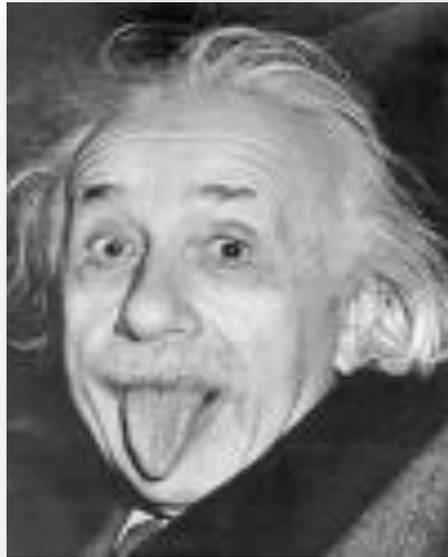


# The Will to Lead: Creating Healthy School Culture

**Anthony Muhammad, PhD**

A decorative graphic consisting of several horizontal lines of varying lengths and colors (teal, light blue, white) extending from the right side of the slide towards the center.

# Is Change Necessary?



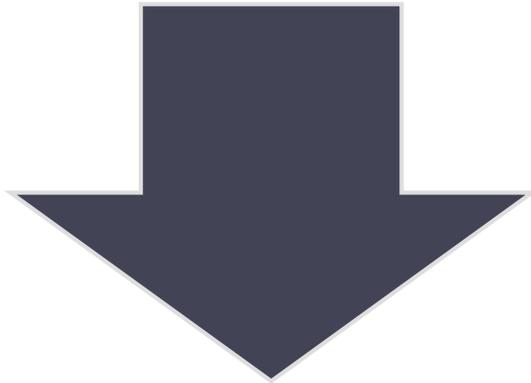
“Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result.”

—Albert Einstein

# Two Forms of Change

- Technical–structural (skill)
- Cultural (will)

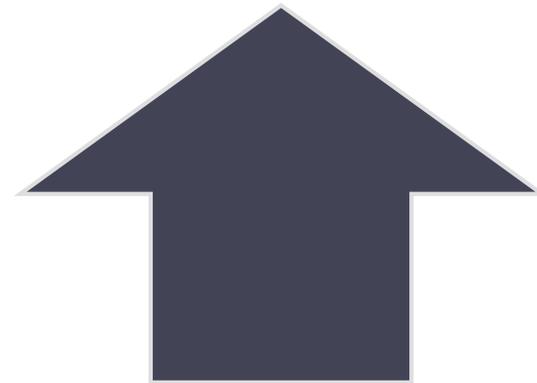
Will and Skill



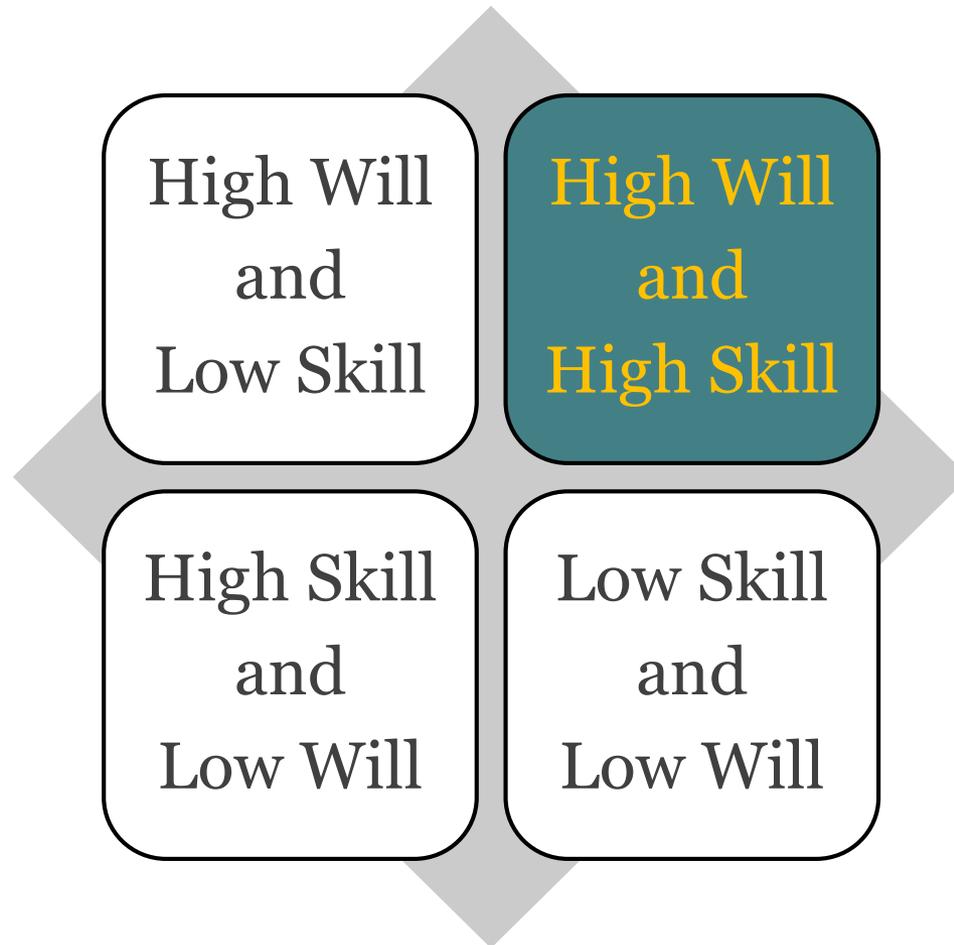
Culture



Pedagogy



# High Will and High Skill



# Cultural Change

“Structural change that is not supported by cultural change will eventually be overwhelmed by the culture, for it is in the culture that any organization finds meaning and stability.”

Schlechty, *Shaking Up the Schoolhouse: How to Support and Sustain Educational Innovation* (2001), p. 52

# Hard Fact #1

**Human Beings are Complex!**

# Transformational Leader

The transformational leader (at all levels) is determined to lead a person into better behavior rather than being satisfied with identifying and criticizing current behavior.



What qualities do leaders need  
to possess to transform  
behavior?

# The Will to Lead

- Aligning the Philosophy
- Managing Frustration
- Creating a Culture of Collaboration
- Institutionalizing Cultural Health

Hollie and Muhammad, *The Will to Lead, the Skill to Teach* (2011)

# 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

# Common Misconceptions about Technical Changes

- Changing the structure will lead to higher levels of productivity (“Rearranging the seats on the Titanic”)
- Technical changes make up for human deficiencies like poor instruction or unprofessional behavior
- Technical changes will “fix” kids or “fix” schools which are broken (i.e. dress codes, longer school day)

# 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)

# Predetermination

- Perceptual (Everything is relative)
- Intrinsic (Victims remain victims)
- Institutional

***How would our society respond if the Achievement Gap were reversed?***

# Pause to Think!

- Have your school improvement efforts been heavily technical or cultural?
- Do you and your colleagues typically do things “with” students or “to” students?
- How have the three forms of Predetermination manifested in your school?

# 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

# Prescriptive

## Commitment

Belief in all students

School goals guide behavior.



## Reflection

Analyze data

Confront brutal facts.



## Prescription

Collaborative

Disciplined practice

## Hard Fact #2

You can't hold people accountable for what you haven't made explicit.

# Aligning the Philosophy - Developing Shared Purpose

The mission question challenges members of a group to reflect on the fundamental purpose of the organization, the very reason for its existence. The question asks, “Why do we exist?” “What are we here to do together?” and “What is the business of our business?”

DuFour and Eaker, PLC at Work, 1998

# Developing Mission

- Who are your students?
- What are the areas where their lives could be enhanced through education?
- What will you collectively commit to focus on in order to enhance their lives?
- Mission must have a **SERVICE ORIENTATION!**

# Who are Your Students?

## Levey Middle School - 2001

- 97% African-American
- 72% at or below National Poverty Line
- 80% of families are headed by single mothers
- 25% - 40% annual student mobility rate
- State achievement scores well below state averages

# Levey Middle School Mission

*“We will work collaboratively to ensure that each student is prepared for post-secondary education”*

# New Frontier 21 School

## A Fresh Approach



# Nine Core Beliefs

1. Schools are places built for the education of children, not for adult employment.
2. Schools play a major role in the future life success of students and their community.
3. Education is a profession, and educators should conduct themselves as professionals.
4. Education is a mission, and educators should conduct themselves as missionaries.
5. Schools are a communities' most precious institution, and they have the power to transform a community.
6. Children are at the center of everything that we do, and our practice should reflect their best interest.
7. We believe that schools must partner with other members of the community in order for the educational experience to be optimal.
8. We believe that character is important and that schools can help shape a child's character.
9. We believe that service to the community is important and that it is essential in a democratic society.

# Pause to Think

1. Are you and your colleagues clear on your fundamental purpose?
2. What would be evidence that your school has a clear and concise shared purpose?

## Hard Fact #3

A highly frustrated staff is a highly unproductive staff.

# Managing Frustration



# Toxic School Culture

“Educators believe that student success is based on students’ level of concern, attentiveness, prior knowledge, and willingness to comply with the demands of the school, and they articulate that belief in overt and covert ways. Educators create policies and procedures and adopt practices that support their belief in the impossibility of universal achievement.”

—Kent D. Peterson in Cromwell, 2002

# Descriptive and Deflective



# “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

# The Culture of Complaint

## Two V's

- Venting
- Validation

# Time Out!

“To be a good teammate, your responsibilities must be more important than your rights”

Orr, J. (2009). Our Top Ten Favorite John Wooden Quotes. Christian Science Monitor.  
Boston, MA.

# Real Difference

Healthy Culture

Problem  
solvers

Toxic Culture

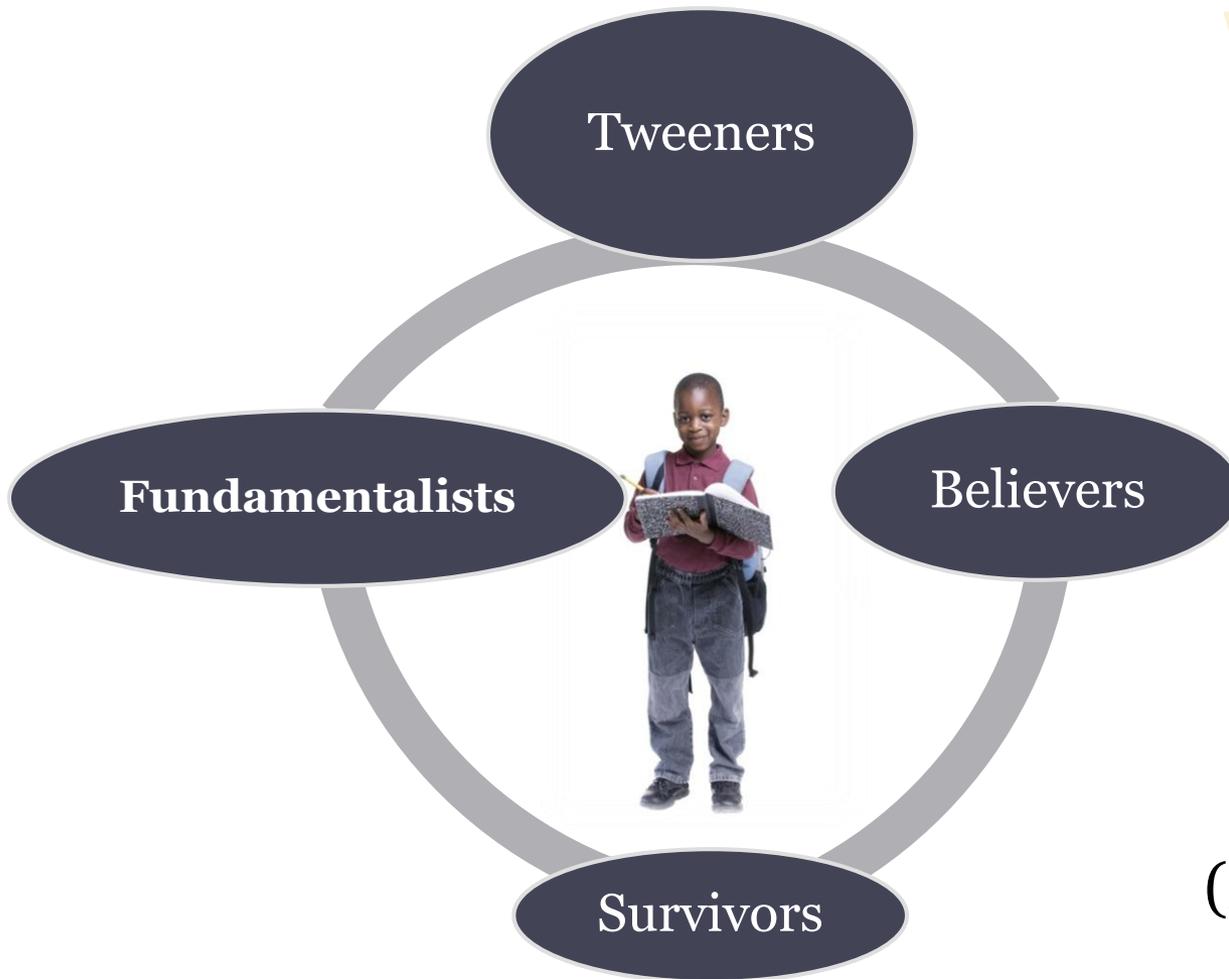
Complainers

# *Good to Great*, Jim Collins

What do great corporations/organizations do differently than good/average organizations?

1. They seek and confront the “brutal facts”
2. They get the right people on the “bus” and sit them in the “right seats”

# The Quandary



(Muhammad, 2009)

# 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

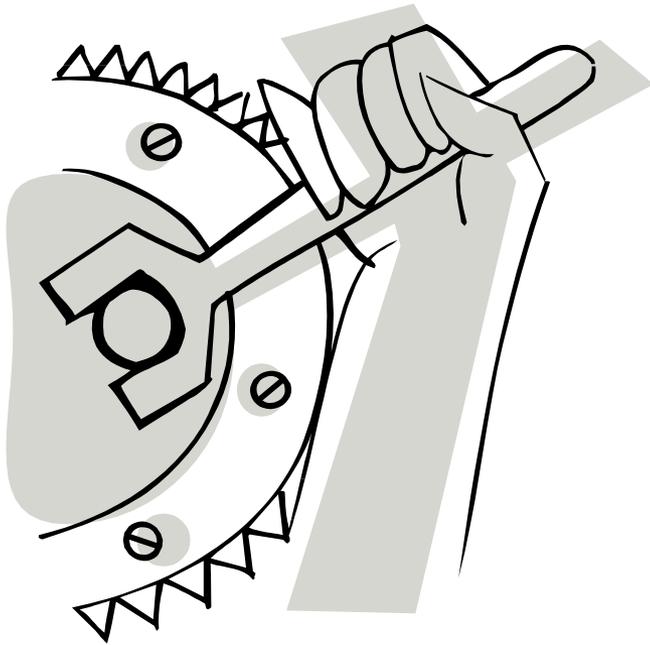
# Pause to Think

- What are your most prevalent frustrations?
- How do you and your colleagues typically respond when you get frustrated?
- Does your leadership relieve or add to your frustrations?

# Creating a Culture of Collaboration

## Why Collaborate?

# Collaborative Culture

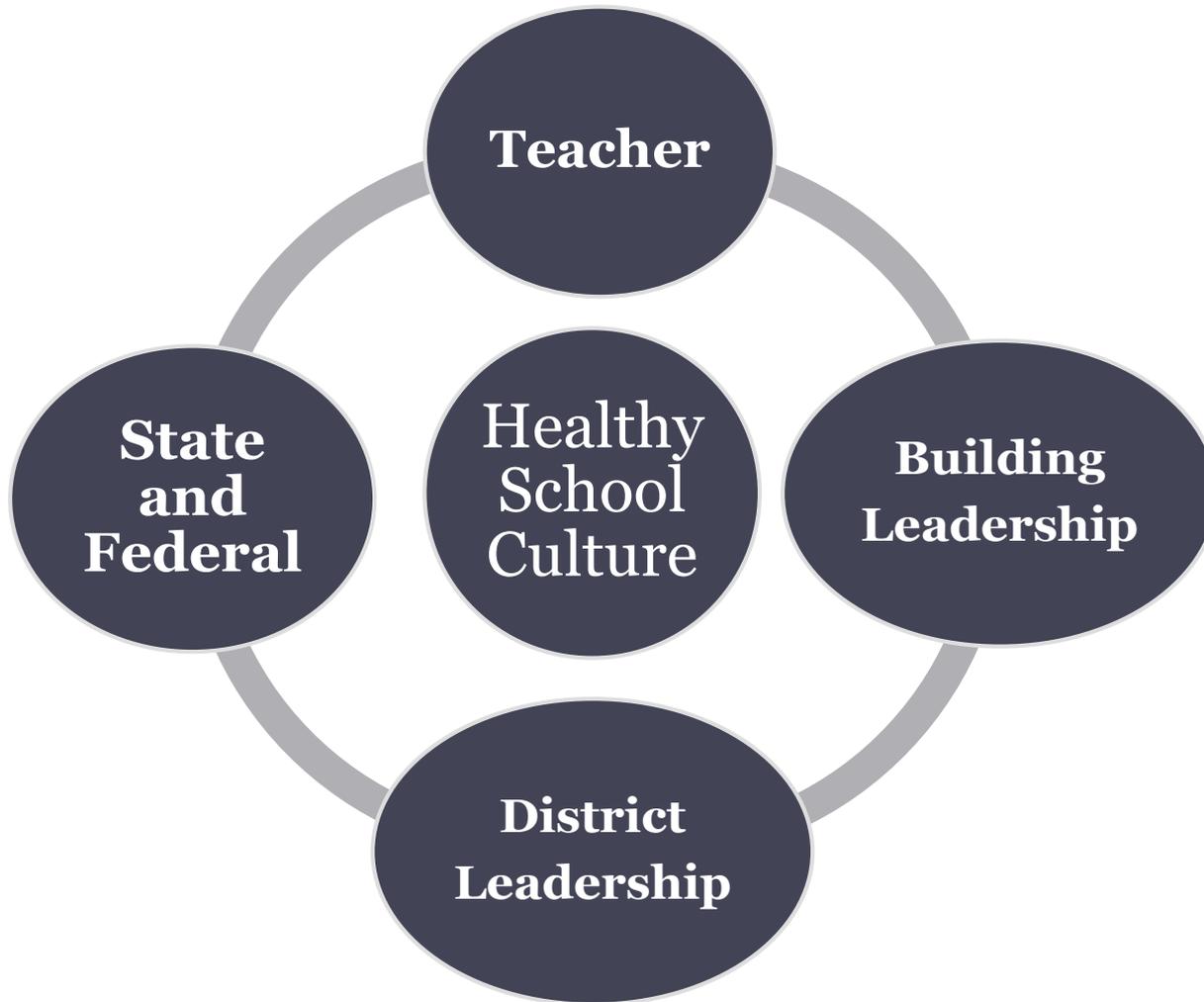


**Team:** A systematic process in which we work **interdependently** to analyze and **impact** professional practice to improve individual and collective results

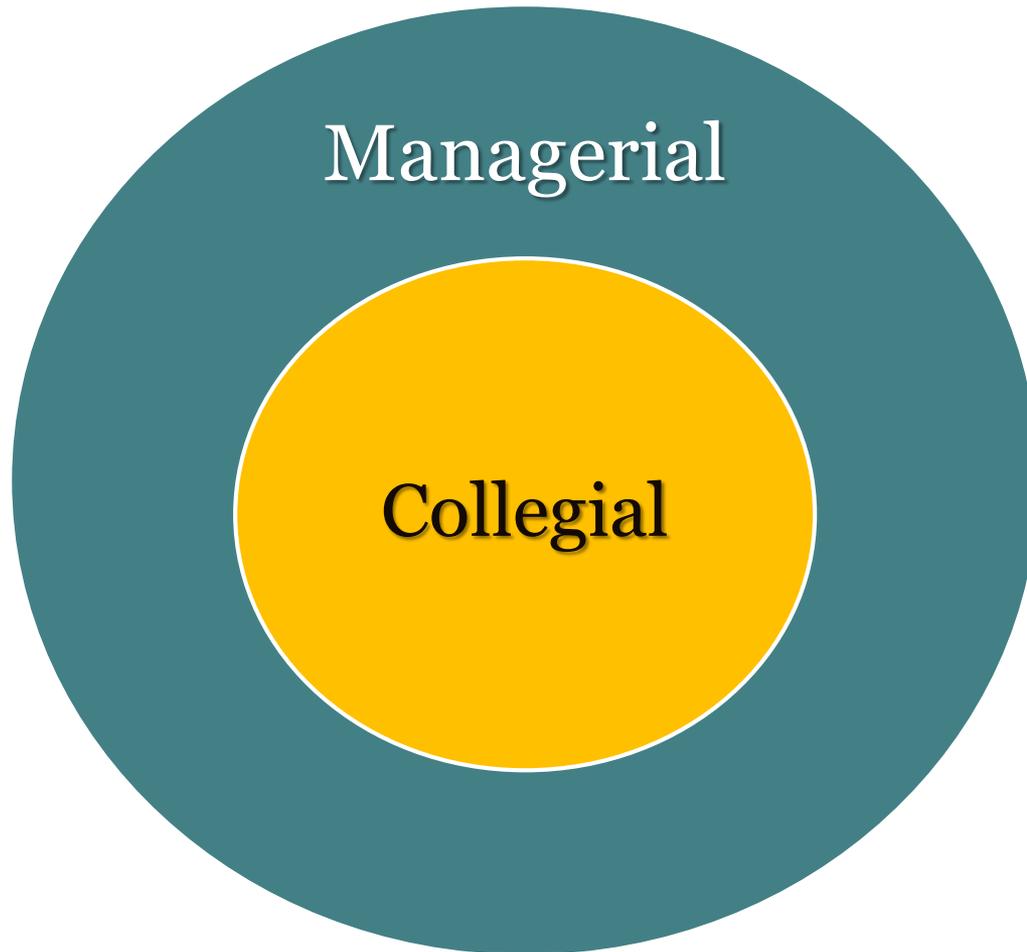
# 4 Stages of Collaboration

- Forming
- Norming
- Storming
- Performing

# Leadership at Every Level



# Two Important Subcultures: Managerial and Collegial



# Creating Healthy Cultures: A Two-Way Street

## Collegial

- Control the language of the informal organization.
- Remove emotional tone (culture of complaint) from informal interactions.
- Focus peers on mission and problem solving.

## Managerial

- Develop and maintain healthy organizational vision.
- Develop and maintain healthy policies, practices, and procedures.
- Institutionalize organizational health.

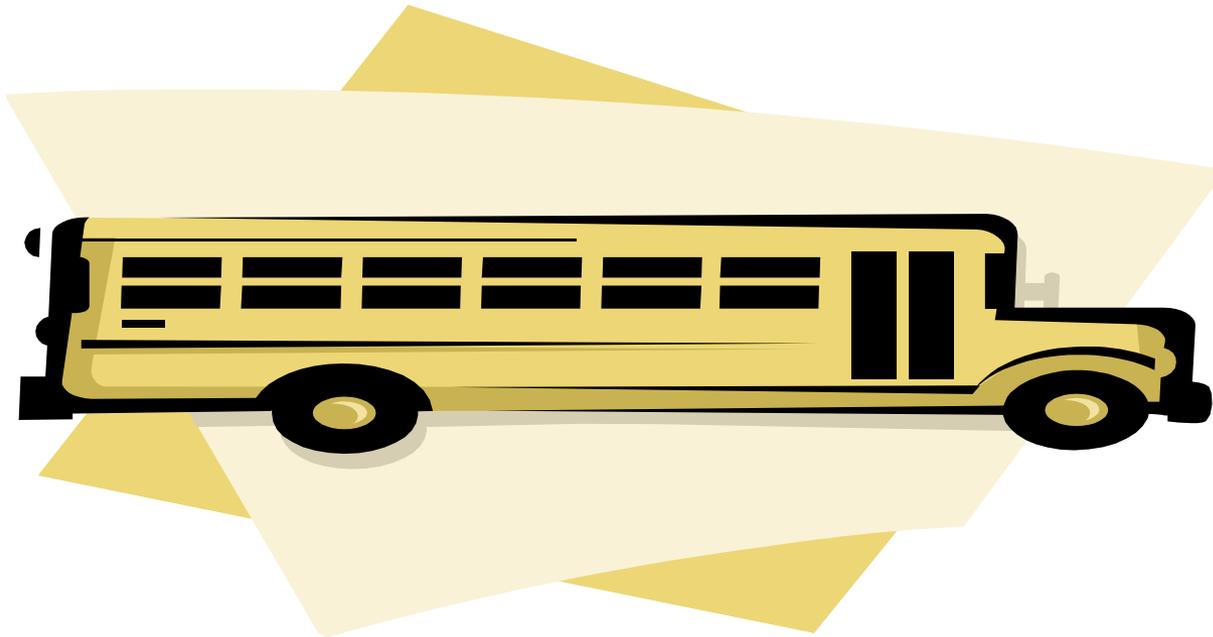
## Hard Fact #4

Being **correct** is no substitute  
for being **effective**.

# Pause to Think

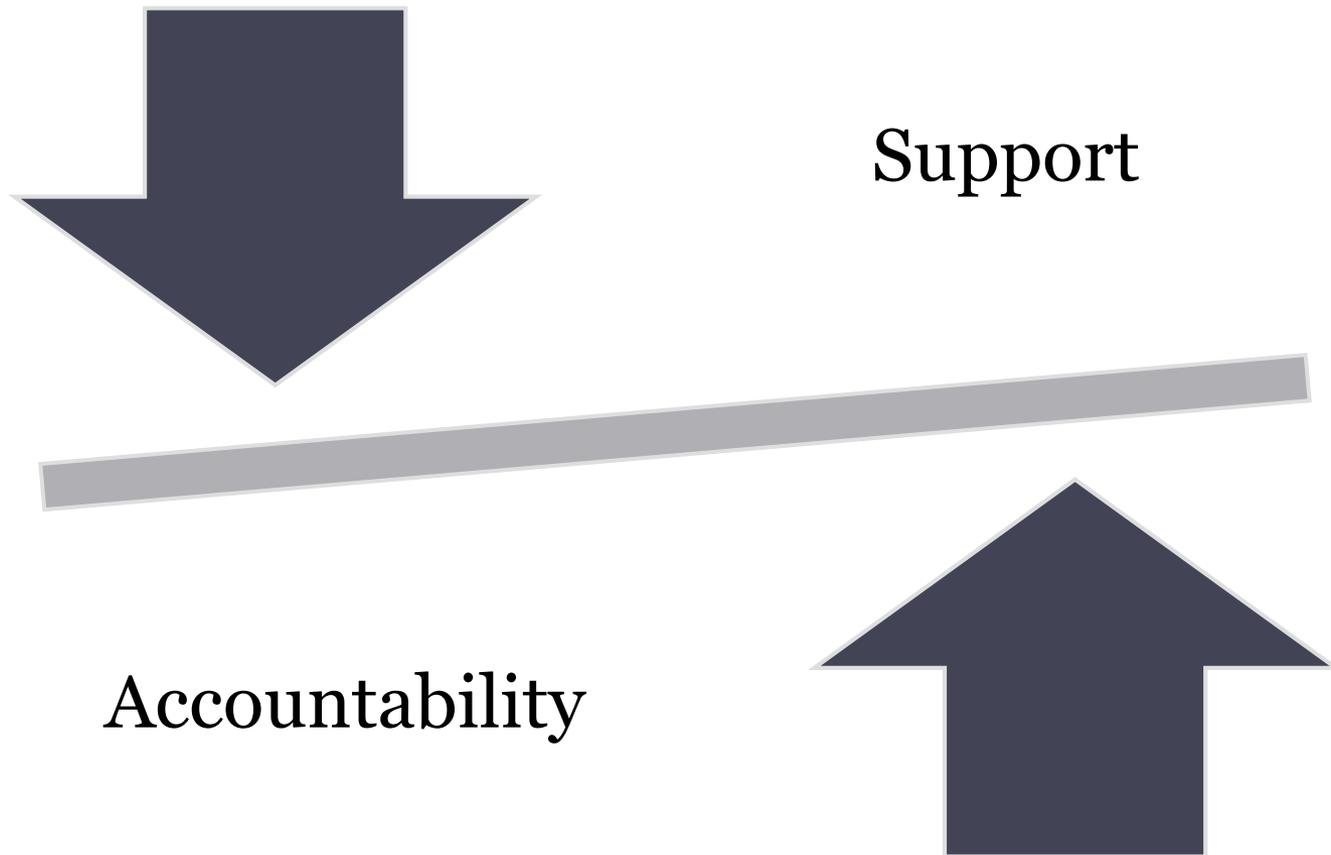
- How well do teachers and site leaders collaborate in your school and/or school district?
- In your school and/or district, is being effective more important than being correct?

# Institutionalizing Cultural Health



**Moving the bus forward**

Healthy cultures are two-way streets.



# Fundamentalist: Change is not easy. “Drop Your Tools” Research

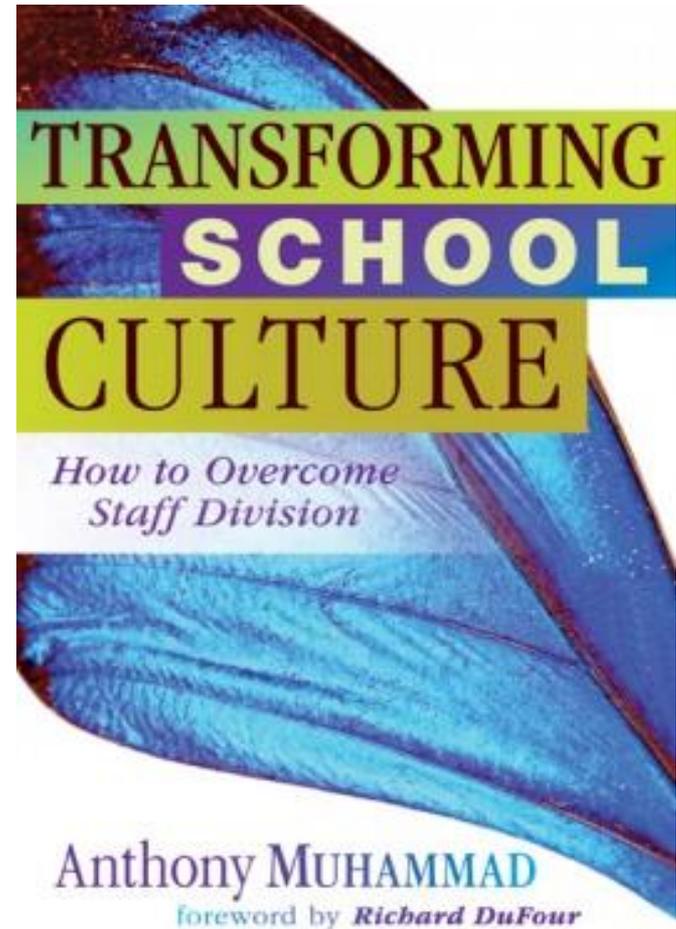
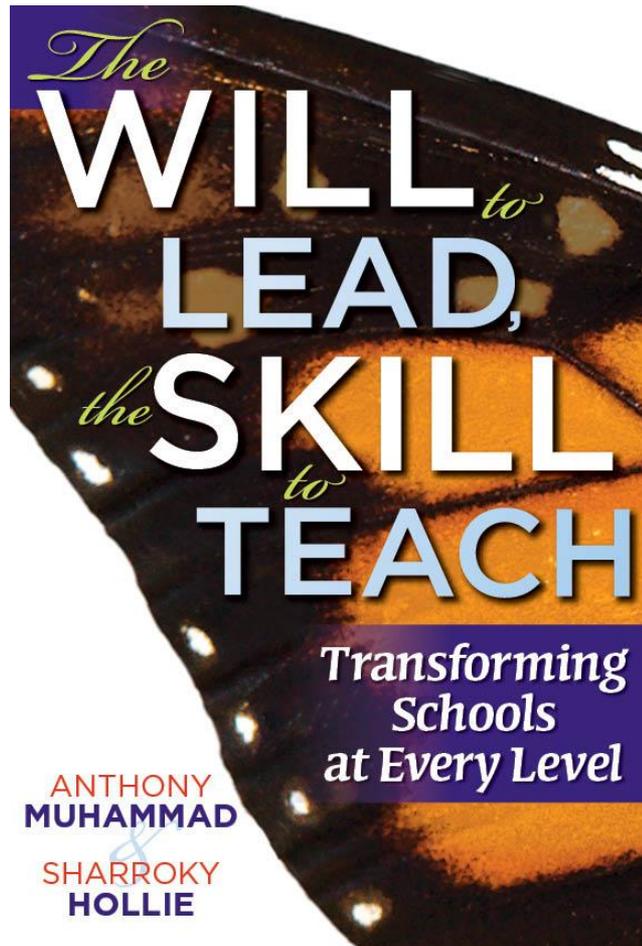
- People persist when they are given no clear reason to change.
- People persist when they do not trust the person who tells them to change.
- People persist when they view the alternative as more frightening.
- To change may mean admitting failure.

(Maclean, 1992)

# Good Leaders

- Transparently communicate purpose.
- Foster collaboration.
- Build capacity.
- Hold people accountable.

# Two Must-Reads for Follow-Up



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