

Tools FOR SCHOOLS

FOR A DYNAMIC COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS AND LEADERS

LEADERSHIP TEAMS CREATE LASTING CHANGE

BY VALERIE VON FRANK

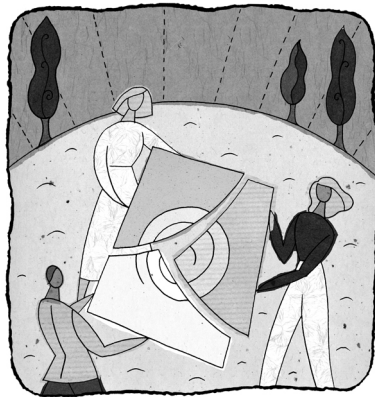
Creating lasting change involves building strong school cultures that engage education professionals with their colleagues and communities, according to Sharon Kruse and Karen Seashore Louis, university faculty whose research focuses on leadership and school improvement.

“We’ve had this kind of love affair with the heroic leader — one person is going to have all the answers and save us,” Kruse said. “It’s not possible.”

Instead, the pair’s work suggests that “intensified leadership” — helping leaders develop skills to bring together more people focused on the work of the school through professional community, organizational learning, and developed trust, a combination they dub PCOLT — can improve student learning.

Seashore Louis and Kruse define the concepts this way:

- **Professional community** is the idea that the ways adults in schools work together on teaching and learning matter, that adults feel a sense of collective responsibility for students and outcomes, and that they attend to high-quality content and instruction. “It’s the relationship of adults to each other and to their students around what they teach and how they teach it,” Kruse said.



- **Organizational learning** is the idea that knowledge is socially constructed, that educators learn more when they learn together, and so teachers must work cooperatively and collaboratively to develop their knowledge. In the common practice of professional learning communities, Kruse con-

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Leadership teams create lasting change

Reflection questions

Think of your own school or district.

- What barriers to sustaining change have you encountered?
- How have you attempted to address these issues?
- Are there ways you have helped to successfully sustain innovations?
- What have you done to foster sustainability?
- How could you use PCOLT and intensified leadership to help sustain efforts in your own context?

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tends, “the learning piece gets short shrift.” Organizational learning is making certain that curriculum and instructional techniques are used consistently, and teachers understand the application in their own context to such an extent that improvements become a part of the school culture, the “way we do things around here.”

- **Trust** is required for developing a sense of professional community, Kruse said. “Unless there’s a tie that binds us together in ways that make it easy for us to work together,” change won’t occur, she said. “You can’t have deep, meaningful conversation without trusting the person you’re having that conversation with.”

Seashore Louis has studied hundreds of schools and districts in the past decade, including in a five-year Wallace Foundation-funded project, Leadership for Learning (University of Minnesota and Ontario Institute for Studies in Education), and found that schools with high levels of PCOLT have statistically significant improvements in student learning. Research shows that professional community and organizational learning result in increased student achievement, lower staff and faculty turnover, and increased satisfaction and greater support from the community for schools’ work (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Louis & Gordon, 2006; Zwicky, 2008).

“PCOLT suggests we need to think beyond the heroic figure,” Kruse said. “Leadership has to be reconceptualized.”

INTENSIFIED LEADERSHIP

Kruse said intensified leadership goes beyond the notion of instructional leader to leader as cultural change agent. Kruse and Seashore Louis say principals who have successfully developed PCOLT have created these characteristics in their schools:

- Collective identity, a sense of common

purpose, of the school’s direction and how to get there;

- A focus on learning with the end goal always clearly on student achievement;
- A philosophy of contribution where individuals share power and authority and all are engaged in contributing to shared success;
- A sense of trust, a feeling that binds parents, students, professionals, and community.

Intensified leadership also is more than shared governance. “Meaningful involvement is more than distributing tasks,”

Kruse said. “It’s asking more folks to be involved in the work of the school, engaging them in work that is important and intellectually interesting; when more are aware and have feedback into the initiatives at the school, the school has a better

chance at producing quality student outcomes.”

Beginning that change requires determining who is influential in different stakeholder groups. “Then bring them on board in a way to help make sense of the data at hand,” Kruse said.

AFFECTING CULTURE MEANS MINING DATA

Leaders engage others in changing the culture. Changing the culture requires mining data, Kruse said. Seashore Louis and Kruse set out a cycle that leaders follow to diagnose the school culture:

- **Collect data individually or with a small group, such as the administrative team.** Principals need to look at the school with fresh eyes and get a sense of how everyone in the school experiences it, rather than continuing to see it through their own lens. They say surveys, shadowing, or spending more time observing in hallways are methods to help leaders put aside assumptions and gain different perspectives.
- **Include others.** Next, bring more people into data collection. Introduce test scores, focus groups, or community surveys to get a deeper sense of the data. Do a force-field analysis (see p. 4). Broaden the data collected and deepen understanding of the data.

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NSDC’S BELIEF

Sustainable learning cultures require skillful leadership.

	Leaders as cultural change agents	Diagnosing	Linking leadership and culture
PCOLT is ...	Employed as a primary tool in cultural change efforts.	Strengthened as insights into the school are developed.	Supported by involving others in meaningful efforts.
Intensified leadership is ...	The adaptable and flexible practice of leadership <i>and</i> management.	Stimulated by insights about how members relate, work, and learn.	Enhanced by deepening and being selective about culture change.
Culture is ...	Determined by your choices about who to work with and how you work together.	Revealed through inquiry into the meaning of norms, values, and beliefs.	Sustained by consistent focus on key goals and involving others.

Source: Sharon Kruse and Karen Seashore Louis

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- **Formulate ideas to make the diagnosis.** Once the group has a sense from the data of what areas need focus, identify next actions.
- **Go through the cycle again.** “The idea is you’re excavating down to understand what people really believe, what they value, the ways in which they work together,” Kruse said. “The ultimate goal, of course, is to create a culture focused on meaningful goals for student learning.”

STATES AND DISTRICTS PLAY A ROLE

Both state and district decisions affect a school’s culture, Kruse said, noting that the way leaders interpret the push for accountability makes a big difference.

“Places that have strong cultures looked at the push from state for accountability and said, ‘How do we do this and still maintain our values?’ They tended to be places that evidenced PCOLT skills,” Kruse said. “Low PCOLT schools passed out the textbooks, sent everyone to professional development, and then stopped talking about it. They hit the implementation dip sooner, hit it longer, and had less discussion; so 18 months later, they were saying, ‘Well this didn’t work so let’s move to the next thing.’”

States that provide some direction around expectations and build leadership contribute more to positive results, she said. School districts can support change by clarifying expectations, establishing common priorities, designing opportunities for communication and mutual learning, building trust, modeling professionalism, and

thinking strategically, Kruse and Louis write (2009, pp. 128-129). “A lot comes down to focus and purpose,” Kruse said.

In Minnesota this fall, the Minnesota Elementary School Principals Association, Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals, and Minnesota Association of School Administrators are combining to work with association members statewide to study Kruse’s and Seashore Louis’ work. “These are workable tools to move administrators forward together,” said Olivia Gault, MESPA director of communications and professional development. Mia Urick, MASA director of professional development, said the joint effort will “take down the silos” that keep educators from collaborating and create common language across the state.

COMPLEX PROBLEMS NEED BROAD SUPPORT

The complex problems facing schools today require team solutions and intensified leadership, Kruse said, rather than the individual solutions and leadership that used to solve simpler matters. Having more people engaged in meaningful roles creates results that cannot be obtained from “a heroic leader leading the followers to the promised land,” Kruse said.

“Commitment to intensifying leadership within your school requires reconsidering your current images of leadership,” Kruse and Seashore Louis state (Kruse & Seashore Louis, 2009, p. 81). “Intensifying leadership demands that you actively seek the help and support of others, building school cultures that rely on the wisdom of the many.” ■

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- Kruse, S.D. & Seashore Louis, K. (2009).** *Building strong school cultures*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Leithwood, K., Louis, K.S., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2004).** *Review of research: How leadership influences student learning*. New York: Wallace Foundation.
- Louis, K.S. & Gordon, M.F. (2006).** *Aligning student support with achievement goals: The secondary principal’s guide*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Zwicky, C.N. (2008).** Pushed or pulled? Between school mobility among experienced teachers. Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

Force-field analysis

More directions for completing a force-field analysis and free worksheets are available at:

www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTED_06.htm

www.mycoted.com/Force-Field_Analysis

www.skymark.com/resources/tools/force_field_diagram.asp

www.quickmba.com/strategy/swot/

www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMC_05.htm

Purpose: To encourage staff to think about the school as a system, rather than distinct parts, and how parts work for and against the status quo; to frame existing problems or to anticipate factors that might emerge in the process of change.

Materials: Instructions, chart paper, marker

Time: 1 to 2 hours

Conducting a force-field analysis is relatively straightforward. Where you start with force-field analysis depends on your initial analysis of the existing energy and interest within staff members. If they are raring to go, start by examining the state of the school's readiness to implement new programs. If staff are not committed to change, examine the conditions within the system itself, looking for barriers to change.

STEP 1

State the problem or desired state and make sure that all team members understand it. You can construct the statement in terms of factors working for and against a desired state (if you all agree on an ideal) or in terms of factors working for and against the status quo or problem state (if you agree that a problem exists but do not agree on the ideal state). Make sure that there is consensus and understanding at this point or eventually you will have to start over!

STEP 2

Brainstorm the positive and negative forces. You don't have to be definitive the first time around. You can add forces later in the discussion.

STEP 3

Review and clarify each force or factor. What is behind each factor? What works to balance the situation? This discussion is very important and may allow you to add or change the factors that you have generated in Step 2.

STEP 4

When you can reach consensus on a reasonable list of important factors, determine the strength of hindering forces (high, medium, low) in achieving the desired state or from improving the problem state. When the force-field technique is used for problem analysis, the forces with the biggest impact should be tested as likely causes. If the force-field analysis is used to develop solutions, those factors with the biggest impact may become the focus of plans to reduce resistance to change.

STEP 5

Develop an action plan to address the largest hindering forces.

Source: *Building Strong School Cultures: A Guide to Leading Change*, by Sharon Kruse and Karen Seashore Louis. © Corwin Press, 2009. Used with permission.

Identify your 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. Put a check mark in the box next to those areas in which you might consider intensifying your leadership.

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

Source: *Building Strong School Cultures: A Guide to Leading Change*, by Sharon Kruse and Karen Seashore Louis. © Corwin Press, 2009. Used with permission.

Leadership challenges come from the internal situation and the external environment. Assess your school and reflect on where your sources of challenge lie.

	SITUATIONAL PRESSURES				
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Our school is well-positioned to be successful in the current environment.	5	4	3	2	1
2. Our school has an excellent reputation in the community.	5	4	3	2	1
3. The structure and behavior of key parent groups is stable and supportive.	5	4	3	2	1
4. Our district's policies are consistent and clear.	5	4	3	2	1
5. Our test scores are good and definitely not declining.	5	4	3	2	1
6. We are not undergoing any major changes that have created concerns or disruptions inside the school.	5	4	3	2	1
7. Teachers' skills are keeping pace with new research and demands.	5	4	3	2	1
8. New state curricular and testing changes are not likely to be difficult for us to implement.	5	4	3	2	1
9. Our student population is stable and we do not anticipate any significant changes.	5	4	3	2	1
10. We are not concerned about losing students to private schools or other schools of choice.	5	4	3	2	1
11. Our families are completely satisfied with the quality of the school.	5	4	3	2	1
12. Our district's taxpayers are satisfied with our costs and the value that they see.	5	4	3	2	1
13. We don't have a problem getting the resources that we need to do the job.	5	4	3	2	1
14. We don't need to worry about political or economic shifts affecting us significantly.	5	4	3	2	1
15. Well-qualified professionals are eager to fill all our job openings.	5	4	3	2	1
16. Labor relations are excellent in our school.	5	4	3	2	1

INTERPRETING YOUR SCORE

Total your score from each of the 16 items above. Your score could range from 16 to 80.

- A score of 25 or lower indicates a fairly stable environment. A steady-as-she-goes strategy (continuous improvement focus) should be sufficient.
- A score of 35 or above indicates an unstable environment. Expect precipitating events in such an environment, even though you cannot always predict what they will be or when they will occur. Be a flexible change master.
- Above 60? You are in a pressure-cooker environment that demands a continuous change leadership focus.

Source: *Building Strong School Cultures: A Guide to Leading Change*, by Sharon Kruse and Karen Seashore Louis. © Corwin Press, 2009. Used with permission.

Diagnosing your district culture

Consider the following items. Assess the relationship between the district office and building leadership efforts. Where are your sources of internal support? Where might reaching out to external mentors and coaches be needed?

Use the space provided at the bottom of the form to add any areas specific to your context.

IN MY DISTRICT ...	Always	Sometimes	Never
A high level of trust exists between central office staff and building leadership teams.			
Communication is regular, clear, and focused on school and student success.			
Central office staff view learning about new initiatives and ideas as part of their role.			
Decision making is open and transparent.			
When problems arise in the district, the central office can be counted on to help.			
Central office staff offer opportunities for professional learning and development.			
Instructional and curricular matters are a prominent topic of discussion.			
People like coming to the district office for events; they are always worthwhile.			
Central office staff support school improvement agendas and efforts.			
Resources are provided to support school culture change efforts.			

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