STRONG CULTURES AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Finding Our Way....
Basic Assumptions

1. School culture affects how people feel, but also student learning
2. Culture is deeply embedded in most schools, but it can change
3. Leaders shape culture, but…
4. Culture change requires more than one person or a small team
Culture and Climate....

“We can compare organizational culture and climate to personality and mood. The former is enduring; the latter is temporary.”

http://businessmanagement.suite101.com/article.cfm/organizational_culture_and_climate#ixzz0RTwo4vUT

IN OTHER WORDS:
CULTURE IS HARD TO CHANGE,
BUT STRONG CULTURES ARE FUNDAMENTAL TO ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE
What Will I Be Talking About?

I. A (VERY) Brief Overview of Research on Culture and Organizational Change

II. A Framework for Thinking about School Culture and Its Effects

III. What Conditions Foster Cultures that Lead to School Effectiveness?

IV. What is the Role of Leadership in Shaping Culture?
I. RESEARCH ON CULTURE AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

A Brief Overview
Starting out....

- Empirical research linking culture and change is relatively recent.
- Early roots (before 1980) emphasize culture as a drag on change (Meyer & Rowan; van Maanen & Schein); positive culture as a precondition;
- Early studies in education tended to link culture change with organization development (Brown; Fullan, Miles & Gibb);
- 1990s saw a great surge of interest.
WHAT DO WE KNOW????
(Findings from outside of Education)

So.......
ORGANIZATIONS WITH STRONG CULTURES ARE...

MORE ADAPTABLE
Organizations with Strong Cultures Have...

**HIGHER MEMBER WORK COMMITMENT AND MOTIVATION**
Organizations with Strong Cultures Have...

BETTER CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND GREATER COOPERATION
Organizations with Strong Cultures have... GREATER CAPACITY FOR INNOVATION
Organizations with Strong Cultures Demonstrate...

HIGHER PERFORMANCE
II. SCHOOL CULTURE AND ITS EFFECTS

Cultural Features that Get in Our Way
Stepping Up Is Stepping Out of Line....

Crab Bucket Culture

Daniel Duke, 1994
Culture of Doing Limits Reflection

High Frequency/ Low Amplitude

Low Frequency/ High Amplitude

CULTURE OF DOING

CULTURE OF REFLECTION AND INSIGHT
Schools and Districts Have Many Subcultures....

- All schools have stories...
- Not all stories are aligned
- We want to align school stories to strengthen the culture

Schools are Cautious When it Comes to Change...

- BUT SOME FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES ARE NEEDED TO SERVE THE STUDENTS THAT WE HAVE IN OUR SCHOOLS....

- [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Loh7dUkYFnE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Loh7dUkYFnE)
What Does it Take to Unfreeze Culture?

PCOLT creates the energy to grow and change—personally, professionally, and organizationally.
III. CONDITIONS THAT FOSTER STRONG CULTURES

Linking Culture and Effectiveness
PCOLT – The Key to School Culture

Trust

Professional Community

Organizational Learning

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Professional Community

Potential Benefits
• Empowerment and Increased efficacy
• Personal dignity
• Collective responsibility for student learning and well-being

Key Characteristics
• Thoughtful public discussion of important and central issues
• Collaboration
• Shared norms and values
• Focus on student learning
Components of Organizational Learning

LEARNING PROCESSES

MEMORY

KNOWLEDGE BASE

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Components of Trust....

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A Task of Leadership and Management

Shaping and Guiding Culture....
The Primacy of Leadership

An investigation of 204 organizational case studies found that


- We know much more about leadership in education....
WHAT DO THESE MOVIES HAVE IN COMMON? WHAT IMAGE OF LEADERSHIP AND CHANGE DO THEY PORTRAY?

- To Sir With Love
- Mr. Chips
- Stand and Deliver
- Dead Poet’s Society
- Mr. Holland’s Opus
- The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie
Hollywood’s Image of Schools....A Strong Leader

From Madeleine Church, 2002
The Alternative Picture….A Strong Culture

From Madeline Church, 2002
Yin-Yang and Cultural Leadership...

Cultural Leadership
- Discovering new possibilities and developing the capacity to realize them
- Creating a new paradigm/visions
- Promoting inclusion and dignity for all

Cultural Management
- Empowering staff, students, and stakeholders
- Changing the system
- Attitude of “Serving”
- Providing oversight and mutual accountability
- Creating an attitude of doing
- Moving “things” and people into motion
- Providing sustained support (aid)
- Working within a paradigm
- Creative problem solving

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“Yin-Yang” Redux....
How Do School Leaders Affect Learning?

Instructional Leadership

Trust in Principal

Shared Leadership

Professional Community

Focused Instruction

Achievement In Math

School Level

Louis, Dretzke and Wahlstrom, 2009
District Leadership Matters....

- Quality of PD for Principals
- District Focus on Instruction
- Communicating Priorities

Teacher Ratings of Principal Instructional Leadership
Districts/Superintendents contribute by...

- Ensuring that teachers and administrators have access to professional development aimed at strengthening their capacities to achieve shared purposes;
- Assigning priority, unambiguously, to the improvement of student achievement and instruction;
- Making significant investments in the development of instructional leadership; and
- Emphasizing teamwork and professional community.
What Else Do Principals and Teachers Say?

- Districts promote participatory democratic structures in schools by creating policies and expectations for participation on the part of a wide array of people and groups outside of the school.

AND

- Student achievement is higher in schools where teachers share leadership and where they perceive greater involvement by parents.
What Else do Principals and Teachers Say?

- Districts that help principals feel more efficacious about their school improvement work have positive effects on school conditions and student learning

AND

- Principals who believe they are working toward clear and common goals in collaboration with district personnel, other principals, and teachers are more confident in their leadership.
The Challenge...

- Principals do not always feel that they receive clear support and direction from their districts...
- Principals do not always feel that they are part of active collaborative networks in their district...
- Principals do not always feel that they have opportunities for meaningful professional development...
- Larger districts (suburban/exurban as well as larger cities) seem to have more difficulty in providing support.
The District’s Role in Shaping School Cultures

Vision and Planning are not enough. District leaders must address culture by...

1. Supporting individuals and groups to preserve what is valuable to them...
2. Guiding a school in chipping away at cultural features that “get in our way”...
3. Helping members to understand the forces and conditions that will shape the future, ensuring cultural adaptation...
4. Consistently checking to make sure that district aspirations for supporting schools are actually affecting schools.
Thank You for Listening....

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