Leadership

In terms of the central role of leadership in providing coherence:

1. Do we strive to attract and retain the *best people* we can find?

2. Do we have frequent *conversations* about our values in the context of making decisions?

3. In our school, do we emphasize the need to preserve the valuable aspects of our *culture* while being open to adapt to a changing environment?

4. Has our school been successful in dealing with a significant amount of *change* in recent times?

5. Do our people take action with the full knowledge that our ultimate *accountability* is to serve our stakeholders in a manner consistent with our values?

6. In our school, do we balance the competing or even *conflicting* priorities of various stakeholders?

7. Do we understand that the public sees us as one school and therefore we must work actively to strengthen *internal partnerships?*

If you answered *no* to any of these questions, then the topics in this section should be helpful.

We start this section of the field manual by describing a leadership model that conveys our understanding of the concept of leadership. From there, we move into six topics directly connected to effective leadership:

- communications
- dialogue
- trust
- collaboration/teamwork
- firefighting
- culture

We break each of these topics down into specific techniques and tools.

We believe that leadership can be learned and that people can become more effective leaders. If we didn't, this manual would be a waste of time! We further believe that for an individual to become more effective, the individual must both (1) understand that many

pieces must fit together and (2) develop increased proficiency in specific practices. The topics in this section tie to the leadership at the hub of organizational effectiveness.

In the Introduction, we suggested that the person at the top of an organization is the person in position of authority (PPA). The ongoing questions for the PPA are these: What is the optimal mix of the four varieties of activities (leading, managing, administering, supervising) in your organization at this point in time? What does your organization need most? What do you spend most of your time actually doing? Is that working? If it's not working, what will you stop doing in order to make more space for what you should be doing?

For instance, if your school needs better management and you are doing mostly administration, is that acceptable? Does that best serve the needs of the students and staff? Or if you're doing entirely management and you sense that your building needs better leadership, what will you do to alter the balance?

Now, with a narrower understanding of leadership within the role of the principal, let us introduce The Commonwealth Practice (TCWP) model of leadership.

The model shown in Figure 3 represents our thinking as it evolved over a decade or more of thinking, practicing, learning, and teaching. We will discuss the model, working up from the bottom:

Figure 3   Discovering Leadership Model
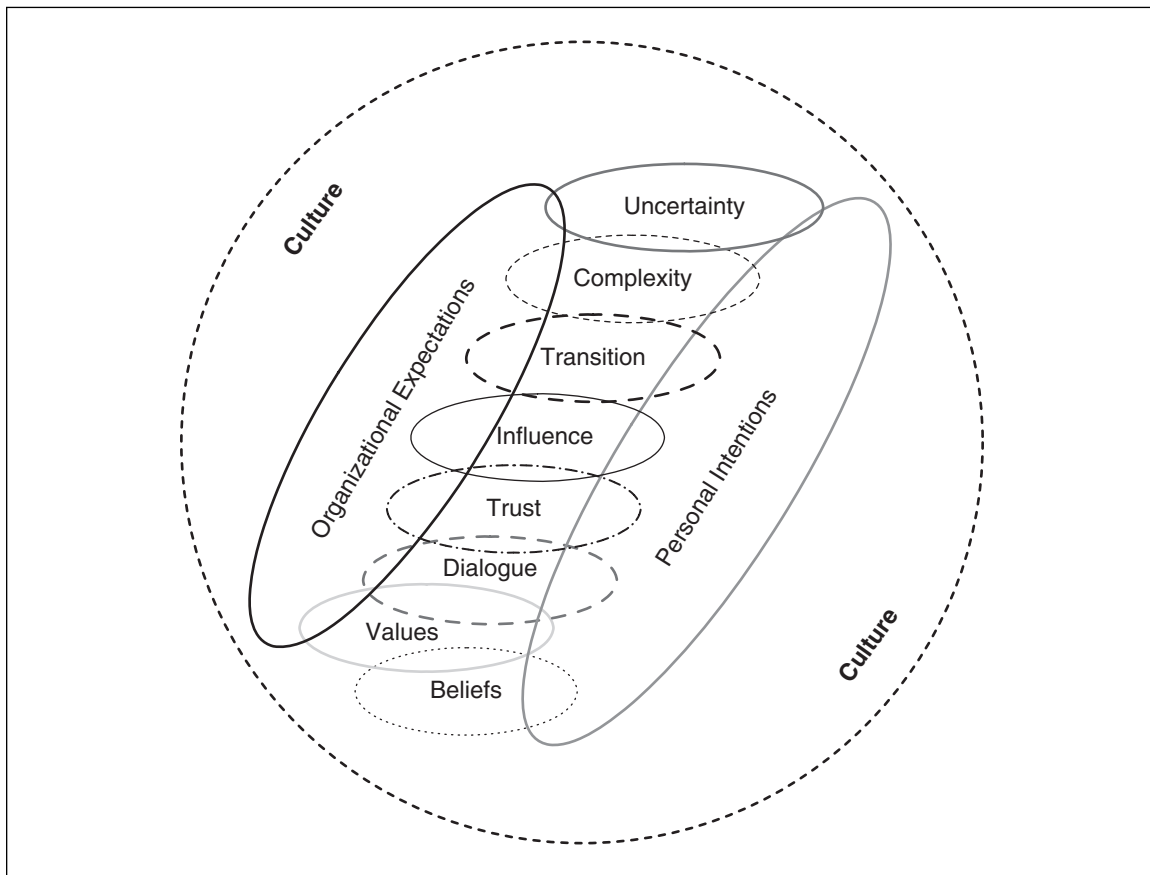
SOURCE: The Commonwealth Practice, Ltd, 2002.

We understand a *belief* as (1) an idea or concept that is held by an individual and (2) has been very highly internalized regardless of its source. What you believe has tremendous influence on your understanding of what's important and how things work. (See the topic Beliefs on page 107.)

We understand *values* as the fundamental criteria used in decision making, whether by individuals or organizations. To lead, you must first know yourself. Understanding what is really important to you is the bedrock of the leader you will become. What you value must align with what your organization values. (See the topic Personal Values on page 97.)

We understand *dialogue* as a relatively rare alternative means of communication within groups and the essential source of collective learning. Dialogue involves the creation of new, shared knowledge; this collective learning drives enduring success and can offer significant competitive edge. (See the topic Dialogue on page 8.)

We understand *trust* as a mysterious intangible that serves simultaneously as the lubricant facilitating interpersonal relationships and the glue that holds organizations together. Trust is ultimately about the relationship between exactly two people. (See the topic Trust on page 11.)

We understand *influence* as a critical element of both the formal and informal networks by which organizations get things done. Influence can be seen as cold and selfish when engaged in as manipulation. But building strong teams by capitalizing on scarce resources depends on our ability to influence others. (See the topic Influence and Political Savvy on page 118.)

We understand *transition* as the sometimes difficult consequence of change, the human response to instability and evolution. (For example, the vacation policy has changed, and now the staff must make the transition to planning further in advance.) Transitions occur both in the nature of the work and in the nature of the workforce. These differences may require the adoption of a new form of governance. (See the topic Change on page 73.)

We understand *complexity* as a property of our perception of many contemporary problems or issues. Complexity results from the dynamic interaction of multiple variables. While we can improve our perception through a richer understanding, we cannot entirely overcome or eliminate complexity. (See the topic Systems Thinking on page 55.)

We understand *uncertainty* as an inevitable element when we discuss, plan for, and create our future. We cannot forecast exactly how every event will unfold, thus we will always face some degree of uncertainty. And we have to act anyway. (See the topic Scenario Planning on page 48.)

We understand *personal intentions* as the ultimate source for any contribution that an individual brings to an organization. An individual's personal intentions serve as the wellspring for passion and commitment. (See the topic Personal Values on page 97.)

We understand *organizational expectations* as having two faces: what the community expects of the organization and what the organization thus expects of the individuals within it. (See the topic Competencies and Position Sketch on page 89.)

We understand *culture* as the overall container within which all of these various facets of leadership come together. The culture of each school is unique, determined by its history, its leadership, its community, and its challenges. (See the topic Culture on page 74.)

In the work of TCWP, we use this sequence from Figure 3 to develop improved leadership abilities. That is, we adopt the perspective that first you must be aware of your own beliefs since they underlie your values. Our position is that while only people can have beliefs, both people and organizations can espouse values. To develop trust, we must engage in dialogue, which frequently involves talking about

our values and beliefs. Only after trust has been developed can one exert influence over others. We use that influence to effect certain changes and deal with the consequent transitions. In making those changes, we operate in an arena of considerable complexity and uncertainty. Those changes will become easier if the people within the organization are clear about their personal intentions and the organization is clear about the organizational expectations. And all of this occurs against the backdrop of the prevailing culture.

Megan Tschannen-Moran (2004) observes that there are two basic underlying structures of organizations: bureaucratic and professional. Bureaucratic organizations rely on a hierarchy of authority for coordination and control, whereas professional organizations rely on trust in the expertise of the professionals to exercise discretion in responding to the needs of clients. Schools are a unique combination of bureaucratic and professional organizations.

Trust sits at the middle of the leadership model, for without trust nothing significant can happen. Because trust depends on communications and especially dialogue, we start there.

COMMUNICATIONS

> *If communication is to happen, we require not merely messages, but an ordered situation in which messages can assume meaning.*
>
> —Neil Postman (1976, p. 9)

A concerned parent calls with a complaint: "My daughter's teacher is constantly on her case. She says he is picking on her. I want you to stop him from picking on her."

What does this message mean anyway? What did the daughter mean in talking to the parent? What does the parent mean when talking to you—what does the parent intend that you do?

Communication is more than simply delivering a message. For true communication to occur, *you* must be clear about the meaning of the message you intend to send and you must ensure that the *recipient,* upon receiving the message, assigns to it the same meaning. That is what Neil Postman is driving at in the quote above. Communication is about the transmission of meaning, not simply the sending and receiving of words.

In the example above, it turns out after some investigation that the student had neglected to turn in a critical assignment two weeks earlier. The teacher had informed her that if she didn't turn it in, her grade would take a major hit. He had talked to her several times since then, reminding her that time was quickly running out. What the *teacher* meant in reminding her was that she needed to understand the consequences of not doing the assignment. What the *student* meant in talking to the parent was that the teacher was nagging her, reminding her to do the work he knew she was fully capable of doing. What the *parent* meant in talking to the teacher was that she was concerned about her child's education. So much for using clear language!

In fact, communication need not even involve words. If one person sees another in the hallway, looks at the clock, scowls, points at the other person, and nods her head toward an empty room, the meaning of that suite of gestures is only slightly open to misinterpretation. It seems quite clear that the first person wants to have a chat in a nearby room related to the second person's presence in the hallway at that time. While nonverbal messages can *accompany* verbal messages, they can also *replace* verbal messages.

When an individual is talking with someone, he delivers both verbal and nonverbal messages. Remember these three important facets of nonverbal communication:

1. Estimates are that 70 percent of the total message is nonverbal.

2. Nonverbal elements are most likely to differ between cultures or groups and are therefore most open to misinterpretation.

3. If there's a conflict between your verbal and nonverbal messages, the nonverbal message will prevail.

A leader in an organization will have countless opportunities to communicate and *mis*communicate every day. And a leader cannot *not* communicate. When you fail to respond to an e-mail, you are communicating, however subtly, that the e-mail was not high enough priority to get your attention and action. When you pass someone in the hallway without acknowledging her, you are communicating that you are preoccupied, that your attention is elsewhere. When you glance at your watch while talking to someone, you are communicating that your time is valuable. You might also be communicating that you have another pending appointment or are wondering how long this will take.

In schools, communication is one of the most important aspects of leadership. Communications includes internal (within departments, school, and district) and external (parents, community, and state agencies) audiences.

We know from brain research that when we have gaps in our knowledge or experience, we make up information to make sense: we need to feel comfortable and we need a complete story. If pieces are missing, we simply make them up, whether consciously or unconsciously (see Ladder of Inference on page 106). The reality is that if leaders do not communicate, people—whether internal or external—will make up reasons and motivation of behaviors.

Several principals we know not only prepare weekly announcements internally, but also send out information electronically and in hard copy. Several principals use what they call *The Rational Inquirer,* which contains quotations and questions for reflection, announcements of meetings, needed information for the week, Web sites for further learning, stories for the heart, humor, research citations, and annotated resources. If principals want staff to be talking about and reflecting on learning and teaching quality, they need to initiate and encourage dialogue about those subjects.

Externally, by using parent newsletters and district communication avenues, principals can set the tenor and agenda for conversation. They can also write articles for the student newspaper that identify positive learning behaviors and offer information about changes and reasons for policies, thereby setting the tone for a positive learning culture. Some principals write for the local newspaper. One high school principal wrote about the math wars at the elementary level. Parents had shown up at board meetings complaining about the math curriculum. The issue was a new focus on problem solving versus multiple sets of simple problems (the way most of us were taught) to learn a concept. The high school principal took the opportunity to write an article in the local newspaper advancing the idea of needing both approaches. This helped the elementary principals and demonstrated that a principal can communicate about learning, curriculum, and assessment. The question you must ask yourself is: Who is setting the communications agenda: you or others?

Only a small percentage of your daily or weekly communications will be formal. These may include a memo to a large group, a one-on-one with a specific staff member, a presentation to a site council meeting or staff meeting, or perhaps a review of the budget with someone from the district office. The vast majority of the communications will be informal. These will comprise a blend of verbal and nonverbal elements. Some will concern routine matters, while others will focus on exceptional matters. In the limited space in this manual, we want to focus on formal communications, especially those related to change, a place where communications seems frequently to break down.

Intentional Communication

When a leader initiates an effort to change the status quo (e.g., launches a project), the leader must pay close attention to all aspects of communication. Many leaders will make a speech at the outset, assume everyone present understood exactly what they meant, dole out fuzzy assignments, and feel no particular need to revisit the topic later. *Wrong!*

In laying out a clear communications *plan*—especially for an effort that will span several months or more—the leader radically improves the odds of success. The communications plan includes an entry for each significant communications event: the announcement of the project planning meetings, notes of welcome to the project members, the formal announcement of the project launch, the publication of the plan's goals and timeline, notes to remind project members of the need to provide timely status updates (and probably reminder notes for the same purpose!), notes of thanks to those outside the project team who contribute to its success, and so on.

For each event, the leader should identify the elements of good communication shown in Figure 4 briefly but clearly.

Figure 4 Facets of Good Communications

- The *content:* What is the message and meaning to be conveyed?
- The *intent or rationale*: Why are you sending this message?
- The *date:* When should the message be transmitted?
- *From* whom: Should the message come from the leader? From the project team?
- *To* whom: Who must receive the message? An individual? Several individuals? An entire group?
- The *format or medium:* What is the best channel? Should the message be conveyed by a meeting, an e-mail, a printed and signed letter, a presentation, a poster on a bulletin board? A series of these, each as a separate communication event?

For instance, the leader might elect to send a personal note of welcome (on paper) to the team members, follow up with a kickoff meeting (open to everyone), then send out a recap note later in the week (to catch those who did not attend the meeting).

When we prepare a formal written document, we frequently write it and then set it aside for a while. Then we'll reread it so see what words we accidentally left out as we revised it earlier. Then we'll run it past a trusted second reader. We'll explain to that person what we want to accomplish and ask for help in identifying passages that are open to multiple interpretations or are likely to be misinterpreted. And we'll revise them. We may or may not ask for another round of reviewing. We especially do this when the subject is touchy and the emotions are high. After all, with a written message, you forfeit all of the nonverbal supports you have available in a face-to-face (or at least, voice-to-voice) real-time interaction, and you rely on your skill with words alone.

The basic guideline once again is to strive for balance. On one hand, the leader shows respect for people's time by refraining from flooding them with redundant messages. The leader also shows respect by knowing and accommodating the fact that different people and different audiences prefer to receive messages in different ways. (For instance, there's no use in *only* sending out a broadcast e-mail or posting a note on the school's Web site if even a small percentage of the school's parents have no Internet access.) On the other hand, you emphasize a project's importance by keeping people up to date. Yet another consideration is that not everything can be a number-one priority for every person, and what is valuable information for one person might be so much noise to another (see the topic Data, Information, and Inferences on page 101).

You and the people around you are much too busy to waste time. If you can simplify their lives, that seems like a laudable goal. One way to do this is to communicate more effectively. Especially for more formal communications, keep in mind Bill Jensen's (2003) three primary considerations: as a consequence of having received this communication, precisely what is it that you want these people *to know, to feel,* and *to do?* If you cannot identify a response for each element, then reconsider whether the communication event is worth the time and energy it will take to create, transmit, receive, and process it. Time is, after all, a nonrenewable resource; you have only 1,440 minutes in each day and must use them as wisely as you can.

Communications is a broad topic. We shift now to one specific (and unfortunately rare) variety of communications: dialogue.

ACTION CHECKLIST FOR COMMUNICATIONS

How often do others around you misunderstand your meaning? Have you asked why in a way that indicates that you genuinely want to learn and thus improve?

Are you attentive to the congruence between your verbal and nonverbal messages?

For critical changes, have you laid out when and how to communicate what to whom?

When you communicate to others, is it clear what the intent of the communication is—what you want the receiver to know, feel, and do?

When you prepare a message while under stress, do you let it sit for a while and then run it past another (trusted) set of eyes?

DIALOGUE

Through dialogue we can participate in collective thinking. We no longer have to take actions based on limited understanding.

—Gerard and Teurfs (1995, p. 146)

One vastly underused form of communication is dialogue. We can best understand dialogue by contrasting it with interactions which are *not* dialogue. Figure 5 lists common types of communication.

Note the differing intents. Only dialogue has the explicit goal of creating new knowledge. The others involve more mundane, but nonetheless useful, intents. If you are facing a situation in which you believe currently known solutions will not work, and thus need to create something new, then dialogue should be the interaction of choice.

Of course, creating dialogue can be problematic for two reasons. First, in most circumstances you do not simply convene a meeting to have dialogue. You usually start out with another form of communication, and eventually dialogue may emerge. For example, a problem situation arises. You ask several people to come together to fashion a response. In the course of that *discussion*, participants *present* several potential solutions. In *evaluating* them, the group concludes that none of the identified solutions seems to be a truly good answer for the current situation. At that point, the interaction can evolve into a *dialogue.* If the circumstances are right and people are willing to engage in genuine dialogue, innovative solutions will emerge.

Figure 5   Varieties of Interaction

Type of Interaction	Typical Ratio	Intent Is to . . .
Presentation	One : Many	Transfer data/information
Persuasion/sales	One : A few	Convince
Argument	One : One	Prevail
Evaluation	One : One	Offer feedback/develop
Discussion	One : One : One : One . . .	Air viewpoints
Small talk	One : One	Strengthen relationships
Status report/update	One : A few	Increase task awareness
Brainstorm	Many : One	Generate ideas
Interview	One : One	Gather specific data about a person
Interrogation	One : One	Gather specific data about an event
Inquisition	One : One	Gather data to support a preconceived conclusion
Dialogue	Several : Several	Create knowledge

That brings up the second reason dialogue is problematic: it takes time. In our experience, it takes the average group of a half dozen people *60–75 minutes* to get to the point where the quality of the interaction really becomes dialogue. And many organizations simply do not allow people 60–75 minutes to "think together" even about a genuinely perplexing situation. The time pressure to come up with a response quickly overpowers the pressure to come up with a high-quality response that is powerful and enduring. In many cases, dialogue leads to the paradoxical result that the group does not yet know enough to develop an effective solution. That is, engaging in dialogue may reveal a solution or it may reveal the need for more dialogue! (This also opens the way for the Zeigarnik Effect to take place: people continue to process, remembering uncompleted or interrupted tasks better than completed ones.)

Given a tough problem, the right people, and the time to engage in dialogue, it is still not automatic that dialogue will happen. Engaging in dialogue involves a set of skills and attitudes that get better with practice.

Guidelines/Ground Rules

We have developed several guidelines for dialogue. They represent a synthesis of ideas from several sources.[1] For a conversation to evolve into dialogue, we have found the ground rules shown in Figure 6 to be essential.

For us the ground rules carry two important implications: (1) As a participant, I will do my best to act according to these rules. (2) As a participant, when the ground rules are violated, I am willing to call others and be called myself for breaking the rules. Essentially, the ground rules define how we will behave during dialogue. We might even call these *mental considerations* to complement the following physical considerations.

Figure 6	Ground Rules for Dialogue

1. Participate as *equals:* Dialogue is the natural way for humans to think together, but it will become messy at times.

2. Balance *advocacy and inquiry:* Make your case concisely and with passion, answer questions respectfully, and then give others the same opportunity.

3. Make space for *silence:* By deferring impulsivity, give people, including yourself, adequate time to process what has just been said before responding.

4. Make your assumptions *clear:* Exercise care in climbing the Ladder of Inference; identify both the data you include and its meaning to you.

5. Suspend certainty and *stay curious:* Respect the other person's life experience and contribution to the moment, knowing that it does not mean devaluing your own.

6. Pay attention to your *listening:* Listen with your ears but also with your eyes, heart, and gut and with the intent to learn, not simply to prepare your rejoinder.

---

1. Adapted from various works of David Bohm, William Issacs, and Meg Wheatley.

Physical Considerations

In addition to the evolutionary development, the timing element, and the ground rules, we have identified two physical considerations: the arrangement of chairs and the number of people involved.

We strongly recommend sitting in a rather small circle because of its favorable consequences. First, a small circle cannot include too many people. In our experience, for dialogue to occur each participant should be within six to eight feet of everyone else. You must be close enough to talk in a normal tone of voice and have not only your voice heard, but also your body visible (for the nonverbal elements of your message). That limits the number of people to perhaps as many as eight, but not more. Second, having everyone sit in a circle (or as nearly as possible) visually promotes the concept that during the dialogue we are all peers. There is no head of the table, and ideas are useful (or not) based on the quality of the idea, not the rank of the speaker. Having a whiteboard at hand is an advantage as well, for drawing pictures or diagrams to increase the clarity of the communications.

Sherod and Phyllis Miller (1997) observe that some people naturally have a more controlling style of speaking: "We should all . . . ," or "Why don't you. . . ." In environments of low trust, that style will predictably result in others adopting a spiteful style or even an aggressive fighting style. In dialogue, we strive for two different styles. *Straight talk* involves speaking honestly just for yourself: "I'm confused . . ." or "I think that idea. . . ." *Search talk* involves open and honest questions (i.e., the asker does not have in mind the "right" answer): "I wonder whether anyone has . . ." or "What do you think would happen if. . . ." When we engage in dialogue, we need to be able to call others on their behavior (gently) if they slip into counterproductive styles of speaking and to remind them of the ground rules.

Simply knowing about the existence of dialogue as a type of interaction helps. Until people are quite comfortable with dialogue, keeping the ground rules or norms posted physically can help. But having the chance to practice dialogue increases comfort and familiarity with the ground rules and the physical considerations. Again, if what is needed is new knowledge, then presentation or evaluation or discussion simply will not suffice. Dialogue needs to be a communications tool in the effective leader's toolkit.

Through dialogue, people come to know one another: their beliefs and values, where they have specific areas of expertise, and so on. We believe that the willingness and ability to engage in dialogue serves as a prerequisite to the development of trust.

ACTION CHECKLIST FOR DIALOGUE

When was the last time your leadership team engaged in dialogue as the term is used here? Are you comfortable with that?

What percentage of your time do you spend on other forms of interaction? Does that seem like the optimal balance?

Do you have a physical space where you can engage in dialogue, where no interruptions (except for life-endangering catastrophes) are permitted?

Would you be comfortable if one of your leadership team members called you on violating one of the guidelines? Would they be comfortable if you called them?

TRUST

> *We trust people because we make up our minds to do it and not because the circum-*
> *stances compel us to do so.*
>
> —James Flaherty (1999, p. 48)

In our leadership model (see Figure 3 Discovering Leadership Model on page 2), we have positioned *trust* at the center of the model. Early on, our intuition told us that trust was central to effective organizations. Subsequently, we have found research that confirms this intuition. Looking at 248 elementary schools, Anthony Bryk and Barbara Schneider (2002) reported that the schools where trust existed have a one-in-two chance of increasing student achievement. Of the several varieties of interpersonal trust, they found the strongest correlation between improved student achievement and increased levels of teacher-to-teacher trust. Teachers who trust one another share their repertoire, ask for help, give and receive feedback, and take more responsibility for student learning. Since it is the teachers with whom the students have the most interaction, these trusting and trustworthy teachers are modeling the way through their attitudes and actions.

In the for-profit world, Axel Edmans (2008) has shown that businesses with high employee satisfaction indexes (and trust is a crucial part of employee satisfaction) see double the market return compared to industry benchmark companies not on the list of great places to work. Why is this? Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus (1985) make it clear:

> Trust is the emotional glue that binds followers and leaders together. . . . Trust is the basic ingredient of all organizations, the lubrication that maintains the organization. (p. 153)

What a magical substance that is simultaneously a powerful glue and an effective lubricant!

Principals who encourage, enhance, and sustain trust in the school can make major headway in helping students learn. Building a trustful culture is hard work, but it's worth it. In schools, the principal must include staff in decision making, be a person as well as a position, and be honest with staff. These are simple ways to increase trust in the school culture.

If trust is such a powerful aspect of the relationship between leaders and followers, and such a powerful predictor of effective organizations, what can we do to increase the amount of trust within our organizations?

Actually, it's not that hard. Research suggests that of all the competencies that a leader might choose to develop (e.g., political savvy, approachability, confronting direct reports), it is much less difficult to strengthen integrity and trust than nearly all the other competencies (Eichinger & Lombardo, 2001). It comes down to two fundamental practices: (1) tell people the truth and (2) keep your promises. If you remember and practice those two ideas, the level of trust in your organization will grow.

That sounds quite easy on the surface. The difficulty, as usual, comes in the details of doing it in real time under tough circumstances.

Suppose this situation arises. Miss Smith approaches you (the principal) and complains that Miss Jones has been neglecting her work and students—that's why Miss Jones's students are doing less well on the standardized tests. You thank her for bringing this to your attention and tell her that you will investigate. You subsequently notice that Miss Jones is indeed frequently rushing in the morning at the last minute and is the first teacher out of the building at the end of the day. You stop by her classroom and notice for yourself that the condition of the room and the behavior of the students are not up to your clearly stated expectations and the school's values.

You decide to have a follow-up conversation with Miss Jones. At that session, it becomes clearer why this situation has developed; together with Miss Jones you develop a plan to correct the problem over the next eight weeks. You make the consequences for failing to improve clear to her.

The next week, Miss Smith corners you in the hallway. She says that Miss Jones is becoming an embarrassment to the profession and wants to know what you are doing about her continuing poor performance. "You promised you would do something," she says.

You want to have a high-trust environment so that people like Miss Smith feel comfortable bringing problems like Miss Jones's behavior to your attention. You know that building trust depends on telling the truth and keeping your promises. How do you respond to Miss Smith's pressure?

You tell the truth. You point out that you did not promise to take action against Miss Jones. You point out that while you value Miss Smith's concern, you cannot take action without firsthand knowledge. You did, however, say you would investigate. These statements are all true.

You note that you kept your promise. You have followed through (on the implied promise) and investigated. As a consequence of that investigation, you have taken action to address the concerns Miss Smith raised. These statements are also true.

There is more that you could say to Miss Smith (and that she might desperately want to hear) about the details of the corrective plan. You point out that you do not want to share more information because it is part of a confidential conversation you had with Miss Jones. Just as Miss Smith approached you believing that her conversation with you would be confidential, you intend to extend the same courtesy to Miss Jones. This is about keeping a promise (perhaps only implied) to Miss Jones that the results of your investigation and the resultant plan would be between the two of you unless she failed to comply, at which point it would go into her personnel records.

"Telling the truth" thus does not mean telling everyone around you everything you know about every situation. And pleading dumb would be dishonest. In many cases, the truth that you tell is this truth: you do in fact have more knowledge but cannot share it. In a sense, this is the easier of the two elements of building trust.

The question of just what constitutes a promise can be complex. In the example above, you did not say, "I promise to do something about Miss Jones." You did not even explicitly say, "I promise I'll investigate." However, you did say you would investigate, and Miss Smith reasonably interpreted that as a promise.

Here is the potential for misunderstanding. Suppose you had said, "I'll investigate and try to get back to you by the 15th." Is that two smaller promises: one to investigate and one to report back? Or is it all one larger promise? Suppose you do investigate but other priorities come up and prevent you from reporting back? Well, you only said you'd *try* to get back to Miss Smith. So if you don't, is that a broken promise? In many cases this is a source of confusion and potential disappointment. If your goal is to keep your promises—especially in a bad-tempered or unforgiving environment—be careful about what you promise (or what a reasonable person might infer as a promise).

Remember that trust grows, over a period of time, using a biological clock. There is no microwavable parallel. Trust is a challenging blend of emotional and factual ingredients, cooked for the right length of time.

Trust and Betrayal

When trust is broken, however, the reductions are not small and do not occur not over time. They are large and instantaneous. The Reina Trust Building Institute suggests a seven-step model for rebuilding broken trust in organizations (Reina & Reina, 2006; see Figure 7).

Figure 7	Rebuilding Trust

1. Observe and acknowledge what happened.

2. Allow feelings to surface.

3. Get support.

4. Reframe the experience.

5. Take responsibility.

6. Forgive yourself and the others.

7. Let it go and move on.

SOURCE: From "Rebuilding Trust Within Organizations," by D. S. Reina and M. L. Reina, 2006, *Systems Thinker, 17*(1), pp. 2–6. Copyright 2006 by the Reina Trust Building Institute. Reprinted with permission. For more information on the above Reina Trust & Betrayal Model go to www.reinatrustbuilding.com.

When it's clear that someone has not told the truth or has not kept a clear promise, broken trust is a logical outcome. Marshall Goldsmith offers this comment of the need for forgiveness: "Forgiveness means letting go of the hope for a better past." It's over, let's learn from the mistake, let's forgive one another, and let's move on to accomplish the mission. When we have broken trust and we do not acknowledge it, it can easily lead to cynicism and alienation as well. (See the topic Followership on page 111.)

Trust Versus Confidence

We've heard people talk of "earning someone's trust," but we offer a different slant. We take the position that trust cannot be earned—it is a gift, to be given or withheld at the discretion of the giver. While an individual may fully believe that he has acted in a trustworthy manner, the decision of whether to offer trust remains solely with the giver. And it is a decision, not an entitlement.

Confidence, on the other hand, can be earned. We find that being able to distinguish between these two concepts has important implications for the development of trust. We differentiate between trust and confidence this way: Trust is a question of *character*, and it applies to the whole person at all times in all circumstances. Confidence, on the other hand, is a question of *competence* and thus applies only to a part of the whole person and only in certain circumstances. Thus, a parent can trust a teenage son without having

confidence in that son's ability to drive on the freeway on a Friday evening with friends in the car to a distant basketball game in dodgy weather!

Consequences of the Lack of Trust

Why do we spend so much time on the concept of trust? Our experience (as well as the research noted previously) leads us to believe that growing the amount of trust in an organization is one of the leader's vital responsibilities.

Education is fundamentally a people business, and interpersonal relationships drive actions. What happens when trust is not there? Peter Lencioni (2002) offers a graphical representation of what follows when trust is absent (see Figure 8). Read the pyramid from the bottom up. Lencioni asserts that absence of trust causes fear of conflict—if someone don't trust you, she will not challenge you because the results of the conflict may be too damaging. And read from inside the pyramid to the right and outside. Thus her response to the absence of trust is to pretend invulnerability—she will not expose any personal doubts or weaknesses. And so on up the model.

We strongly suspect that you could roll this model into a cylinder, bringing the top into contact with the bottom, and you'd have a feedback loop. That is, inattention to results, in turn, leads back to absence of trust, and we are well into a downward spiraling loop.

Figure 8   Lencioni and Absence of Trust
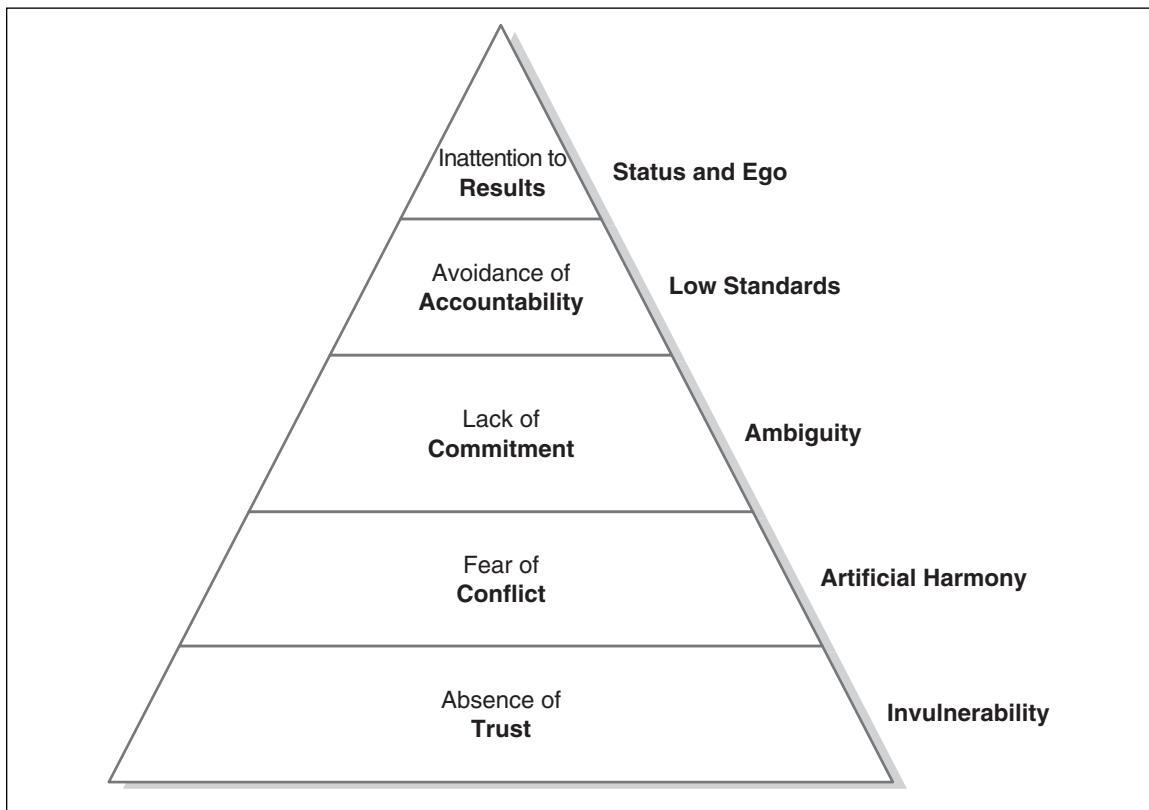
SOURCE: Lencioni, 2002.

The antidote is to reverse the entire process. If she exposes doubts and uncertainties, opening the potential for conflict, she is demonstrating that she is willing to trust you.

In an environment of trust, people can more easily focus on the organization's goals without having to worry about covering their rear ends or being stabbed in the back. Less energy spent on self-defense leaves more energy for the productive work of the organization. And in most organizations, much of the work must be done with others. We turn now to the topic of collaboration.

ACTION CHECKLIST FOR TRUST

Do you behave in a trustworthy manner, only making promises you can keep and telling the truth as fully as you can?

Do you find yourself having to create more rules because of a lack of trust and confidence in the rest of the staff?

When someone does betray trust, are there consequences, followed by a deliberate shift to healing the relationships?

Do you see evidence of the absence of trust, such as fear of conflict or lack of commitment?

COLLABORATION/TEAMWORK

Transforming broad directives into specific and measurable performance goals is the surest first step for a team trying to shape a common purpose meaningful to its members.

—Katzenbach and Smith (1993, p. 53)

Collaboration. Let's take the word apart: *co,* or together, and *labor,* or work. Co + labor = working together. We can imagine a spectrum of varieties of ways to work together that runs from compliance through cooperation on to collaboration. Each is appropriate under different circumstances. It seems quite clear, however, that for a strategy such as Small Learning Communities or Professional Learning Communities to fully flower, an organization has to have, well, *community.* People have to work together, at least cooperating and many times collaborating, especially in the context of teams. For a helpful tool to support collaboration—especially to support collaboration across an experience gap, with the more senior supporting the more junior—see the topic Intuition on page 63.

Genuine collaboration depends on keeping others (teammates or not) fully informed so that all can make accurate and timely decisions. The information must include not simply facts but also ideas, relevant opinions, feelings, intuitions. But it does not mean that coworkers have to constantly share everything; there's a prudent balance that's necessary to avoid data overload. (See the topic Data, Information, and Inferences on page 101.)

The most important facets of effective collaboration are the broadest ones: Do we share a sense of mission and a sense of values? Collaboration depends on many, many individual actions, including behaving in a trustworthy way, demonstrating integrity,

and sharing ownership of successes and failures. It involves admitting errors, tolerating honest mistakes, and keeping confidences. It involves refraining from making promises unless you are absolutely sure you can deliver. It involves having skill at finding common ground, negotiating in an atmosphere of competing priorities and values, while attending to both a focus on the task at hand and the importance of the relationship. In a highly collaborative environment, we have the belief that given the information at hand, any one of us would have made the same decision. Thus we can more fully disperse decision making throughout the organization.

   Collaboration also depends on our willingness and ability to engage in the realities of organizational life, specifically including the use of political savvy to nudge the organization to make the best possible decisions in light of the organization's mission and values. It thus depends on understanding why others do what they do, what motivates them.

A former principal was asked to consult in an urban district to help a high school. The district had decided since the school's enrollment had plummeted from 1,800 to 900 in five years that it had three choices: close the school, reconstitute the school, or help rejuvenate the school. The district decided to try the third approach.

The consultant was called early in August to work with the school. This did not leave much time for community or students to be heard. The work had to be started with the staff in mid-August before school began. The school had a new principal and a new assistant principal; the other assistant principal was in his second year. The school had teachers with experience ranging from "hired yesterday" to 38 years.

The nonnegotiables from the consultant were these:

- coaching the new principal every week
- working with the leadership team every month
- working with the whole staff every other month

The district agreed.

The consultant began with a whole-faculty meeting the third day back from summer break. He had the staff line up according to years of experience at the school. Then they counted off from 1 to 10. Thus, there were 10 groups with varying degrees of experience in each group. The first question the consultant asked the groups was, "Is your need to be an independent operator greater than your need to work together for the good of the school?"

After 15 minutes, the consultant asked for feedback. Some teachers said this was a hard decision since they had been in their own rooms working with their kids for a long time. The consultant knew from the research (Hord & Sommers, 2008) that if the staff do not collaborate on shared norms and values, it won't make much of a difference what they decide. It is better to gain agreement on what the staff intend to actually do rather than on a specific program.

The consultant said to the faculty, "I want you to take more time to discuss the first question. I won't waste your time or mine if you don't want to work together for this school." The consultant knew that unless there are agreements, no decision would stick: some would be willing to enforce the agreements and some would not. Students and parents get confused when we say one thing about how we operate a school but they know from experience that not everyone is following the same rules.

After 15 more minutes, the teacher leadership emerged and said, "We have spent a lot of time in this school and do not want it taken over or reconstituted." Our experience is that a principal or other organizational leader must ask the tough questions and be willing to accept the answers. The consultant demonstrated that he was willing to walk away and save them money and time if they were unwilling to collaborate.

Teams

People throw the word *team* around quite a lot. We may not all mean the same thing. Figure 9 provides an excellent operating definition from Katzenbach and Smith (1993).

Figure 9	Basic Makeup of a Team

1. Small group of people with

2. Complementary skills

3. Who hold themselves mutually accountable for the accomplishment of a common purpose

4. Using a shared approach and performance goals to define success

SOURCE: Katzenback & Smith, 1993.

More schools are recognizing that they depend on knowledge work—that is, the primary asset is not the building nor the texts nor the policy manual. The school's primary assets are its staff and their knowledge. The assets go home each night and each day must decide whether to come back again.

In this environment, getting people to collaborate becomes fundamental. For the organization to reach its full potential in delivering value, the interpersonal relationships have to move from a minimalist *contract* mind-set (what's the least I can do to meet the formal obligations?) to a *compact* mind-set (we're all in this together—what's the most I can do to ensure that we all thrive?).

This definition of team highlights several key pieces and reminds us that the goal is not having a team but rather getting the benefit of teamwork.

A principal who took over a school learned in the third month of the school year that teamwork was absent. There was distrust and backbiting between the two members of a two-member department. The principal called both staff members in to discuss the issues. The principal told both that their actions were dividing the staff and creating animosity; putting students in the middle was not going to be tolerated.

The principal employed a strategy learned from Bob Chadwick (2008), an expert in consensus building, in one of Chadwick's Conflict-to-Consensus workshops. He asked several specific questions: What were the worst possible outcomes if the two members couldn't change the working relationship? What were the best possible outcomes if they could change the relationship? What actions were they willing to take to foster those best possible outcomes? What would serve as evidence that the relationship was making progress?

Both staff members responded and made commitments to make the relationship better.

The principal decided that it was important to check each week whether they were acting in alignment with their commitments. One week later, on Friday at 3:00, he called them in to check progress.

Even that first week, the staff members came back mad at each other. Not one of the commitments was honored. As a matter of fact, the relationship may have gotten worse. Again, the principal led the discussion to get agreements on how they would treat each other.

This process went on for six weeks as the principal tried to resolve the conflict. While this process has been extremely beneficial in many groups with many issues, these two staff members would not follow through. The principal finally said, "One of you has to bid out of the school." The principal knew which one he wanted to bid out, but he could not force someone to do so. He decided to start evaluating the two in a more detailed fashion and use that to support his decision. Two months later one did bid out of the school.

Sometimes, even the best process won't work. However, it can start the process of resolving the issue by focusing on the need for stronger teamwork.

Work Groups, Federations, Tribes, Teams

When you begin a new activity, you may automatically assume that you need to establish a team to take it on. But do you really need a team for this activity? What are the alternatives? How else do people work together? The simplest kind of managerial group is a *work group,* simply a set of people who report to the same person and perhaps share a work site. They can work independently. In many cases, this has been the historical pattern for teachers: go into the classroom, close the door, and get to work with minimal interference from above and no interaction with the class next door.

Gervase Bushe (2004) identifies two more varieties in addition to teams. He suggests that a *federation* consists of different functional heads who report to the same person. For instance, the grade-level team leaders or department heads in a high school might themselves constitute a federation. Bushe describes them as a collection of representatives of different groups or interests with little sense of shared mission or purpose. Further, they have independent tasks and often competing fiefdoms with a tendency to think of each other as "us and them."

Bushe suggests that a *tribe* might include different department heads who report to a single principal and have built a team spirit but aren't really a full-fledged team. It's a collection of individuals who share a sense of identity and some sense of shared mission and purpose. However, they retain largely independent tasks within an interdependent overall goal structure. While they have a tendency to think of each other as "we," there is not the sense of mutual accountability.

Expanding on the four criteria previously listed for a *team,* Bushe says that a true team is also characterized by a shared sense of not just purpose, but also strategy, tactics, and values. Team communication is frequent and largely informal to maintain vital coherence, and the members have high regard and respect for one another's different contributions. All of this takes time and energy. By the way, even the best teams need occasional booster shots—time together to remind themselves of why they are a team and how teams work together, and to reinvigorate the interpersonal relationships.

While engaging in collaborative work, we still want to ensure that the work being done is the right work. It is pointless to collaborate on make-work. (We define *make-work* as any activity that makes someone look occupied while adding no value whatsoever to the organization.) It is also a waste of resources to have to do work today that we would not have to do if only we had done something differently yesterday, last week, or last month. When it is the work that dictates the schedule rather that our sense of priorities and importance, we will always find ourselves reacting—doing what we call *firefighting.*

ACTION CHECKLIST FOR COLLABORATION/TEAMWORK

Does the group of people engage in enough communication—sharing facts, intuitions, feelings?

In the current situation, do you genuinely need a team? Will a lesser kind of "working together" be good enough?

If you need a team and don't see one, can you identify one of the key criteria where it's falling short?

Does the team have energy? Does it need to be recharged somehow?

Is the team learning as a group? Is there time set aside for reflection on experience?

Are the team members committed to one another's learning, open to sharing failures and successes?

FIREFIGHTING

In some few cases, a Band-Aid solution is perfect—it can let you finish the current tennis match! For enduring success, however, you must find the cause of the blister and address that cause.

—Michael Ayers

Take two minutes to write down a list of things you associate with firefighters: descriptors, practices, traits. Really. Please.

Okay, now look at the list and see how many of these things apply to you and your job. Surprised? Dismayed? Encouraged?

Earlier in his career, one of the authors worked with information technology as a computer programmer then later as a systems analyst and designer. In those days, one of our fears was that our programs would cause the computer to start thrashing. According to Wikipedia, *thrashing* is described as follows:

In computer science, thrash (verb), is the term used to describe a degenerate situation on a computer where increasing resources are used to do a decreasing amount of work. . . . Usually it refers to two or more processes accessing a shared resource repeatedly such that serious system performance degradation occurs because the system is spending a disproportionate amount of time just *accessing* the shared resource. Resource access time may generally be considered as wasted, since it does not contribute to the advancement of any process.

Hmmm . . . sound like *your* day? Several people or activities demanding your attention as the "shared resource"? Shifting between tasks without actually accomplishing any of them (or at least accomplishing them satisfactorily)? Just as you start to make progress on task A, someone shows up demanding that you work on task B. Task B doesn't take long and when task B is done, it takes a few minutes to figure out what you were doing and where you were on task A. Just as you begin to work on task A again, here is someone demanding that you work on task C. When that is done, you return to task A. And in your heart you know that if you could just concentrate on it, task A would only take about 20 minutes. But you've already spent way more than that because each time you return to it, it takes about 5 minutes to figure out where you were and get back into that mode of thinking.

Is your day filled with firefighting or thrashing? We recall one principal who sighed, "The interruptions *are* the job." Let's dig a little deeper into the analogy of firefighting.

Real Firefighters

Here's an important thing to remember: the firefighter is just one member of a larger team. The team includes fire captains who coordinate the firefighters. It includes fire marshals who inspect buildings to detect fire hazards. It includes policy people who craft the building codes related to fire prevention. It includes arson investigators who look into fires of suspicious origin. You might even include experimenters at the Underwriters Laboratories who test new products to ensure that they are safe.

And by the way, the mission of the entire team is not to put out fires. Rather it is to ensure the absence of destructive fires. They only resort to fighting fires when all the other efforts at prevention have failed. Who are the people in your environment who serve as the other parts of the team dedicated to the absence of fires?

In 1949, there was a real fire, a forest fire, in Mann Gulch, Montana. Thirteen smoke jumpers died. The forest service took a hard look at the practices used to deal with forest fires and changed how it handled specific activities. Karl Weick (1996) reviewed Norman MacLean's (1992) story of that fire and extracted the lessons of Mann Gulch as shown in Figure 10.

Figure 10	Lessons From the Mann Gulch Fire

1. The leader has a unique view of the world.

2. The leader must bring focus.

3. The leader prepares and equips both himself and the organization.

4. The leader helps the organization learn via appropriate practice.

5. The leader may ask people to abandon previously successful practices.

6. Organizations require clear direction (in both setting the direction and giving directions).

7. Organizational responsiveness depends on communication and trust.

8. The leader must operate from a base of accurate and timely information.

9. The leader must help others make sense of the reality of the situation.

If your organization suffers from too many fires, it might be time to give appropriate attention to one or more of these lessons.

This all pertains to destructive fires. We know that in nature some species depend on the periodic renewal offered by fire. In those cases, preventing fires actually works against the cleansing fresh start offered by a fire. Starting a fire deliberately and constructively is akin to creating a sense of urgency in the context of change. (See Change on page 73.)

Fighting the Right Fires

An elementary school principal decided to retain the services of a qualified coach after attending a workshop on the benefits of coaching. One issue the principal wanted help with was this: The district had installed a new area superintendent within the last year. The principal told her new coach that the area superintendent was making her job very chaotic, calling at least once a day telling the principal what to do in one matter or another. For instance, on successive days the principal was told to work out the relationship between the district technology department and the teachers. Then she was to make sure the teachers were conforming to the technology initiative. Then she was to force the teachers to spend the required amount of time on computers in the lab.

This principal had been in the school eight years. She had showed steady increases in achievement scores each of the last four years and was continuing to develop increasing levels of trust and collaboration among the staff. The principal felt pressured by the area superintendent—she was starting to believe that her competence was in doubt. Her professional confidence was shaken.

In discussing possible responses, the coach suggested that the principal consider an approach called the 5−15 Report. As outlined in *Managing Up* (Dobson & Dobson, 2000), the approach asks the principal to take 15 minutes on Monday morning to write up the week's agenda (e.g., what important events are

happening at the school), describe major issues facing the principal (e.g., a budgeting meeting), and report on previous activities (e.g., a recap of the past few weeks). This written document should take 5 minutes to read and should be less than a page and preferably consist of short bullet points. This document gives the area superintendent a quick review of past projects and current high-priority issues. It allows the area superintendent to monitor ongoing progress.

After three weeks of using the 5–15 approach, the phone calls from the area superintendent were down to one a week. Apparently the area superintendent was now convinced that the principal actually was on top of things.

Here are several fundamental considerations for deciding in real time whether to fight a fire:

- What is a fire worth fighting right now?
- Does this fire belong to me?
- If not, to whom does it belong?

Answering these questions draws on several essential competencies for organizational leaders.

Priority setting. What things are worth doing now, require action now? The question is not which wheels are squeaking the loudest, but rather which are truly mission-critical? Have you mistakenly confused taking action with getting results? Are you unwilling or unable to just say no? If you could work on just three things today, would this be one of them? If you were a hundred miles away right now, would you come back to take care of this?

Time management. Are you willing and able to concentrate on just one thing at a time and finish it? Do you protect time during the day for big-picture, long-term items of importance? Can you skillfully cut off conversations that have run on and on and on too long? Are you able to delegate activities that others can do, then trust them to take care of it?

Planning. Do you operate entirely by the seat of your pants? Do you think that actually scheduling time for anything other than meetings undermines your open-door policy? Do you have (on paper or at least in your mind) a clear cascade of objectives and goals that you could easily explain to anyone who asks how achieving this short-term goal facilitates accomplishing that long-term goal?

Organizing. Do you use your limited resources to the best effect? Are you able to coordinate and balance the many inevitable demands, giving each the appropriate attention? Does it seem like if it weren't for the last minute, nothing would ever get done?

Here are a few more thoughts on time management.

All principals must determine what is the most important goal for the school and therefore what is the most important use of their time. We suggest that it goes without saying that student learning is the most important goal for the school. We suggest that teacher and administrator learning is also important. Research shows that teachers who function at higher cognitive levels produce students who function at higher cognitive levels. The principal, therefore, must increase staff learning. Learning takes time.

Principals who only firefight usually don't make time to lead learning. Hall and Hord (2005) identify three different types of principals:

1. The *reactor* deals with every issue that comes into the school. Many staff members like this because they are running around making sure the school responds to everything. Significant change, however, does not happen in these schools. People are always busy but are focused on activity rather than results.

2. The *manager* not only reacts to issues but also manages the school well. The budget is in order, buses run on time, class schedules are orderly, and the school is a good place to teach. Many staff members like this because not only are issues responded to but also the school is very organized. Again, significant change does not happen in these schools. People are focused on control and routines rather than results.

3. The *initiator* not only deals with issues and manages the school well, but also initiates and leads change. If you believe that change involves learning and that to learn means to change, then you will need to learn strategies in order to lead change. This means investing time in policies and processes that result in more learning for staff and students alike.

Many times initiators get moved to another school (to turn a school around); sometimes they retire; sometimes they move to another district. In *Leading Professional Learning Communities,* Hord and Sommers (2008) offer a fourth kind of principal:

4. The *collaborator* responds, manages, initiates, and develops leadership in the school. If leadership is not developed through attention to effective succession planning, the school is at risk of not sustaining its success when the principal leaves. If there is leadership distributed throughout the school, the incoming principal can rely on the support of the staff that remain in the school.

For more on time management, consider Ann McGee-Cooper's (1993) *Time Management for Unmanageable People.*

Recovering Lost Time: Better Meetings

Surprisingly, if we have fewer and better meetings, we actually *can* do more with less—or at least we can do more of the right things and fewer of the wrong things. For organizational leaders, meetings are not superfluous and a waste of time; they are an inevitable part of the job. Done well, they offer a very effective way of taking care of certain communications (task and relationship) needs. Done poorly, they can be terrifically wasteful. For instance, before attending a meeting that someone else has called, ask yourself the questions in Figure 11.

Figure 11	Do I Need This Meeting?

- How much will I get *from* this meeting? Could someone attend and brief me afterward? Might that even be good for both that person and me?
- How much value can I contribute *to* this meeting? Do I bring special expertise or information, or an unusual perspective, such that my absence will diminish the outcome of the meeting?
- If I were a hundred miles away, would I return to attend this meeting? Could this meeting function just as well *without me?*

Figure 12 presents a few guidelines to consider in preparing for a meeting that you are calling.

Figure 12	Basics of a Good Meeting

1. Remember that people attending are giving you an irreplaceable gift: their time. Respect their time.

2. Let them know via the agenda what will be covered so that they can properly prepare. This includes letting them know whether the meeting is about brainstorming, making a decision, or having a dialogue. (See the topics Decision Making/Problem Solving on page 62 and Dialogue on page 8.)

3. If the meeting results in an action item, follow up with minutes to ensure that everyone has the key information: what, by when, by whom.

Have you ever been to a meeting that was scheduled for an hour, and then took more than the hour, when you believed that a one-page memo would have taken care of it? Compare the cost of preparing and distributing the memo to the cost of the one-hour meeting. If you could spend the hour you would otherwise spend at the meeting just preparing a memo, and each person could read it at her own convenience in 10 minutes, you have effectively given each of them the gift of 50 minutes at no time-cost to yourself. Respect their time!

Have you even gone to a meeting not sure what the topic was to be? Whether you were expected to make a final decision or just hear a report? Gotten the agenda, prepared for that meeting, then attended only to have the meeting hijacked by someone with a private agenda? Prepare an agenda in advance, and then stick to it (unless something much more important comes up and you all agree that the new topic should take priority). People will come prepared if you give them half a chance.

Have you ever attended a meeting where you're pretty sure an assignment of some sort was given to someone (you hope it wasn't you!) but you're not sure when it was to be done? Or a decision was made, once and for all, but no one wrote it down and now we have to have the same meeting all over again? Larry Bossidy writes that after each meeting he had as CEO of Honeywell, he wrote a brief letter or memo to the others who attended. The intent was to spell out who agreed to do what by when, not so much because he didn't trust them but because he wanted to be sure that they were all on the same page following the meeting. In fact, the whole theme of the book he cowrote with Ram Charan (2002) is that implementation and follow-through are not merely tactics. They are a discipline and a system. They must be "built into a company's strategy, its goals, and its culture. And the leader of the organization must be deeply engaged in it" (p. 6).

Time-wasting meetings. Drifting, unfocused meetings. Meetings with no record of critical actions. Don't let others accuse you of being the person who has *those* meetings. The goal for each meeting is to get the right people in the room, take care of business, track any decisions made, and assign follow-up actions. And over the long haul, the larger goal is to have meetings so good that people will not want to miss them.

Effective communications through dialogue and productive meetings enable the development of higher trust and smoother collaboration, working on the right activities at the right times. All of this, in turn, both depends on and helps create the organization's culture.

ACTION CHECKLIST FOR FIREFIGHTING
Do you seem to spend every day thrashing?
If you are always fighting fires, who around you is working on fire prevention—improving the inspection process and updating the code for fireproofing?
Do you paternalistically take on every fire brought to you, or do you let others handle some situations?
Do some events become urgent fires because you failed to plan ahead, set priorities, manage time, organize more carefully?
Do you have the fewest and most productive meetings possible? Do people come away routinely feeling that it was worth their time, that you haven't stolen time from other priorities?

CULTURE

> *There is no right or wrong culture, no better or worse culture, except in relation to what the organization is trying to do and what the environment in which it is operating allows.*
>
> —Edgar Schein (1999, p. 21)

Culture forms the backdrop against which everything in an organization occurs. It is pervasive and highly stable unless disturbed by a catastrophic event. For example, a culture of openness and trust can be turned upside down in seconds into a culture of paranoia and fear by an incident of school violence. Barring huge events, however, culture moves more like a glacier. We might also think of culture as a sort of force of entropy—it tends to move to the state of lowest energy, the least difference between extremes, and perhaps to mediocrity! This is a state of predictability and maybe even comfort. But it is surely not a state of high potential.

It can help to think of *culture* as more enduring with *climate* as what's happening right now. That is, you might see an overall culture of academic excellence and a climate of tension as the testing season approaches.

Edgar Schein (1999) defines culture as "the sum total of *all the shared, taken-for-granted assumptions that a group has learned throughout its history*" (p. 29). Someone else offered a simpler definition: culture is whatever we know that we don't know we know. That includes everything from how close to stand to another person while talking, to what gestures carry what meaning, to the significance of certain colors, to iconic figures, to proverbs, and to what topics of conversation are acceptable.

Schein suggests that culture includes three main levels, from the very visible to the very invisible (see Figure 13).

Figure 13	Levels of Culture

Level One: Artifacts—what you see, hear, and feel as you hang around (the easiest level to observe)
Level Two: Espoused Values—what you learn as you start asking people questions about why they do what they do
Level Three: Shared Tacit Assumptions—what you can reasonably deduce as you watch actual behavior

For instance, you are the principal and you enter your school building with a visitor. First the visitor sees a trophy case, noting that it contains only athletic trophies (level one, artifacts). You ask a passing teacher about what's important; he shrugs and points to the Values Statement on the wall plaque (also level one, artifacts) just to the side of the trophy case. The visitor points to one particular value—trust—and asks about the level of trust within the building. The teacher's response is that the school has adopted the Small Learning Community approach, therefore trust is highly important (level two, espoused values). Together the three of you enter the teachers' lounge and all the previously hushed conversation comes immediately to a halt. The tacit assumption (level three) seems to be "remain cautious about what you say in front of whom." Hmmm . . . high trust? There seems to be a disconnect between the tacit assumption and the espoused values. In this situation, believe what you see—the artifacts.

You might complain, "But there is no trophy for the school with the highest level of trust! That's just silly!" But as we noted in the section on trust (see Trust on page 11), trust is a means to the end of increased student achievement. We surely could have trophies for various aspects of student achievement at the school. And we might even have a trust meter posted (and updated frequently) as a leading indicator for eventual student achievement. We would do this because we believe it is a metric worth measuring (see Metrics on page 37).

The leadership goal for an organization must be *congruence* between all three levels. For instance, if the shared assumption is that we are all in this together, and the espoused values must resonate with that, then the awards on the walls should be team awards, not individual awards. If the awards are all individual awards, it's very hard to square that with the notion that we are all in this together.

Take a different visitor situation. The visitor enters and notices a nearby trash container. A student tosses a wadded up paper at the container but misses it. Without even looking around, the student walks over, retrieves the paper, and puts it into the container. A teacher standing nearby approaches the student saying, "Thanks for picking up that paper. One of the values we are working on this year is respect for the environment, and through that simple act you showed me that you care about not just the larger environment but even the smaller environment within our building. Thanks!"

In this second example, the artifact consists of the action—tossing then retrieving the wad of paper. The espoused value is what the teacher said. The shared tacit assumption is that respect for the environment is part of "the way we do things around here."

Changing the culture from a group of independent teachers to a collaborative team is not easy work. The history of schools has focused on taking care of your *own* kids in your *own* room just to keep the administration happy. We now recognize the limitations of solo operations: we can no longer work independently because no one has the single right answer for all of the learning problems that exist. It will take all of us learning together.

Many schools are starting Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) (Hord & Sommers, 2008) to change the culture in schools. Principals who help initiate PLCs must beware of signs that something has degenerated into "just another program" that will be gone in a few years. If the staff see a weekly faculty meeting as just meeting every Tuesday, it will likely become a perfunctory obligation rather than a genuine opportunity to focus on gathering and sharing information, looking for positive outcomes, and engaging in systemwide continuous improvement.

PLCs involve professionals (teachers and administrators) learning together (in community). The most important aspect is learning. What are the professionals learning that will help them raise student achievement? The culture of a school must be centered on learning rather than teaching. And principals will have to model and lead that change.

Types of Cultures

Kim Cameron and Robert Quinn (1999) propose that there are four quite different kinds of culture within organizations. Interestingly, they claim that, on the one hand, each calls for a different type of leadership and, on the other, each reveals a different basic belief about management.

Briefly, if the culture is like a *clan* then the prevailing management theory focuses on gaining commitment while the leadership acts as a parent. If the culture is more like a *hierarchy*, then management focuses on efficiency while leadership monitors activities. If the culture is an *adhocracy* (i.e., everything appears to be done ad hoc), then management focuses on new resources while leadership stresses entrepreneurship. And finally, if the culture is like a *market*, then management emphasizes competition and productivity while leadership becomes hard-driving.

If the person in position of authority (PPA) displays behavior associated with the clan culture, we can assume that he espouses the theory that participation fosters commitment. On the other hand, if he displays market behavior, we can assume that competition fosters productivity. We have already commented on the interplay between the style of leadership and the style of followership (see Followership on page 111). If the staff broadly believe that control fosters efficiency, then they will resonate more with a leader showing hierarchy-like behavior and reject adhocracy-like leadership. That is, the overall culture reflects some kind of negotiated equilibrium between what the staff believe and what the PPAs believe. When that equilibrium cannot be achieved, the culture will appear dysfunctional.

Returning to the opening epigraph by Schein, there is no one right culture. If your elementary school has been losing students to neighboring schools, perhaps you need to shift part of your focus to market-like behavior—after all, you are in competition with all the other schools and presumably you believe that your school can serve students best (or at least as well). If your school's staff have shown a clear lack of commitment to current initiatives, perhaps you need to shift to more clan-like behavior. The value lies in recognizing (a) that there is no one style of culture that is always and everywhere correct and (b) how you, as the organizational leader, need to change the focus as the circumstances indicate.

Rob Goffee and Gareth Jones (1996) slice culture differently from Cameron and Quinn. Rather than management/leadership pairs, they use a two-dimensional model (including an assessment in their article) suggesting that cultures can focus on solidarity and/or sociability. Given these two dimensions, they present four resulting themes for the prevailing culture:

- *Low* solidarity plus *low* sociability yields a *fragmented* culture.
- *Low* solidarity plus *high* sociability yields a *networked* culture.
- *High* solidarity plus *low* sociability yields a *mercenary* culture.
- *High* solidarity plus *high* sociability yields a *communal* culture.

In their work, Goffee and Jones include a relatively quick exercise that may be done in the context of a staff or leadership team meeting. This way, you can take the pulse of your organization. Again, the point is to get feedback on people's perceptions and make adjustments to plans and activities as necessary in order to keep the organization on track to achieve its goals. If the goals require a quick turnaround in a bad situation, this might call for a mercenary culture (strong focus on tasks) in the short term with a shift toward a communal culture after the situation has improved.

With regard to the prevailing culture in an organization, Michael McMaster (1996) makes the role of leadership clear:

> The job of an executive is to create an environment in which engagement is possible, and to communicate in ways that provide a certain focus, call attention to certain things and engage the hearts and minds of people in the possibility of the corporation. (p. 171)

In assessing the kind of culture an organization exhibits, and using either model, the leadership questions are straightforward:

1. Which culture most closely describes your school now?

2. Which one do you believe will best support accomplishment of the mission?

3. If there's a difference, what do you propose to do about it?

ACTION CHECKLIST FOR CULTURE

Do the espoused values and the tacit assumptions in your school match up? For instance, do you preach teamwork but reward individuals?

In looking at culture styles, does one of them seem to best describe your school?

Do you think that it is the best possible alternative given the school's mission and values, and its current circumstances?

Do you have a reliable way to assess what the others in the building think about the culture and/ or climate?

TEN GOOD LEADERSHIP REFERENCES

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The next section of the field manual switches the focus from leadership at the hub of the framing model to the first element on the perimeter: mission.

Figure 14   Ten Rules/Guidelines for Leadership

1. *The Leadership Rule:* Organizations need leader*ship,* not necessarily a single leader, and leadership about doing, not simply knowing.

2. *The Clear Messages Rule:* Leaders must help others within the organization understand *why* the organization exists and *how* its members must behave.

3. *The More-Than-Just-Words Rule:* Leaders must walk the talk and *model the way;* others will judge you by your actions, not your intentions.

4. *The Space for Dialogue Rule:* In a knowledge-intensive environment, dialogue is critical; leaders must make space—both *chronologically and spatially*—for dialogue. It is part of the day job, not a fluffy add-on.

5. *The Trust Rule:* Trust is always a gift; act in such a fashion that you will be *worthy* of your staff's trust.

6. *The Confidence Rule:* Demonstrate your competence and *let others demonstrate theirs* in order to grow the collective confidence in each other's decisions and actions and the organization's capacity to take effective action.

7. *The Teamwork Rule:* Remember that the goal is not teams for the sake of teams, but rather teams for the sake of the resulting *teamwork.*

8. *The Absence-of-Fires Rule:* The goal of the firefighting community is not simply putting fires out; it is to ensure the *absence* of resource destruction. If you can prevent the fire today, you don't have to put it out tomorrow.

9. *The Task-and-Relationship Rule:* Effective organizations pay balanced attention both to the *tasks* at hand and the *relationships* between the people working on those tasks. But not everyone places the same priority on those two facets.

10. *The Perfect Culture Rule:* There is no perfect, one-size-fits-all culture for all organizations. A school needs the culture it needs, and adapting a poorly fitting culture is an *evolutionary* process.