
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 2

Chapter 2 focuses on role of leadership in developing school culture. As we noted in chapter 1, intensified leadership includes broadening the meaningful involvement of others in the leadership process *and* the deepening of one's thinking about the large goals and small tasks that comprise the day-to-day work in schools. In chapter 2 we recognize that culture is not monolithic and that subcultures exist within every school. We also distinguish between management and leadership roles in schools, but show how they are complementary in culture change. Finally chapter 2 explores how PCOLT can be used as a management and leadership tool to create positive school cultures.

Key Themes

The important themes in chapter 2 include school subcultures, leadership and management, and the use of PCOLT to enhance culture within schools.

Sub-cultures: In chapter 1 culture was defined as the shared beliefs, values and actions present within a school. Culture is co-created by members of the school community and it is visible whenever members of the school community interact with each other. Chapter 2 expands on these core assumptions by introducing the idea that although most schools share a dominant culture, they also contain smaller groups that have their own *sub-cultures*. These can include:

- *A teacher subculture* that consists of values, norms and beliefs related to carrying out the daily work of engaging students in learning activities;
- *A school administrator subculture* that consists of the norms and expectations held by members of the leadership team about how the school should be managed, and how the work of all school members should be organized;

- A *district subculture*, which focuses on managing several schools and creating policies and expectations that mediate individual school cultures and community and legal and/or state expectations;
- A *student subculture* that is focused on maximizing social engagement and minimizing adult control; and
- A *parent subculture* (or subcultures) that consists of relatively stable expectations about how the school should work with children to reinforce their own and community values.

In the best of all possible worlds, the principal will *manage and lead the groups toward a greater consensus* (or at least an accommodation) as part of the effort to intensify leadership. This means finding and emphasizing the common core on which most groups agree. In schools where (1) the common core culture is understood and (2) some divergence or disagreement among subcultures is accepted, there is less conflict, more participation in decision making and other leadership initiatives and, generally, more agreement on directions and choices.

Leadership and management: Central to the discussion about management and leadership is the notion that the daily work of school leaders includes both *management and leadership* functions. Rather than thinking of these as distinct activities, we assert that when schools are well run, leaders attend to both management and leadership on a regular basis. In higher-performing schools, leadership (or the leadership team) performs both the organizational functions typically attributed to *leadership*—working on sustained system improvement, enticing and empowering staff to achieve top performances, and developing trust within the organization—as well as with

organizational functions typically credited to *management*—working within the system, organizing regularized and predictable operations and supervising the performance of staff.

To do so requires that the school leader think of leadership and management as the two sides of a Yin Yang figure, where each contains each other. In this way, management and leadership are not distinctive but blend almost seamlessly in practice.



Why is this important?

When a school engages in intentionally developing cultural leadership and cultural management, members work to involve others in activities from both sides of the Yin Yang diagram. It is helpful to look at PCOLT as supporting the development of cultural leadership and management by focusing a leader's attention on faculty and staff relationships (PC), broader discussions that generate learning within the school (OL) and

developing trusting relationship (T) among all stakeholders. Doing so changes culture within schools because it addresses not only *who* does the work but *what* work gets done. The result is a stronger, focused culture where members and stakeholders are more cohesive because they share similar goals and values.

Questions Discussion and Reflection and Activities for Chapter One

Individual Reflection

Think about your school setting. Consider the following questions.

- What subcultures exist in your school?
- How cohesive are they?
- How do they differ in membership, values, norms and beliefs?
- What brings them together – are there areas of agreement?
- On what issues facing the school do they disagree?

Completing the following chart may help you to understand your sub-cultures better.

Analyzing the Subcultures of Your School

| | District Leaders | School Leaders | Teachers (majority) | Students | Parents |
|--|-------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| What they are most concerned about? | | | | | |
| How is the majority of their time invested? | | | | | |
| On what do they wish to spend more time? | | | | | |
| What strengths do they bring? | | | | | |
| What concerns do they bring? | | | | | |
| What word or image would describe them? | | | | | |
| What one thing about the school matters most to them? | | | | | |
| What one thing would they want to see added to the school day or year? | | | | | |
| When they talk about the school what do they share? | | | | | |

What did you learn? If others in your school were to complete the chart would their responses be similar? How might they differ? Draw a Venn diagram that shows each

group and your responses. Where are the overlaps that you could build on? The gaps that you might want to address?

Group Reflection (Use your individual reflections to guide group discussion)

Look back at the Yin Yang figure. Consider the following questions.

- On what leadership behaviors do you spend most of your time?
- On which management behaviors do you spend most of your time?
- What other people in your school engage in leadership and management behaviors such as those listed in the figure?
- Are there any that are underemphasized?

Considering Cultural Leadership and Management

Reflect on the leadership and management tasks within the Yin Yang. In the table below note on which of the leadership and management behaviors you spend your time. Rank these as considerable attention (daily or at least weekly), some attention (monthly or quarterly) or minor attention (yearly or less).

Note those that you primarily attend to on your own and note those in which others are involved. Where is the time in your school invested? What areas are currently underemphasized? Discuss your findings with members of your leadership team or other school leaders.

| Cultural Management | | | | | |
|---|------------------------|----------------|-----------------|------------|------|
| | Considerable Attention | Some Attention | Minor Attention | Individual | Team |
| Creative problem solving | | | | | |
| Working within the current paradigm | | | | | |
| Providing sustained support or aid for teachers and improvement initiatives | | | | | |
| Moving things and people into motion | | | | | |
| Creating an attitude of doing | | | | | |
| Providing for oversight and mutual accountability | | | | | |
| Cultural Leadership | | | | | |
| Discovering new possibilities and developing capacity to realize them | | | | | |
| Creating a new paradigm or vision | | | | | |
| Promoting inclusion and dignity for all | | | | | |
| Empowering staff, students and stakeholder | | | | | |
| Changing the system | | | | | |
| Creating an attitude of serving | | | | | |