional iteration and improvement. The results were clear that the asynchronous group’s experience with the book study was less positive than the other groups’ in terms of value to role and time spent. In addition, the asynchronous group had the lowest percentage of participants (62%) who indicated they had even read 100% of the book. Also, the main component of the asynchronous design, the discussions, was significantly different than the other two formats, and fewer than half the participants (41%) in the asynchronous group indicated they discussions were helpful in understanding the book. In addition, the asynchronous response to workplace belongingness decreased from the pre to post. Even the control group saw an increase in workplace belongingness from pre to post despite not participating in the book study. The

fact that the asynchronous decreased from pre to post, and the other three groups and control group did not, adds to my concern about the asynchronous group design.

There are several possibilities to explain why the asynchronous group trended as such. First, without the added benefit of meeting others across the organization, the asynchronous book study could have felt more burdensome. This also aligns to the literature, as the asynchronous group format likely did not adequately foster social learning, specifically the need to build community as part of quality online learning experiences (Archambault et al., 2022). Next, the Flipgrid tool sufficiently facilitated discussion, but the element of community was not present in the same way in this group to support increased learning or belonging. When reviewing the actual Flipgrid responses, I noted that we did not design the methods to include some sort of smaller grouping of the members of the asynchronous format. The high quantity of responses on Flipgrid required participants to scroll through multiple pages to view all the discussions. I surmise that this made it difficult to feel connected to members of the community because of the sheer volume of participants, many of whom were unfamiliar with one another.

It is still worth considering ways to improve the asynchronous method given the large amount of people in the organization who opted for this choice. Both Oakes et al. (2020) and Perkins (2022) found positive sense of community in the outcomes of their book studies pairing a combination of asynchronous and synchronous elements to the design. Employees, as evidenced in the self-selection process, want the flexibility of the asynchronous format. Keeping in mind flexibility, perhaps one synchronous session followed by remaining sessions in asynchronous format could help to foster community

in the Flipgrid discussion forum. Another possibility is to allow school or department-based groups that already have relationships developed to form smaller online communities using the Flipgrid tool. Participants would already know the members of these groups and may be more likely to engage in the asynchronous activities in a positive way. This could also help bring visibility to members of the group that perhaps are struggling with workplace belonging by being better connected to people they interact with more organically.

Personal Reflections

An important part of leadership is being able to use data to help better the lives of our stakeholders (Northouse & Lee, 2022). This study's outcomes provide me the opportunity to improve the work lives of our College Prep Network employees by responding to both the positive and more disheartening results. Beginning with the positive results, I was happy to see that more than half of the participants intend to make some change to their workplace behaviors based on the book study. The whole goal of professional development, such as our book studies, is to help increase learning and/or produce change. It was promising to see that intention to change from many members of the organization, especially since the book's topic focused on how small changes can impact organizations.

On the other hand, it was disheartening to see the considerable number of participants who did not find value in the study, and to realize many expressed that the time spent in the book study was not worthwhile. We place a great deal of responsibility on our educators and staff through their regular work duties, so it is disappointing to learn that the book study did not have value for a substantial proportion of the participants. I

also found the workplace belongingness results for the asynchronous group to be concerning. The fact that the pre to post average decreased for the asynchronous group compared to even the control group was definitely disappointing. However, I highly value the contribution of my College Prep Network colleagues who took time to participate in this study. Their participation led to research findings that help improve professional learning at College Prep Network.

Value of Findings

The College Prep Network surveys its entire staff annually using an internally developed culture survey. The purpose of this survey is to measure elements of culture throughout the organization, including trust of school leadership, network leadership, and intention to stay in the organization. It also measures whether employees would recommend working at College Prep Network to their friends or family. The results of the 2023 survey were available in December 2023 and provided an interesting source of comparison to the book study data. The questions on the College Prep Network culture survey did not explicitly ask about the book studies, but there were a number of comments in the free response questions that addressed the additional workload and stress the book studies put on staff. In general, the feedback about book studies was that they should be optional and that attending them was particularly challenging for staff who work with students in person.

The book studies were just one of several major professional development initiatives happening at College Prep Network during the 2023-2024 school year (e.g. teachers were also expected to attend weekly professional learning sessions). The data from the College Prep Network culture survey, in addition to the results of this study

showing no significant difference for workplace belongingness, caused the leadership team to implement a change effective January 2024. The College Prep Network moved to make the book studies optional effective immediately. Beginning in the 2024-2025 academic year, book studies will be an option for professional development and not an organization-wide mandate. The estimated savings is \$14,000 annually for the cost of the books in addition to the centralized training staff's time savings.

Limitations

There were several limitations in the sample and design of this study that became apparent throughout the process. First of all, the study was possibly limited by the self-selection process. Participants were able to choose which session, fall or spring. They were also able to choose between asynchronous or synchronous formats regardless of their position or length of time in the organization. In an organization of 700+ employees, just 139 people fully participated in the study. This group of people who opted into both the pre and post surveys could have been more likely to “belong” to the organization by engaging in this type of process.

Another possible limitation was that my own positionality, though minimized in the design, may have influenced who ended up participating in the survey. Responses were anonymous, but willingness to actually participate in the midst of the busy demands of beginning of the school year or semester's end may have been influenced by their relationships with me. That is to say, people may have opted to participate because they were trying to be helpful to me in reaching adequate sample size or to be supportive of my doctoral program. In fact, I had several people message me after completing the surveys to convey their support.

A third limitation was the book selection for this study. Workplace belongingness perhaps could have been shaped by the actual content of the book, not just participating in a book study as a learning process. The methods aimed to make this study agnostic to the book selection and focus more on understanding the effectiveness of book studies as a practice. However, the content of the book could have influenced overall satisfaction with book studies as professional learning opportunities. For instance, someone who disliked the book may have a more negative response separate from the effectiveness of book studies as a tool in organizations.

A fourth limitation was possibly due to the professional development trainers delivering the content. The trainers changed throughout the sessions, including which were featured in the materials. This rotation of trainers was consistent among all three book study formats, including the brief video-recorded overviews. Although we intentionally kept me out of the schedule for training facilitation, the variety of trainers and their inherent teaching approaches may have influenced the effectiveness of the sessions, thus resulting in varied sentiments about workplace belongingness, as well as receptiveness to book study, understandings about the book's concepts, and even likelihood to implement change.

Future Research Recommendations

For future study, researchers are encouraged to further explore organization-wide book studies. Despite the popularity of book clubs in society and mainstream culture, few studies have examined how organizations can best adopt and scale up book study practices. It is recommended that further work focus on how to enhance or improve an asynchronous format of the book study. This could take the form of a modification to the

grouping of people more strategically in the asynchronous discussion groups or including some element of synchronous time to improve the social learning and connectedness of the asynchronous participants.

A second research recommendation is to examine the effects of K-12 organization-wide book studies completed in school and/or department communities. Perhaps the practice of reading the same book across a K-12 organization could be beneficial, but the design of this book study, which included heterogeneous teams across an organization, made it less valuable. One suggestion is to run the study with homogeneous teams—that is, groups comprised of people who work together on a day-to-day basis. Perhaps the familiar community might positively influence workplace belongingness through the discussion of the book.

A final recommendation is to conduct a mixed method inquiry to further dive into some of the limitations I articulated in the previous section. Conducting interviews or focus groups would yield additional insights into the strengths and areas needing iteration or change within each format. I also suggest that it would be valuable to transcribe and analyze book study discussions to compare the quality of interaction across different formats. Resulting insights from mixed method inquiry would contribute to organization-wide book study design improvement.

Recommendations for Practitioners

There are several key takeaways for practitioners as a result of this study, both in thinking through the design of book studies online but also other asynchronous professional development that aims to improve organizational culture. The first recommendation is to carefully attend to the design of asynchronous professional

learning. If the goal is to influence values and beliefs of an organization, fully asynchronous may not be the best choice of format. Asynchronous may work if the design can ensure community is formed to support the learning more effectively. This can be done by strategically assigning the asynchronous groups to a smaller discussion group within a tool such as Flipgrid. A further enhancement would be to include some element of familiarity with smaller discussion groups, either through a brief synchronous introduction session at the beginning of the book study or by assigning the participants to a group made up of known colleagues.

As a final thought, although self-selection went over very well for the College Prep organization, I recommend fully advertising the types of synchronous choices as well as adding an in-person, team-based book club format. For instance, principals could incorporate the organization-wide book study as part of their regular staff meetings. Another possibility would be for remote teams who work together regularly to leverage tools like Slack that are more frequently used as part of the work day. There could be a special channel established for discussing the book in multimedia format (written, voice recordings, or video responses). The remote teams would not be inconvenienced as much with this tool and would already have the benefit of knowing one another well.

Conclusion

Effective organizational leadership requires attending to organizational culture. Shared learning is the best way to make changes or reaffirm the underlying assumptions and values of an organization, which make up the the most resistant aspects of organizational culture. Book studies, when done effectively, may be an important way to provide shared learning experiences that, in turn, promote workplace belongingness. Core

to designing effective book studies for fostering a more positive organizational culture is ensuring they become meaningful modes of social learning.

This study provides researchers and practitioners alike a design to start from when considering book studies on a large scale. In addition, the instruments used in this study may be useful for replication both in book study formats but also for other training or professional learning geared towards organizational culture. Finally, it is worthwhile for K-12 school systems to consider workplace belongingness in a field that continues to struggle with recruitment and retention. Gaining deeper insight into helping people belong at work is a worthwhile endeavor. Since professional learning and development are going to be a continued part of the world of work, organizations should strive to design opportunities for shared learning that improve the overall organizational culture and sense of belongingness.

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APPENDIX A

MODIFIED WORKPLACE BELONGINGNESS SCALE

Directions: Please indicate the extent to which you agree with each of the following statements by marking 1 *strongly disagree* to 5 *strongly agree*.

- (1) I am able to work in this organization without sacrificing my principles.
- (2) I use “we/us” rather than “they/them” when I refer my organization to outsiders.
- (3) I feel that there is a semblance between my organization and my own values and beliefs.
- (4) I generally carry more positive emotions than the negative ones during my job.
- (5) Being a part of this organization inspires me to do more than what is expected.
- (6) In my work unit I have many common themes with my co-workers.
- (7) Fairness is maintained while executing rules and policies in my organization.
- (8) My personal needs are well met by my organization.
- (9) Whenever I have any personal or professional issues my organization extends necessary help and support.
- (10) My career goals are well considered by my organization.
- (11) My organization tries to make my job as exciting and promising as possible.
- (12) Accomplishments at work are adequately rewarded in my organization.

APPENDIX B

BOOK STUDY EVALUATION FORMAT SURVEY

Directions: After completing the fall book study, answer each of the following questions on a scale of 1(lowest) to 5 (highest)

Level 1: Reaction

- (1) Participating in the book study was worth my time. (*very strongly disagree to very strongly agree*)
- (2) How valuable was this book study to your role in the organization? (*not at all valuable to very valuable*)
- (3) How likely are you to share a positive reaction about this book study to colleagues? (*not at all likely to very likely*)

Level 2: Learning

- (4) How effective was your book study in helping you to understand the important concepts of the book? (*very ineffective to very effective*)
- (5) How effective were the brief overviews at the beginning of each part of the book study in promoting your understanding of the book? (*very ineffective to very effective*)
- (6) How effective were the discussions in promoting your understanding of the book? (*very ineffective to very effective*)

Level 3: Behavior

- (7) How likely are you to implement a small change in your work habits as embraced by [insert book study topic when title decided] and as a result of you participating in your book study? (*not at all likely to very likely*)

(8) How likely are you to take action on some of the improvements in [insert book study topic when title decided] in the next 3 months? (*not at all likely to very likely*)

APPENDIX C

ASU IRB APPROVAL FOR USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS



EXEMPTION GRANTED

Eugene Judson
MLFTC: Educational Leadership and Innovation, Division of
480/727-5216
Eugene.Judson@asu.edu

Dear [Eugene Judson](#):

On 6/20/2023 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	K-12 Organization Book Study Survey
Investigator:	Eugene Judson
IRB ID:	STUDY00018121
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Elizabeth Fowler IRB Protocol June2023.docx, Category: IRB Protocol;• Elizabeth Fowler Permission to Access Registration.pdf, Category: Off-site authorizations (school permission, other IRB approvals, Tribal permission etc);• Fowler 2023 IRB Intervention Overview.pdf, Category: Other;• Fowler Recruitment & Consent June2023.pdf, Category: Consent Form;• Fowler Reminder Recruitment Letter June2023 copy.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;• Survey, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);

The IRB determined that the protocol is considered exempt pursuant to Federal Regulations 45CFR46 (2)(ii) Tests, surveys, interviews, or observation (low risk) on 6/20/2023.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103). When consent is appropriate, you must use final, watermarked versions available under the "Documents" tab in ERA-IRB".

If any changes are made to the study, the IRB must be notified at research.integrity@asu.edu to determine if additional reviews/approvals are required. Changes may include but not limited to revisions to data collection, survey and/or interview questions, and vulnerable populations, etc.

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc: Elizabeth Fowler
Elizabeth Fowler