

# SHAPING

TERRENCE E. DEAL

# SCHOOL

KENT D. PETERSON

# CULTURE

THIRD  EDITION

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# Shaping School Culture



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Third Edition

Terrence E. Deal  
Kent D. Peterson

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## Praise for *Shaping School Culture*

“One of the things I have always loved about the work of Terry Deal and Kent Peterson is that they totally understand the reality of the world of schools without becoming captive to it. They are able to rise above the daily challenges to offer a vision of what is possible. They understand the reality of school culture while also knowing it is the profound role of the leader to shape that culture. This book is a must read for any school leader who yearns for something more than the day to day frustrations of the work.”

—Paul Houston, Executive Director, Emeritus, American Association of School Administrators and President, Center for Empowered Leadership

“The updated *Shaping School Culture* shows us that there is no ‘stickiness’ to hard-fought school change and improvement efforts without a deep commitment to developing and sustaining a productive culture. With this book, Deal and Peterson remind education leaders of how to do just that.”

—Karen Kearney, Director, Leadership Initiatives,  
CA Comprehensive Center, WestEd

“Some things only get better with time. Fine wines... and this classic work by my friends Terry Deal and Kent Peterson. The world of American schools has been spinning furiously since the first edition of *Shaping School Culture* appeared. What has been missing—until now—has been a road map that school leaders may use to navigate the new and perplexing twists and turns as they attempt to understand, craft and sustain their school cultures. In this playful, honest, inventive, timely and approachable little volume the authors not only describe “the store” but hand over the keys to our beleaguered profession.”

—Roland S. Barth, Author and Educator

“Peterson and Deal are the fathers of the school culture movement and the field is finally catching up to their wisdom and the impact of school culture on student performance. This book is a practical and detailed guide that can be applied effectively in any school.”

—Anthony Muhammad, CEO, *New Frontier 21 Consulting*

“Educators are now being urged to adopt the same overly rational practices that many other successful organizations have rejected. In this updated and thought-provoking book, Deal and Peterson use contemporary examples, cases, and policy trends to provide a fresh perspective on schools. Throughout the volume the reader is re-oriented to the elements of school culture that matter most. Folklore, heroes, revival of old ways, paradox, and even the avoidance of toxic cultures all have a role to play in this reorientation. An essential read for school administrators seeking to stave off inappropriate change by reshaping schools from within. A refreshing alternative to today’s arid accountability environment.”

—Sharon Conley, PhD, Professor, *Gevirtz Graduate School of Education, University of California, Santa Barbara*

“The richness of examples, the connections to student achievement, and the diversity of stories all contribute to this latest version of Deal and Peterson’s trilogy on *Shaping School Culture*. These two thought leaders have astutely blended seminal research on culture and effective schools, current best practices about leadership, as well as amazing testimonials to create more than just a “how to” guide. This book is an incredible tool for cultivating new and deeper understanding about how to successfully navigate the complex world of school culture.”

—Karen M. Dyer, Director, *Education and Nonprofit Sector Center for Creative Leadership*

# Preface

This book represents a third refinement of an idea that started in 1990 as *The Principal's Role in Shaping School Culture*—a best-seller for the US Department of Education. We expanded the ideas and examples, later publishing *Shaping School Culture: The Heart of Leadership* (1999). We substantially enlarged and developed it into the second edition, *Shaping School Culture: Pitfalls, Paradoxes, and Promises* (2009). In this third edition, we needed to address new issues affecting schools related to external reforms, pressures, and narrow views of the purpose of schools. Thus we update No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and its replacement at the federal level, Every Student Can Succeed (ESCS). We have added significant material on paradox, updated and expanded illustrations, added new cases and dropped others, as well as introduced some new ideas about stories and their power to shape what we believe.

As usual, we received a lot of help and inspiration from school leaders in writing this edition. From across the country and indeed the world, readers of the previous editions have shared ideas and examples. They once again confirm that stories and examples make a difference to them in how they think about their schools and deal with issues of school culture.

It is clearly time to reconsider and rethink the importance of school culture in today's educational environment. Students have

the right to the best schools we can provide. There is little doubt that teaching staff members and administrators can lead the way to successful cultures in which all students learn. Of late, we believe far too much emphasis has been given to reforming schools from outside through policies and mandates such as NCLB and ESCS. For too long the core values and beliefs of educators have been replaced by external mandates, heavy-handed testing, and draconian criticism rather than support. New laws may or may not substantially alter this trajectory. Too little attention has been paid to how schools can be shaped from within, as our colleague Roland Barth (1991) demonstrates.

Research and examples of excellent practice drawn from education and business show that top-flight schools are possible in every community. This book pulls together the best that we know about to provide insights and examples of ways teachers, administrators, parents, and community can create positive, caring, joyful, and intellectually challenging schools and, if necessary, transform toxic cultures.

The importance of school culture and the symbolic roles of leaders in shaping cultural patterns and practices remain at the core of this revised book. Although policy makers and reformers are still pressing for tight structures and rational assessments, it is important to remember that these changes cannot succeed without deeply ingrained cultural support at the local level. The existential tenor of a school is key to achievement and student learning. In this book, we have expanded the research base demonstrating how culture influences school functioning. Positive cultural features foster success, and dysfunctional cultures damage belief, faith, and progress. We also draw on new evidence from the world of business, linking culture with performance.

We continue to emphasize the importance of mission and purpose because these elements are central features of culture. We have added further examples of the types of rituals and traditions found in quality schools, culture building and development, and share

new case examples of the ways stories and history are used to build commitment and motivation. We also have added important new illustrations of the ways social media is used to reinforce school culture. The case materials on ways leaders mold culture now offer new illustrations and numerous useful examples. We have expanded our understanding of toxic cultures—negative places where the rituals, traditions, and values have gone sour and threaten the very soul of a school. Finally, we have extended our discussion of the connection between the culture of the school and parents and the local community with special attention to engaging diverse groups, so that this topic now receives the attention it deserves.

The new examples and cases were collected while we were working with schools and organizations across the globe. A number of excellent examples from other researchers of schools trying to transform themselves have provided rich new illustrations of shaping culture. We believe that it was important to maintain our previous focus on bifocal leadership and paradox to expand those ideas. Even though we added new material, we wanted the book to be readable and concise, with engaging examples from education and business. We think readers will find the mix of new stories interesting.

We focus on the elements of successful cultures and the ways leaders from every level—teachers, principals, parents, and community members—shape a school's identity and image. Successful schools possess leaders who can read, assess, and reinforce core rituals, traditions, and values. Successful schools have leadership emanating from many people—leadership that maintains and supports learning for all students, as well as learning for all staff members. Successful cultures have leaders who know deep down in their hearts how important schools are to all children and want to make them the best places they can be. Successful cultures have leaders who can cope with the paradoxes of their work, build positive relations, and take advantage of the opportunities of the future. In this book, we hope to support, encourage, and nourish these kinds of leaders for schools.

We begin the book by introducing the impact of culture on school reform and student learning. Drawing on organizational literature and research, we emphasize the importance of culture to achievement and other key educational outcomes.

In part 1, “The Elements of Culture,” we lay out the elements of culture, the basic building blocks people cobble together in creating a meaningful workplace. In chapter 1, we present a now-classic case study of a school that transformed itself by reworking its cultural profile. The school, Ganado Primary, moved from a dismal place to a school with visionary leadership, a deeply held purpose, and rituals and traditions that build commitment and motivation. In chapter 2 we explore the potency of symbols in everything we do day-to-day. We highlight architecture, mottoes, words, and actions. In chapter 3 we turn back the clock to reaffirm the importance of the past in determining current cultural patterns and ways. Central to any school culture is its history—the past events that have shaped the present. In chapter 4 we turn to the legacy of history: myth, mission, purpose, and values. We underscore the importance of a meaningful purpose and widely shared values in adding spark and vitality to a school. In chapter 5 we show how current stories and tales add to the stream of cultural energy and perpetuate important lessons. We burrow beneath everyday routine to showcase its ritualistic significance and variety in chapter 6. In chapter 7, we ratchet ritual to a more grand and episodic plane: celebrations put culture on display. We introduce in chapter 8 the cast of positive cultural players whose real work outside official duties is keeping cultural patterns and practices intact and on track. New attention to negative cultural players emphasizes the problems of toxic characters.

In part 2, “The Symbolic Role of School Leaders,” we move from concepts to application. We discuss cultural metamorphosis and transformation in chapter 9. Drawing on seven case examples (one a new case from North Carolina), we demonstrate how leadership can build school culture through consideration to purpose, energy, and all the elements of culture. In chapter 10 we show

what happens when culture turns toxic or dysfunctional. Drawing on extensive experience in schools and new cases, we identify features of the dark side of some schools and provide antidotes for these poisonous situations. Chapter 11 examines the key symbolic relationship among the school, parents, and the community with new attention of bringing diverse communities together. In chapter 12 we describe the multiple roles that leaders take on in shaping the culture, including historian, anthropological sleuth, visionary, icon champion, potter, poet, actor, and healer. We reconnect the technical aspects of management with the symbolic aspects of leadership in chapter 13 to create the idea of a bifocal principal who thinks structurally and symbolically. Very few issues in education are either-or, and principals who deal with paradox will find their jobs much less stressful and more rewarding. School leaders who want to nurture and sustain successful cultures will have to cope with paradox and take advantage of rational and ethical opportunities they confront. This approach leads to the ideal of a school in chapter 14, where metrics and magic apply. These paradoxes and challenges can shape the direction and hope for leaders as this millennium progresses and new laws shape schools. Chapter 15 reviews the events leading up to the recent replacement of NCLB, the long-standing federal effort to reform schools, with ESSA. Will this new effort bring a sequel to the prevailing punitive testing story? Will it give more discretion to local schools to shape their own destinies? Or will the states simply mimic the same rigid policies that undermined the impact of NCLB. Irrespective, school leaders can make a dramatic difference by focusing on the symbolic features of their schools and creating their local version of a meaningful and successful enterprise. For far too long, schools have been buffeted and pressured by external reforms focused on testing, accountability, and narrow measures of success. In this edition we hope to return the attention of school leaders to the real foundation of success—creating a local story, giving educators pause to believe in themselves again and renewing the spirit of public education in America.



# Acknowledgments

The Deal-Peterson team has been around for many years talking, listening to educators, and looking at schools. As with any duo, there are others around us who make substantial contributions to what we write. The first to receive our enduring thanks is Lee Bolman. He now teaches at the University of Missouri, Kansas City. His work with Terry Deal seeps into this book in a number of places. Thanks, Lee. You have one of the best conceptual minds in the business.

Thanks also to those whose work made this book possible: all our former administrative assistants put in hours and hours. We also express gratitude to our many graduate assistants, now colleagues, who have moved on to important positions—Frances Wills, Kubilay Gok, Nathaniel Bray, Shelby Cosner, Valli Warren, and Yi-Hwa Liou—who did a wonderful job chasing things down, reviewing drafts, continuing to discuss new cases, and pushing our ideas.

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stories of school culture building over many, many years. There is nothing like fresh minds and new blood combined with the wisdom of experience to enrich a book and get your ideas straight.

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Our wives, Sandra Newport Deal and Ann Herrold-Peterson, contributed love and support that helped fuel our creativity and energy. Our children—Kent’s sons, Erik, Russell, and Scott, and Terry’s daughter, Janie—have given us a real boost along the way. Without family this kind of work cannot be completed.

We greatly appreciate the encouragement, support, and patience of Marjorie McAneny, Kate Gagnon, and Lesley Iura and others at Jossey-Bass. They have put in the time and backing necessary through all these iterations of the book.

We dedicate this work to the leaders of America’s public schools. They can and do make a real difference in the lives of children. Their stories and value-driven actions serve so many. Keep the faith.

*Spring 2016*

*Terrence E. Deal*  
San Luis Obispo, California  
*Kent D. Peterson*  
Madison, Wisconsin

# The Authors

**T**errence E. Deal's career has encompassed several roles, including that of police officer, teacher, principal, district office administrator, and professor. He has taught at the Stanford and Harvard graduate schools of education, Vanderbilt's Peabody College, and the University of Southern California's Rossier School. He is currently founder of the Deal Leadership Institute, University of La Verne. He lectures and consults internationally with business, health care, educational, religious, and military organizations. He specializes in leadership, organizational theory and behavior, and culture. Deal is the coauthor of more than forty books, including *Corporate Cultures* (with Allan A. Kennedy, 1982)—an international best-seller. His books include *The Leadership Paradox: Balancing Logic and Artistry in Schools* (with Kent D. Peterson, 1994); *Leading with Soul: An Uncommon Journey of Spirit* (with Lee Bolman, 1995); *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership*, Fourth Edition (with Lee Bolman, 2008); *Reframing the Path to School Leadership* (with Lee Bolman, 2010); *How Great Leaders Think* (with Lee Bolman, 2014); and numerous others.

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**K**ent D. Peterson was the first director of the Vanderbilt Principals' Institute and is former head of the National Center for Effective Schools Research and Development. He is currently

emeritus professor in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. He continues to lecture and consult with leadership academies across the United States and internationally. His research has examined the nature of principals' work, school reform, and the ways school leaders develop strong, positive school cultures. Author of numerous studies on principal leadership, he is coauthor of *The Principal's Role in Shaping School Culture* (with Terrence E. Deal, 1990); *The Leadership Paradox: Balancing Logic and Artistry in Schools* (with Terrence E. Deal, 1994); and *The Shaping School Culture Fieldbook* (with Terrence E. Deal, 2002).

*The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant. We have created a society that honors the servant and has forgotten the gift.*

—Albert Einstein

*Culture eats strategy for breakfast.*

—Peter Drucker

## Introduction

“If only schools would be run more like businesses with more accountability and data to measure results.” It’s a phrase we hear all too often. It haunts many school principals and teachers, making them feel like they’re missing something or following the wrong path. It’s difficult to take pride in your work and believe in what you are doing when you are persistently reminded that your efforts don’t measure up. But let’s take another look at the oft-invoked comparison. What does it really mean? What actually makes successful businesses tick? Is it structure or strategy? Is it technology or clear goals? Or maybe tighter standards and accountability?

Not so for Zappos, a highly successful business organization (now a division of Amazon). Zappos founder Tony Hsieh believes

that if you deliver happiness to employees they'll do the same for customers, whose loyalty and efforts will make the business successful. *Fun* and *weird* are two words used to describe the culture. Singing, dancing, and costume parades happen often. Hsieh believes that "if you get the culture right, then most other things—like great customer service or building a long-lasting, enduring brand—will happen naturally." Zappos's core values include "Deliver WOW through Service," "Create a Little Fun and Weirdness," and "Pursue Growth and Learning" (Bolman & Deal, 2014, p. 400).

Contrary to common misconceptions, in business, one thing is crystal clear: *the culture of an enterprise plays a dominant role in exemplary performance*. Highly respected organizations have evolved a shared webbing of beliefs, informal folkways, and traditions that infuse work with meaning, passion, and purpose. The evidence is persuasive; the word *culture* is a staple in business lexicon. Most business leaders we've talked with about success mention it in the first few minutes of a conversation.

Consider some well-known examples. Howard Schultz, CEO of Starbucks, puts it this way: "A company can grow big without losing the passion and personality that built it, but only if it's driven not by profits but by values and by people. . . . The key is heart. I pour my heart into every cup of coffee, and so do my partners at Starbucks. When customers sense that, they respond in kind. If you pour your heart into your work, or into any worthy enterprise, you can achieve dreams others may think impossible" (Schultz & Yang, 1997, p. 8).

Or take Costco, widely recognized for its low prices and high value. Jim Sinegal, founder and former CEO of Costco, is known as a masterful storyteller constantly spinning yarns that reinforce the value of putting the interests of customers and employees ahead of stockholders:

In 1996 we were selling between \$150,000 and \$200,000 worth of salmon fillet every week at \$5.99 a pound. Then our buyers were able to get an improved product with

belly fat, back fins, and collarbones removed, at a better price. As a result we reduced our retail price to \$5.29. So they improved the product and lowered the price. The buyers weren't finished with the improvements, though. Next our buyers negotiated for a product with the pin bone out and all of the skin removed, and it was at an even better price, which enabled us to lower our price to \$4.99 a pound. Then, because we had continued to grow and had increased our sales volume, we were able to buy direct from Canadian and Chilean farms, which resulted in an even lower price of \$4.79. (Denning, 2005, p. 137)

The “salmon story” is a widely shared symbolic reminder that low prices and high value are central to Costco's core purpose. The story's meaning is reinforced by a “salmon award” given to an employee or supplier who show great diligence in contributing to Costco's mission. Each award celebrates a new story and creates new lore.

“What else have we got besides stories?,” Sinegal asks, “It's what brings meaning to the work we do” (Fisher, Harris, & Jarvis, 2008).

One more example. Lou Gerstner is very clear about the role culture plays in business. His classic turnaround of IBM initially started out as a structural overhaul: “The last thing IBM needs is a vision.” But as he burrowed more deeply under the company's veneer, he realized that striking out in a brand-new direction overlooked the real problem. IBM had drifted from the values and ways that had once made it the most successful organization in the world. The approach then became one of revival rather than reform. Some jettisoned or tarnished traditions needed some attention to restore the sheen of a once-renowned history. Gerstner concluded following IBM's newfound success: “I came to see, in my time at IBM, that culture isn't just one aspect of the game—it is the game” (Gerstner, 2002, p. 182).

There are countless other examples in a variety of enterprises. The point is that education seems to be following or learning the wrong lessons from mediocre businesses that focus only on making a profit and using measurable short-term financial goals as a beacon.

Educators are being pressured by policy makers to adopt practices that many of the best organizations shy away from. If schools want to emulate other successful organizations, then parents, teachers, and administrators need to take a look at their local traditions, folkways, and dreams. And this look has to be a sustained, fine-grained scrutiny, not a brief superficial glance.

Another valuable lesson to draw from businesses such as IBM is how quickly cultural traditions can weaken or stray. Starbucks confronted this predicament in 2007. Schultz's book *Pour Your Heart into It* was published in 1997 when the company was envied by other businesses and its product dominated the American consumer's coffee palette. Starbucks's growth was phenomenal (100 to 23,000 stores in ten years), as were its profits. But a memorandum from Schultz to senior executives in 2007 highlighted a sinister side of success. Starbucks was losing its soul.

Many of Starbucks's growth-induced changes seemed innocuous because rationally they seemed superior to old ways. But growth and automation merged to "[sacrifice] the 'romance and theater' of the coffee shop experience for efficiency and profit" ("Show Tracker," 2007). They then launched a series of company-wide celebrations to reconnect with their cultural roots.

First, they selected a day and closed all Starbucks's stores in America. Baristas were reacquainted with the art of making a perfect espresso, from pouring a perfect shot to steaming milk properly—Espresso Excellence Training. They then gathered senior leaders worldwide for a company-wide global summit to review the company's history, assess its current state and chart its future. Finally they gathered 8,000 US store managers and 2,000 partners in New Orleans for a Leadership Conference to help

people reconnect emotionally with the company's roots, mission and future.

## **Cultural Drift in Schools**

If people are looking for a parallel between business and schools, the experiences of IBM and Starbucks suggest a promising place to start. Similarly, many schools have drifted from traditional cultural roots. In many instances, they have lost, or are in danger of losing, their souls. In most schools this shift has been caused by the unintended consequences of continuous rigid legislative mandates and “reform” as much as by local neglect.

For decades, educational organizations have been pummeled by external reform initiatives. Most of these well-intended efforts have striven to make schools more rational and technically advanced, emulating what people assume to be more like successful businesses: producing measurable results. As a US Department of Education spokesperson remarked in 2007, “If it can’t be measured, we’re not interested in it” (confidential personal conversation with author). This attitude is diametrically opposite to Einstein’s notion that “not everything can be counted and most things that can be counted probably don’t count.”

Curriculum standardization, increased testing, and research-based methods have often replaced local discretion, faith, creativity, and teacher ingenuity. The unintended result of these reforms is the unraveling of symbolic fibers that once gave a hallowed enterprise passion, purpose, and meaning. What were once joyful places of promise and hope have too often become semi-mechanized factories bent on producing only a small fraction of what a well-educated person needs and, deep down, what a community or the country really wants or needs.

As a result, we see the public as losing faith in schools and educators losing faith in themselves. Symptoms of this malaise are

even more pronounced than when we wrote the previous edition in 2009. As an example, in 2014, Stacy Starr, winner of a national Top Teacher Award announced she was quitting. She had served successfully in the Elyria, Ohio, public schools for many years but finally had had enough: “I just can’t do it anymore, not in this drill and kill atmosphere” (Callaghan, 2015). Her decision hit a nerve and drew hundreds of responses from teachers and others across America, echoing her lament.

The concerns voiced by Starr are also playing out in other ways as increasing frustrations spring from teachers, parents, and communities. In many states there is a growing shortage of teachers, often because of rampant criticism of the profession and a focus on testing not learning. Schools of education are reporting fewer applicants for their programs to prepare teachers. Parents in the hundreds are “opting out” of national tests and some politicians are decrying the growing rigidity of curriculum and the amount of time spent used for testing rather than teaching. Charter schools are flourishing. Seasoned teachers are leaving the profession early because of the negative climate, and others are telling their students and their own children not to go into education. How did we get here and, most important, how do we turn the cycle around?

## **Reviving Cultural Beliefs and Practices**

Culture in successful organizations arises in the yeasty crucible of meaning somewhere between mystery and metrics. It is the glue, the hope, and the faith that holds people together: “Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope. Nothing which is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore we must be saved by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone” (McCain & Salter, 2008, p. 338). This heartening way of thinking should chart our future course to better schools: reviving the soul and spirit of a noble and vital enterprise.

## School Culture and Its Heritage

The concept of schools having distinctive cultures is not new. Willard Waller wrote in 1932: “Schools have a culture that is definitely their own. There are, in the school, complex rituals of personal relationships, a set of folkways, mores, and irrational sanctions, a moral code based upon them. There are games, which are sublimated wars, teams, and an elaborate set of ceremonies concerning them. There are traditions and traditionalists waging their world-old battle against innovators” (p. 96). His observations are still relevant today.

Parents, teachers, principals, and students have always sensed something special, yet undefined, about their schools—something extremely powerful but very difficult to describe or “put your finger on.” This ephemeral, taken-for-granted aspect of schools is often overlooked and consequently is usually absent from discussions about school improvement. For decades terms such as *climate* and *ethos* have been used to try to capture this powerful, pervasive, and notoriously elusive force. We believe the term *culture* provides a more accurate and intuitively appealing way to help school leaders better understand their school’s unwritten rules and traditions, customs, and expectations. The unofficial patterns seems to permeate everything: the way people act, how they dress, what they talk about or consider taboo, whether they seek out colleagues or isolate themselves, whether they work together, and how teachers feel about their work and their students.

Beneath the conscious awareness of everyday life in schools, there is a burbling rivulet of thought and activity. The underground flow of feelings and folkways wends its way, beckoning people, programs, and ideas toward often-unstated purposes: “This invisible, taken-for-granted flow of beliefs and assumptions gives meaning to what people say and do. It shapes how they interpret hundreds of daily transactions. The deeper structure of life in organizations is reflected and transmitted through symbolic language

and expressive action. Culture consists of the stable, underlying social meanings that shape beliefs and behavior over time” (Deal & Peterson, 1990, p. 7).

The concept of culture has a long history in the exploration of behavior across human groups. Anthropologists first developed the concept to explain differences among the unique, all-encompassing ways of tribes, societies, and national or ethnic groups. Later, other social scientists applied the concept to patterns of behavior and thought at work.

Formal organizations have clearly distinguishable identities manifested in organizational members’ worldviews, deeds, and customs. The concept of culture helps us understand these patterns—how they came to be and how they affect performance.

Of the many different *conceptions of culture*, none is universally accepted as the one best definition. One scholar defines culture as the web of significance in which we are all suspended (Geertz, 1973). Others define it as the shared beliefs and values that closely knit a community together (Deal & Kennedy, 1982). Another suggests simply that culture is “the way we do things around here” (Bower, 1966).

Schein (1985) provides a comprehensive definition, calling it “a pattern of basic assumptions—invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with problems . . . that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems” (p. 9). He views shaping the culture as one of the most important things that any leader must attend to.

Complex symbolic entities do not develop overnight. School cultures are complex webs of stories, traditions, and rituals budding over time as teachers, students, parents, and administrators work together and deal with crises and accomplishments (Deal & Peterson, 2009; Schein, 1985). Cultural patterns are highly enduring, have a powerful impact on performance, influence approaches

to school improvement, and shape the ways people think, act, and feel (Fullan, 2011; Smylie, 2009; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Everything, and we do mean everything, in the organization is affected by culture and its particular form and features.

## **Culture and Productivity: The Research Base and Impact**

In the business world, evidence across multiple studies documents the significant role culture plays in financial performance. Kotter and Heskett (1992) compared top-performing firms with less successful ones in the same business environment. They found that those with strong cultures attuned to prevailing business conditions outperformed their counterparts in several ways: revenue increased by an average of 682 percent compared to 166 percent, the workforce grew by 282 percent versus 36 percent, stock gained value by 901 percent contrasted with 74 percent, and income rose by 756 percent, eclipsing that of 1 percent in less cohesive firms.

In another major study, Collins and Porras (1997) found similar results in their look at visionary companies—places where cultural values infused all aspects of everyday practice. They compared these visionary companies with other top-rated firms (*comparison companies* they called them) and with average performers. A look at the long-term financial performance of these three groups tells a dramatic story:

- Shareholders who, in 1926, invested \$1 in the general stock market (average companies) would have accumulated \$415 in growth and dividends by the end of their study.
- Shareholders who invested the same dollar in a more select portfolio (above-average companies) would have earned more than twice that amount—\$955.

- Investors whose 1926 dollar was placed in visionary companies would ultimately see a portfolio worth \$6,356.

In business, culture stands out as a strong predictor of financial results. But does this same culture-performance link apply in education? Again, let's look at evidence.

## Culture and School Performance

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, *studies of effective schools* consistently acknowledged a climate and ethos (related to culture) that was purposeful and conducive to learning (Levine & Lezotte, 1990). A clear mission focused on student learning fostered high expectations for all students, focused the work of staff members, and generated motivation to learn.

In a landmark British study, Rutter, Maughan, Morrtimore, Ouston, and Smith (1979) established school "ethos" as a prime contributor to *academic achievement*. As in other studies of successful schools, they discovered that the underlying norms, values, and traditions were factors in achievement gains. The ethos, or culture, was a crucial factor in success.

Later studies of school change have identified culture as critical to the successful *improvement of teaching and learning* (Fullan, 1998, 2001a, 2011; Leithwood & Louis, 1998; Rossman, Corbett, & Firestone, 1998; Smylie, 2009). In study after study, when cultural patterns did not support and encourage reform, changes did not take place. By contrast, things improved in schools where customs, values, and beliefs reinforced a strong educational mission, a sense of community, social trust among staff members, and a shared commitment to school improvement.

Over time teachers in such schools developed a *group sense of efficacy* (a belief that they could become better), which generated energy to improve (Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2004; Tschannen-Moran,