**Effective principals actively see and shape the invisible, yet powerful, forces that fuel or freeze a school’s improvement efforts.**

Introduction and Rationale:

Each and every school comes equipped with a strong, existing culture. This invisible, but powerful, force is the primary determiner of success for a school’s improvement efforts (Fullan, 2007; Hollins, 2015).

It is an unfortunate twist that many school administrators are selected for their positions based on their abilities to produce tangible, structural results; designing a school schedule, supervising employees, enforcing school discipline, or balancing a budget. However, beginning on day one of the job as school administrator, the primary factor for success is no longer tangible (Cunningham & Cresso, 1993). It is the leader’s ability to understand, assess, and positively shape the intangible, but powerful, force that fuels or freezes a school’s improvement efforts- school culture.

Culture, being an invisible force, lends itself to several definitions and descriptions…

* + The totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought characteristics of a community or population.

(The American Heritage Dictionary, 1975)

* + The set of attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes a company or corporation. (Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 1993)
  + The guiding beliefs and values evident in the way a school operates (Fullan, 2007)
  + The qualities of any specific human group that are passed from one generation to the next. (Kotter & Heskett, 1992)
  + A system of informal rules that spell out how people are to behave most of the time. (Deal & Kennedy, 1982)
  + The way we do things around here. (Bower, 1966)

The culture of a school plays an essential role in improving performance. Positive culture can infuse work with meaning, passion, and purpose (Deal & Peterson, 1999). A positive school culture is associated with more rapid and lasting school improvement, higher teacher motivation, greater teacher collaboration, more application of professional development skills, reduced absenteeism, and higher levels of adult and student learning (Hofsteade, 2005; Fullan, 2007; Deal & Peterson, 2009).

Effective school principals

1. gain a clearer understanding of the nature and power of school culture by identifying, describing, and analyzing powerful non-school organizational cultures;
2. understand, read, and assess current school culture by applying culture assessment criteria;
3. understand elements of culture such as heroes, stories, myths, traditions, rituals, ceremonies, symbols, and signs, which have, over time, shaped the current school culture; and
4. assess and improve aspects of personal and organizational trust.