
Building Strong School Cultures: A Guide to Leading Change¹
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Study Guide²

This study guide is designed as an easy reference to the key ideas and themes in each chapter of the book as well as to explicitly link ideas to practical applications for leaders in school settings. This guide offers the reader of *Building Strong School Cultures* materials to enhance understanding and to support group discussion and individual reflection about the ideas in the book.

¹ Kruse, S. D. & Louis, K. S. (2009). *Building Strong School Cultures: A Guide to Leading Change*. Thousand Oaks CA: Corwin Press.

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Chapter 1

The importance of understanding the *culture* within the school and how a leader helps to shape a school's culture is the main focus of this chapter, which introduces the key themes and topics that serve as the basis for the remainder of the book.

Key Themes:

The two key concepts introduced in chapter one are *PCOLT* and *Intensified Leadership*.

PCOLT: This term is an acronym summarizing the three key conditions underlying constructive school cultures: *professional community*, *organizational learning*, and *trust*.

Professional Community: The essence of professional community is that all adults in a school have the opportunity to work with others to grow and change – and that meaningful and sustained connections with colleagues are necessary for that to occur.

Organizational Learning: OL focuses on the ways in which new ideas are brought to the attention of a school organization, how they are considered and evaluated, and the processes that allow the incorporation of new knowledge to improve practices.

Trust: Trust has been linked with organizational effectiveness in all work settings; in schools trust among teachers and between teachers and other groups (administrators, district staff, parents and students) is linked to increase student learning.

Intensification of Leadership: Employing PCOLT strategies requires a different kind of school leadership. This form of leadership is called *intensified*, because it increases the *number* of people engaged in leadership roles and the *scope* of the school's work as it

relates to student outcomes. It assumes that *there is deliberately broadened meaningful involvement* -- through job redesign and through the permanent redistribution of the work among beyond that of formally designated school leaders (Principals, Assistant or Associate Principals, Department Chairs or Team Leaders.)

Just what is “culture?”

A school's culture is characterized by deeply rooted traditions, values, and beliefs, some of which are common across schools and some of which are unique and embedded in a particular school's history and location. Culture informs the ways in which "things get done around here" and frames how change efforts are perceived. Based in accumulated experiences, a school's rules and regulations, policies and procedures, whether written or informal, are lasting observable artifacts of a school's culture. Culture is created by group members in response to each other and outside stimuli, and is transmitted to new members both formally and informally. Culture is a powerful determinant of how people behave in schools, but by paying attention to both *internal and external* people and forces that act upon the school, leaders can harness the power of culture to support change and improvement.

Basic Assumptions:

- School culture affects how all people in a school work with each other, and consequently affects student learning.
- Culture is deeply embedded in most schools, but it can change.
- Leaders shape culture, but...
- Culture change requires more than one person or a small team.

When members of the school community share a *collective identity* around *improved student learning* a strong culture is created.

Why are these ideas important?

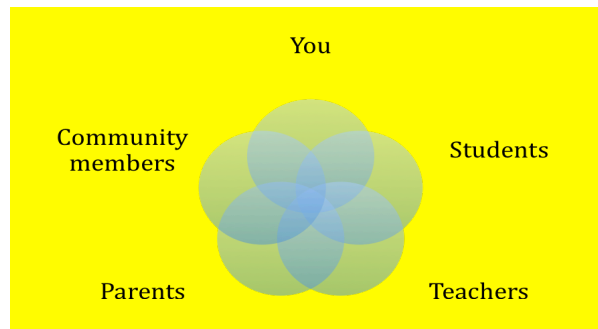
School culture and student achievement and progress are strongly linked. Schools with cultures that focus on student learning and engage parents and community with these goals do better on measures of accountability and achievement. So it makes sense that school leaders would want to develop a culture that produces similar results for their school. However, culture change requires sustained effort, that is broadly distributed throughout a school and that centers on the combination of values and behaviors that allow teachers and administrators to make good choices concerning classroom practice. Building a strong school culture requires spontaneous leadership actions as well as long-term strategic choices and it requires the ability to address both the big picture and short-term demands simultaneously. When schools attend to those aspects of their internal cultures that foster their ability to create community, learn together and engender trust in each other, improvements in the outcomes for students are improved.

Questions Discussion and Reflection and Activities for Chapter One

Individual Reflections:

- List 6 to 10 words that you would use to describe the culture of your school. Do not be concerned about whether they are positive or negative – this is just a starting point.
- Think about why you chose these words – what event(s), behaviors, or visible signs would you point to that serve as examples or cases to illustrate the words you have chosen?
- What aspects of PCOLT are present in your school? Which aspects of PCOLT are the strongest in your school? Which aspects of PCOLT are weakest in your school?
- List several key decisions that were made in your school during the past year. Who was involved, formally or informally, in making those decisions? What does this suggest about the degree to which leadership is intensified in your school or district?
- Are there areas where leadership is already intensified? Where might you begin leadership intensification efforts?
- Draw a Venn Diagram like the one below. How would you characterize your existing school culture? How would parents describe your school culture? How would teachers describe your school culture? How would community members describe your school culture? In what ways are those descriptions the same?
SHARON – I THINK THAT WE SHOULD SAVE THIS UNTIL DIAGNOSIS –

ITS GREAT! How are they different? What actions might you take to make those descriptions more similar so that a collective identify is developed?



Group Discussion: (Use your individual reflections to help guide your group discussion)

- How are the themes in this chapter useful in describing or discussing your school?
- In what ways are these ideas familiar to you?
- How do they support the work in which you are already engaged?
- In what ways do they stimulate you to think about your work differently?
- How do they support or challenge you in thinking about your leadership?
- Complete the survey on the next page.
 - What aspects of your work are most critical? Most easily accomplished?
 - How might you begin intensifying leadership in your school?
 - In what areas of your work would you be able to begin to include others?
 - How will you go about choosing whom to include?
 - How will you talk about your efforts with staff, faculty, parents or community members?

Identifying Internal and External Foci

Consider the external and internal foci present in many schools. Identify how often each plays a role in your school. Then identify if this is work you are currently doing as an individual or as part of a leadership team. Circle those areas in which you might consider intensifying your leadership.

Sharon Kruse 8/10/09 1:32 PM

Comment: Karen, I copied this from my original as it was clearer than a scanned version. What do you think? (Also, my scanner isn't working at the moment and I was too focused to try to stop and fix it.)

Karen Seashore 8/27/09 10:42 AM

Comment: I think that we need to be consistent with the book.

Internal Foci					
	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Individual	Team
Student behavior and discipline					
Curriculum adoption and implementation					
Managing relationships with parents					
Managing faculty and staff relationships					
Budget and budget planning					
School improvement and change agendas					
Vision and mission setting					
Accountability and testing					
Scheduling and building operations					
Supervision and coaching					
Planning for professional development					
External Foci					
Community contacts and relationships focused on issues or events within the school					
District office meetings					
Participation in district office initiatives					
Networking with other professionals					
County-wide or regional meetings					
Working with community groups on non-school related issues					
Working with social workers or community health professionals					

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