



Developing a Culture Where PLCs Can Thrive

TASSP

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Culture is a Powerful Force



**School culture influences
how people think, feel, and act.**

**Culture is a key determinant of staff
focus, commitment, motivation, and
productivity.**

Culture is a powerful force that exists in any organization in which people share some history. It develops as people work together, solve problems, cope with conflicts, achieve successes, and deal with tragedy.
(Schein, 1985; Deal and Peterson, 1999)

Key Roles of Cultural Leaders

READ the Culture

Historian and Anthropologist

ASSESS the Culture

Analyst and Evaluator

REINFORCE or TRANSFORM the Culture

Visionary, Symbol, Potter, Poet, Actor, and Healer

(Deal and Peterson, 1994; 2009)

Types of Culture



- **Positive--Negative**
- **Coherent--Fragmented**
- **Strong—Weak**
- **Learning Communities—Stagnant Communities**

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)



- Reflective dialogue
- De-privatization of practice
- Collective focus on student learning
- Collaboration
- Shared norms and values supporting a collective focus on student learning

(Sharon Kruse and Karen Seashore Louis in “Teacher Teaming-Opportunities and Dilemmas,” *Brief to Principals*, Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools, Spring 1995; DuFours 2009)

Elements of Culture

- **Norms, Values and Beliefs that underlie thinking, feeling and acting**
- **Symbols and Artifacts that Communicate Meaning**
- **Stories that Herald Values**
- **Cultural Network**
- **Heroes and Heroines**
- **Rituals, Traditions, and Ceremonies**
- **“Culture is “the way we do things around here!”**

Elements of Toxic Cultures and Non-Learning Communities



- **Negative Values and beliefs hold sway in toxic cultures. Staff don't believe in themselves or students.**
- **There is no sense of shared purpose.**
- **Relationships are negative and destructive. There is little or no collaboration.**
- **The cultural network's most powerful members negaholics (Carter-Scott, 1989).**
- **The only heroes are anti-heroic.**
- **Few positive rituals, traditions, or ceremonies exist to develop a sense of community.**

Deal and Peterson (2009)

Ways of Reading Your Culture as a Group...



- **LIST SIX ADJECTIVES TO DESCRIBE YOUR SCHOOL.**
- **THINK OF A SONG THAT DEPICTS YOUR CULTURE.**
- **CREATE A METAPHOR... IF MY SCHOOL WERE AN ANIMAL, IT WOULD BE A _____ BECAUSE _____.**
- **CONDUCT A SCHOOL HISTORY.**
- **CONDUCT AN “EDUCATIONAL GARAGE SALE”**
- **INTERVIEW A SCHOOL’S STORYTELLERS.**

Conduct a School or District History

- Major Events
- Key Formal and Informal Leaders
- Ideas about Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment
- Key Successes and Challenges
- Rituals, Traditions, and Ceremonies
- Students, Community, and Locale
- Major Events and Changes
- People and Personalities
- Clothing, Hairstyles, Music of the Time

The Positive Informal Network Shapes the

PLC



- **Gossips**
- **Spies, Counterspies, Moles**
- **Heroines and Heroes**
- **Storytellers**
- **Compasses**
- **“ Keepers of the Dream “**
- **Navigators**

The Toxic Informal Network Damages a PLC



- **Anti-Heroes and Anti-Heroines**
- **Pessimistic Storytellers**
- **Rumor Mongers**
- **“Keepers of the Nightmare”**
- **Negaholics and Naysayers**
- **Prima Donna**
- **Space Cadets**
- **Martyrs**
- **Deadwood, Driftwood, Ballast**
- **Saboteurs**
- **Rogue Pirates**
- **Resource Vultures**

Making the Informal Network Effective



- **Know who resides in each role.**
- **Provide stages for storytellers.**
- **Recognize heroes and heroines**
- **Use Gossips to pass information**
- **Work to decrease the negative impact of hostile roles.**

Stories Reinforce a PLC



- **Stories are the foundation of a culture.**
- **Stories communicate purpose, reinforce success, and maintain traditions.**
- **What are the history, myths, and stories of the culture?**
- **Discuss the key stories to tell newcomers and reinforce the culture.**

Ceremonies and Celebrations Shape the PLC

- **Reinforce Values**
- **Build Culture and Community**
- **Recharge Motivation**
- **Communicate Purpose**
- **Celebrate Success**

Avoid Turning Negative

- **Build trusting, collaborative relationships.**
- **Reinforce the good that is happening and support each other during hard times.**
- **Recognize those doing good.**
- **Share successes together.**
- **Work hard and celebrate often.**

Shaping School or Unit Cultures

- **Hiring and Socialization**
- **Recounting History and Telling Stories**
- **Communicating Vision and Values**
- **Walking the Talk; Modeling**
- **Transforming Toxic Cultures**
- **Distributing Leadership**
- **Celebrating Accomplishments**

Culture Shaping Roles



- Anthropologist
- Historian
- Visionary
- Symbol
- Potter
- Poet
- Actor
- Healer

(Deal and Peterson, 2009)



"If you want to move people, it has to be toward a vision that's positive for them, that taps important values, that gets them something they desire, and it has to be presented in a compelling way that they feel inspired to follow."

Martin Luther King, Jr.

“Teachers usually have no way of knowing that they have made a difference in a child's life, even when they have made a dramatic one...

Good teachers put snags in the river of children passing by, and, over the years, they redirect hundreds of lives...

[Great schools are] made up of people who can never really know the good they have done.”

Kidder (1989): *Among Schoolchildren*

The Road Ahead



Paradox versus opportunity, standards versus spirit, test scores versus stories--the list of dilemmas school [and district] leaders face...goes on and on. But in our view, unless we can restore the sacred stature of education, very little will help us to achieve our hopes and dreams. Schools need once again to believe in themselves and relish the opportunities to make a real difference. They must become places of community.

Schools can make a difference by restoring hope, faith, and a shared spirit to a place called school.

(Deal and Peterson, 1999)

Resources and Research

Research on Organizational Culture

Effective Schools Research (Edmonds)

Shaping School Culture (Deal and Peterson)

School Reform Literature (Fullan)

**Professional Learning Communities
(DuFours)**

Good to Great (Collins)

Balanced Leadership (Marzano et al)

Execution (Bossidy et al)

Dr. Kent Peterson is a professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis. He was the founding director of the Vanderbilt Principals Institute, Director of the National Center for Effective Schools, and a principal investigator for the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools. Over the past two decades he has studied school leadership and the professional development of leaders. His research focuses on the realities of principals' work, school culture, and effective leadership. This research is being used in a variety of leadership academies in the U.S. and internationally. He has co-authored several books with Terrence Deal including **The Leadership Paradox**, (1994), **Shaping School Culture: Pitfalls, Paradoxes, and Promises 2nd edition**, (2009), and the **Shaping School Culture Fieldbook 2nd edition** (2009). Over the past several years he has conducted workshops for ASCD, NSDC, NASSP, and for numerous state and national associations, districts, corporations, and educational organizations.

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