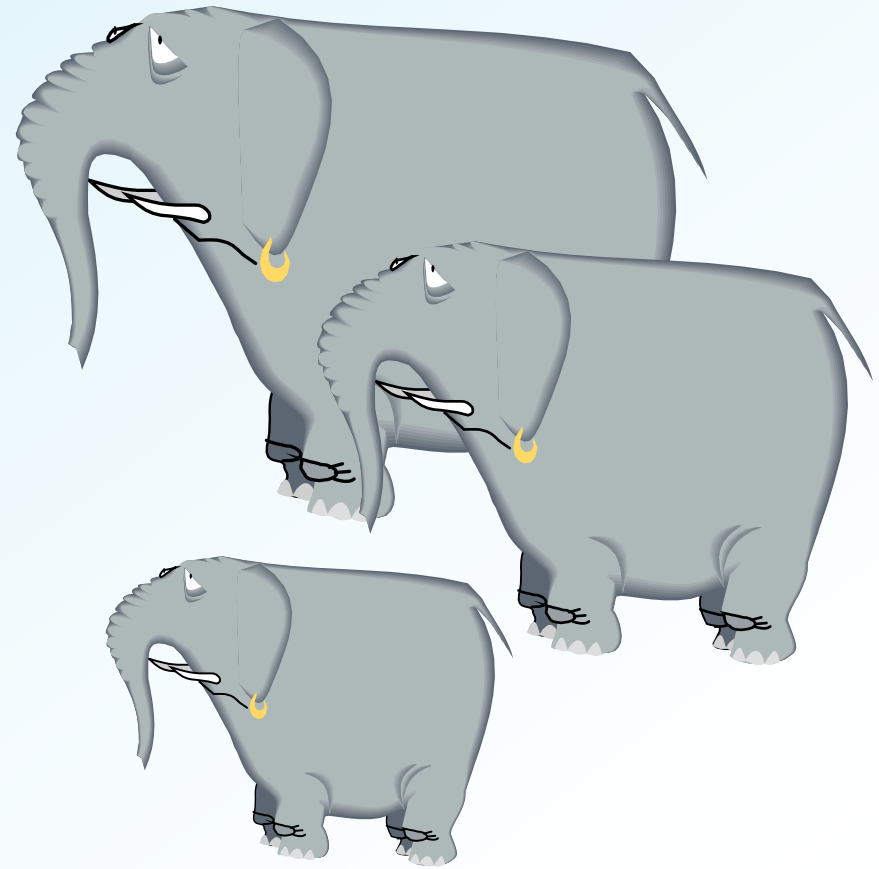


Elephants in the Room: Confronting Barriers to Collaboration

Anthony Muhammad, PhD



What Is a PLC?

“A professional learning community is a group of educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research in order to achieve better results for the students they serve.

“PLCs operate under the assumption that the **key** to improved learning for **students** is continuous, job-embedded learning for **educators**.”

—DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, *Learning by Doing*, 2006

PLC Cultural Beliefs

- All Children Can Learn
- All Children Will Learn Because of our Collective Beliefs and Behaviors

Reflection

- Why do you want to be a PLC?
- How close is your school or district practice to the standard description of a PLC Culture?
- What are your major obstacles?

Two Forms of Change in a PLC

- Technical
- Cultural

Apprenticeship of Observation

- Educators have been socialized in their field since childhood and adopt the norms.
- The average educator was a good student.
- Educators subconsciously protect a system that was of personal benefit.
- Educators implement practices that protect the system (academic obstacle course).

(Lortie, *Schoolteacher: A Sociological Study*, 1975)

Predeterminations

(the Elephants in the Room)

- Perceptual
- Intrinsic
- Institutional

Reflection

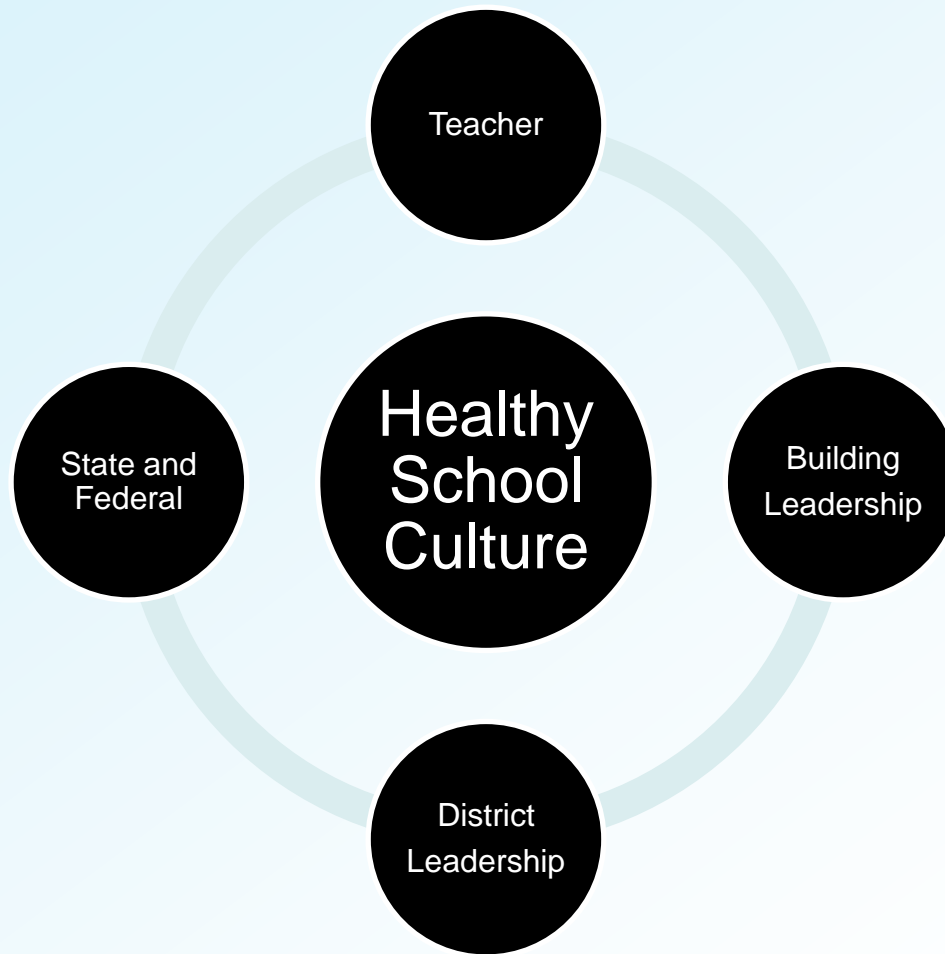
- What are the technical changes that have been implemented in your district over the last two years? Have they had a profound impact on practice? Why or why not?
- Have any of the **predeterminations** affected you or your school? How did you respond?

School Culture

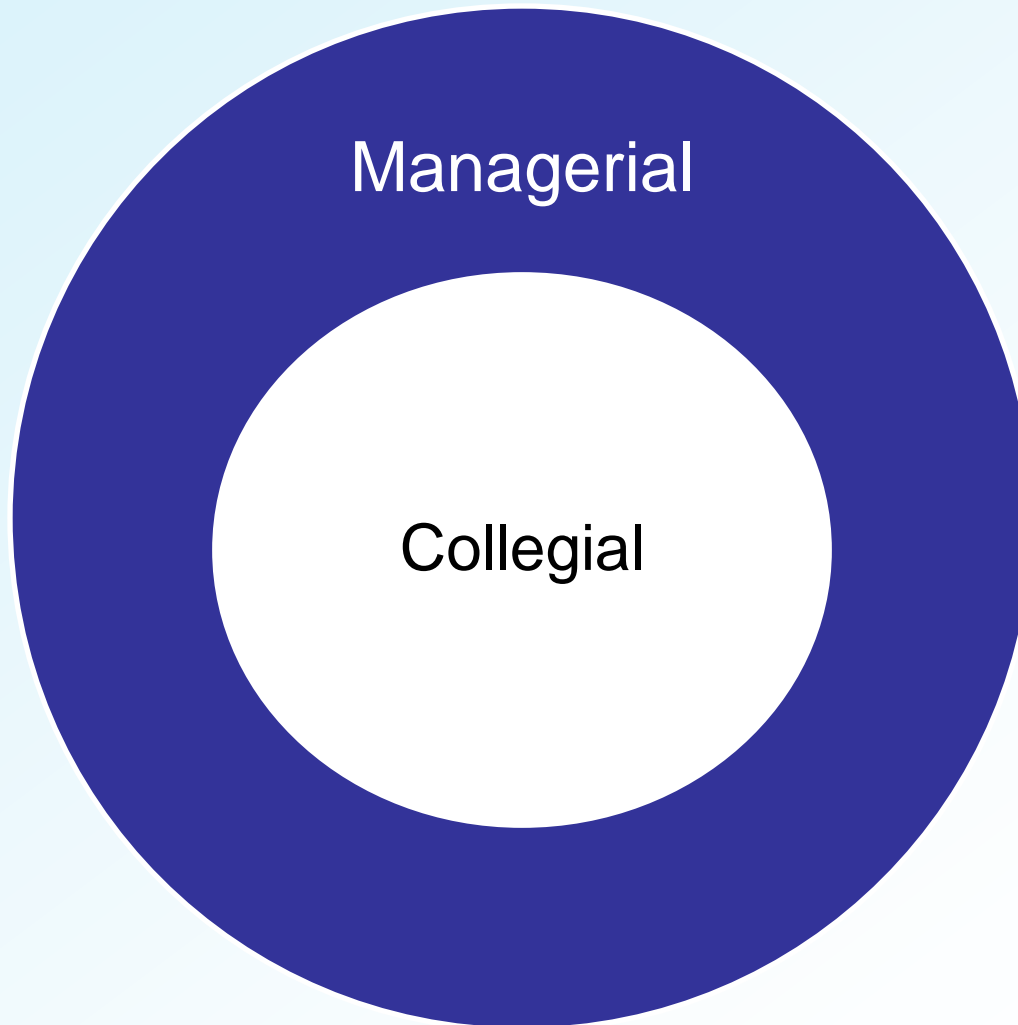
“School culture is the set of norms, values, and beliefs, rituals and ceremonies, symbols and stories that make up the ‘persona’ of the school.”

—Deal & Peterson, 2002

Leadership at Every Level



Two Important Subcultures: Managerial and Collegial



Healthy School Culture

“Educators have an unwavering belief in the ability of all of their students to achieve success, and they pass that belief on to others in overt and covert ways. Educators create policies and procedures and adopt practices that support their belief in the ability of every student.”

—Kent D. Peterson in Cromwell, 2002


Frustration

The Root of a Toxic Culture

Frustration: A feeling of anxiety as a result of the inability to perform a task

- A mismatch between skill set and task
- Causes people to deflect blame onto others and create covert alliances with people experiencing similar struggle

Recipe for Disaster

- 
- Inappropriate preparation
 - Poor support system
 - Task overload

Important Notes

- A highly frustrated staff is a highly unproductive staff
- If people do not have a formal outlet to communicate struggles and frustrations, they will do it informally
- Keep your finger on the pulse of your staff's frustration

Culture of Complaint

- Complaining becomes a crutch or coping mechanism for high levels of frustration
- There is little to no evidence that complaining in isolation is detrimental to an organization
- Complaining becomes damaging when it becomes a habit

Psychological Benefit of Complaining “The two V’s”

- Venting
- Validation

Adult Drama

Dysfunctional social interactions between adult professionals within a school environment that interfere with the proper implementation of important policies, practices, and procedures that support the proper education of students

Professionalism and Mutual Accountability

- We are only as strong as our weakest colleague.
- High-performing PLCs support each other at every level of the organization.
- How will you respond when your agreements are violated?

Healthy Communication: The Key to Productive Interaction

Healthy Cultures

- Focus on problem and **problem solving**
- Pragmatic discussions stay within the locus of control

Toxic Cultures

- Focus on personal affect of the problem and constant, **emotionally-charged description of the problem**
- Emotional discussions lie outside of the locus of control

Complaint Challenge

- Take a 30 day moratorium on complaining
- Debrief your staff after 30 days to discuss the impact and change in informal interaction

NORMS:

The standards of behaviors by which we agree to operate while we are in this group.

Creating Team Norms

Effective Norms.....

- Govern behavior
- Are universally accepted and enforced by all members of a team
- Accurately describe action, not a wish-list
- Are reviewed and discussed frequently

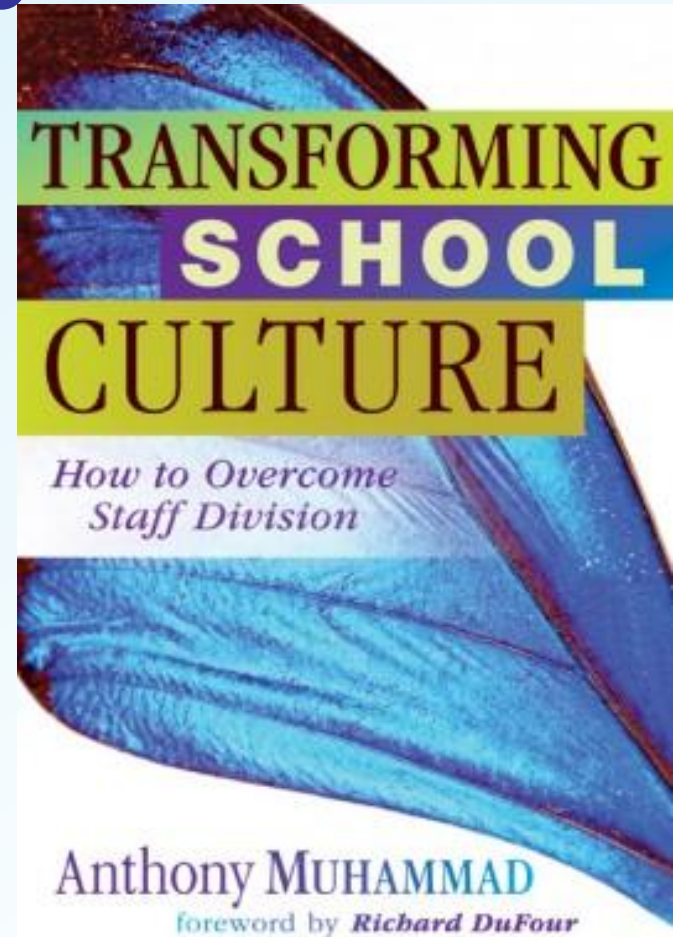
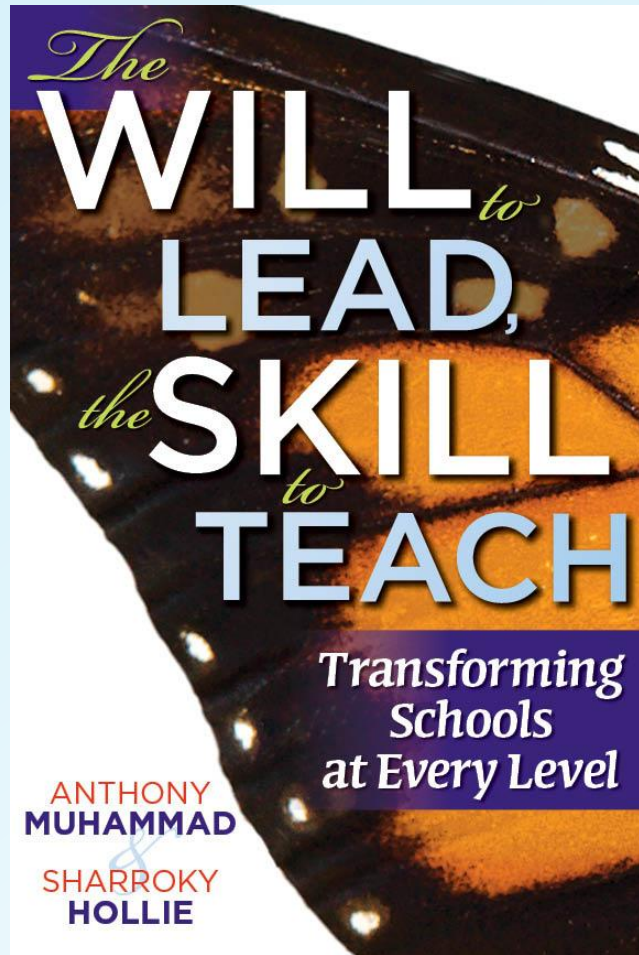
Important Note

Collegiality and Collaboration are not
synonymous

Reflection

Complete Team Norm Activity

Two Must-Reads for Follow-Up



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