

Culture-Shaping Tools

Toolbox B

3. Allocate Resources, Time, Rewards and Recognition

Site administrators' control of budget, scheduling, and staff development offers multiple opportunities to reinforce desired values and beliefs. Examples abound. One principal wanted to reinforce the belief that kids benefit when teachers talk collaboratively about student problems. She used Chapter One money to release teachers for student study meetings. She spent money from her budget to redecorate the teacher conference room. She arranged the music and PE teachers schedules for the convenience of student study team meetings.

A high school principal used the master scheduling process to reinforce the value of teachers planning collaboratively. Teachers who worked as colleagues were given top priority in class scheduling. Whether subtle or overt, leaders distributions of money, time, and recognition can reinforce existing values and beliefs or move the culture in new directions.

McGregor told of a company that wanted him to help install a management development program. The president hoped that McGregor would propose exactly what to do and how to do it. Instead, McGregor asked the president if he really cared about identifying and developing managers. On being assured that he did, McGregor proposed to him that he should build his concern into the firm's reward system and set up a consistent way of monitoring progress. He announced that henceforth 50 percent of each senior manager's annual bonus would be contingent on what he had done to develop his own immediate subordinates during the past year. He added that he himself had no specific program in mind but that each quarter he would ask each senior manager what had been done. The president continued his quarterly questions and evaluated once a year how much each of his subordinates had done for management development.

- Shein

Culture-shaping managers also develop something close to a reward routine; that is, they actively seek ways to provide frequent and visible praise or other recognition for even modest contributions to the service of important values. They seek to use each contact with another member of the organization -- a meeting, a phone call, a chance encounter in the hall, a memorandum in the in-box -- to send a message that reinforces a value theme. In fact, they organize their calendars so that they will be seen as spending a lot of time on matters visibly related to the values they preach. Even in dealing with outsiders they neglect no opportunity to reinforce the theme. What is said to customers, to investors, or to journalists can often have a powerful impact on people inside the organization. It provides further evidence that management's commitment to the values is "for real."

- Deal and Kennedy

While schools have fewer material rewards to distribute than industries, school cultures can be shaped by the ways principals allocate existing material, social, and symbolic rewards. In one school, teachers who put in extra hours, keep up their professional growth, and work well with others are given extra paid assignments in the summer, have their ways paid to meetings and conventions, and find their projects funded when others are not. In other instances, teachers who support the school's values are selected to be mentors for neophyte teachers or to have student teachers assigned to them as forms of increased professional status. In some schools teachers are recognized for particular achievements, thus reinforcing a set of goals and values. The allocation of the many small rewards (often recognition and attention by superiors) can reinforce particular norms and roles.

- Petersen

4. Manage the Communication Network

Most principals know how to write a memo, publish a newsletter, hold a teacher conference, or conduct a faculty meeting. However, few principals move beyond this superficial use of the communications network into the complexities of the informal web. Culture savvy leaders have identified their schools' gossips, priestesses, cabals and whisperers. They know how to test out new ideas with priests and heroes. They know how to spread key information through gossips and whisperers. They know how to build political support for innovations by jawboning cabal leaders and elbowing powerful resisters. Principals who over rely on formal, bureaucratic paths for information exchange miss 90 percent of their communication leverage.

Culture-Shaping Tools

Toolbox C

5. Hire, Transfer, Promote and Dismiss

Many principals use the "Personnel Function" to shape their school's culture. They hire teachers who already embody desired values and beliefs. They orient new staff so that their vision of what it means to be a "good teacher" matches the culture's. They use the formal evaluation process to recognize success, to set improvement targets, and exert authority. When possible, they transfer or dismiss teachers who immovably resist new values and beliefs. In some schools, the personnel function offers leaders the most immediate and forceful means to shape a school's culture.

One of the most subtle yet potent ways that culture gets imbedded and perpetuated is in the initial selection of new members. This cultural embedding mechanism is subtle because it operates unconsciously in most organizations. Most organizations tend to find attractive those candidates who resemble present members in style, assumptions, values, and beliefs.

— Shein

As has been found in the study of organizational control, the recruitment, selection, promotion, and demotion of individuals not only shapes the overall composition of the faculty, it communicates to others what values, norms, and beliefs are important. Principals can shape their school cultures by carefully filling their schools with teachers who share the norms and values of the culture. As is seen in other research (Dwyer, 1985; Deal and Petersen, 1988), principals consciously interview teachers seeking answers to normative as well as disciplinary and instructional questions. Selection for norms of collegiality, performance, and improvement can help foster a school culture based on those norms. By hiring and keeping teachers who share the norms and values of the school, principals can spend less time inculcating those values and reinforcing the culture.

— Petersen

It's clear, however, that the traditional practice of working with teachers one at a time is ineffective, an inefficient use of time, fails to recognize group membership, and does little to address the assumptions that guide the work of all within the school. What is known about organizational culture suggests the need for principals to work more often with groups of teachers or with an entire school faculty rather than exclusively with individuals.

- Alfonso

Today's knowledge and information bases are too complex for managers to control alone. Work behaviors found in productive places are characterized by continuous bargaining and negotiating for information and resources in a context of ambiguity, lack of clarity, overlapping territories, networking, opportunities to develop more powerful systems, job enlargement, and success. When one examines the outcomes patterns of teachers, a lack of exchange about professional concerns, enlivening the work culture of schools provides an enormous opportunity for promoting fruitful professional interchange.

The characteristic that separates great from ordinary organizations is the strength of the matrix; that is, the ad hoc and permanent work group structure. At any given time a high school should have as many temporary task forces as it has departments. The two different kinds of groups provide different functions for the organization and tend to integrate the organization as a unit.

- Snyder

In the best high schools, everyone seems to know what is important in a given year. Somehow in a good school, the focus for school development finds its way into all publications, bulletins, boards, hallways, ceremonies, activities and events. In other words, the goals pervade the culture.

- Alfonso

7. Anoint Heroes and Heroines

School leaders can strengthen current heroes, create new heroes from existing staff, or import new heroes. All three sources provide individuals who can demonstrate the desired cultural values and beliefs, who can personify the ideals. They display what can and should be in ways more vivid and convincing than any handbook, pamphlet, school plan, or other bureaucratic artifact. Instead of reading handbooks or listening to directions, staff members need only emulate their school's heroic figures to follow the right path.

Heroes arise in many forms. Some are giants who embody all the culture's major values and beliefs. Others are heroes for specific qualities. Perhaps they have a magic touch with low achieving students or they involve all parents or they consistently seek out and master the latest instruction/curriculum innovation.

Truly masterful culture shapers detect, acclaim, and multiply the heroic qualities of many individuals.

A recent edition of "Think," IBM's corporate magazine, profiled Joe McClosky, a veteran typewriter salesman in the Seattle branch, after he had logged thirty straight years in the Hundred Percent Club. By extolling the virtues of a veteran salesperson like McClosky, IBM told its young salespersons: here's a hero to follow. As motivation, McClosky was clearly superior to a memo on a new increase in sales quotas.

When Jack Welch, recently appointed CEO of General Electric, was an up-and-coming group executive, he had a special telephone installed in his office with a private number which was made available to all purchasing agents in his group. If the agents ever got a price concession from a vendor, they could phone Welch and the call would come in on his telephone. Whether he was making a million-dollar deal or chatting with his secretary, Welch would interrupt what he was doing, take the call and say: "That's wonderful news; you just knocked a nickel per ton off the price of aluminum." Then, straightaway, he'd sit down and scribble out a congratulatory note to the agent — a profoundly messy, and ambiguous, motivational procedure. But Welch not only made himself a hero by this symbolic act, he also transformed each and every purchasing agent into a hero, too.

There's a positive side to the socialization process for new teachers. New members of an organization need to learn how to behave, and the examples and advice received from peers are important in the process of adjusting to a new job or a new organization. When peer group norms support organizational norms, they can be a valuable asset to the organization. However, when the values of the group into which a new person is hired are out of line with the value system of the larger organization, the new person is likely to learn the immediate group's values much more quickly than those of the total organization.

The process through which new teachers are socialized is an area in which principals could have some influence, but typically have very little. Outside perfunctory welcoming comments, little is done to try to shape understanding and values that might guide the work of a new teacher. The process of socialization is primarily in the hands of informal teacher groups or in some school systems, representatives of teacher organizations. Principals need to be as actively involved in the socialization process as are teacher colleagues. Generally they are not and so miss the first and best opportunity to influence what is important and valued in a school.

- Alfonso

6. Establish Stretch Goals

Leaders may improve their school's culture by establishing stretch goals. Instead of accepting the status quo, these leaders communicate clearly and frequently that

incrementally in simple ways that every employee can understand. Examples include raising California Assessment Program (CAP) relative ranks by eight percent, reducing drop-out rates by 10 percent, or decreasing student absenteeism by 6 percent. The cultural norm underlying these stretch goals is that everyone has a responsibility to improve his/her own performance and to assist the improvement of others.

Harold Geneen, who ran International Telephone & Telegraph (ITT) for 14 years, demonstrated the importance of organizational stretch goals and doing what it takes to help the organization succeed. Each year, he set a stretch goal for ITT that over time increased profits of the multinational conglomerate from several hundred million to several billion dollars.

The dramatic growth did not happen in some mystical way. Geneen taught his managers to spend time talking together each month about the problems and challenges they faced in achieving their 10 percent stretch goals. He was tough about the goal, as well as about sharing and problem solving, and then doing what it takes to remove the roadblocks to success. He taught his leaders to shed their patterns of isolation and to become partners in the shared success of ITT.

- Snyder

Some of the most successful companies in America believe so strongly in heroes that they regularly, and subtly, make them. We call these people "situational heroes," because they tend to arise from particular situations within the business; they are heroes of that moment or day, although they can last for year given the right environment. Watson was a visionary hero for IBM; his supersalesperson of the month is a situational hero. Corporations need both. Visionary heroes light the way for all employees, but their influence is broad and philosophical. Situational heroes, on the other hand, inspire employees with the example of their day-to-day success.

Companies with strong cultures are quite adept at recognizing and creating situational heroes. Many place their potential candidates in bellweather jobs — certain critical positions that epitomize what the core of the culture is all about. When people know what the hero-making jobs are, they're energized. They know what's expected of them; they're free to be innovative. And over a period of time, the company becomes more innovative; it performs better. Creating such jobs and increasing their visibility is a prime requisite for hero-making.

A second type of "made" hero is the compass-hero. If a company is in a situation where things have to change and there are not role models for the change, it is good management practice to find role models, plant them inside the company, and make them heroes. By doing so, top management communicates that, in the future, business will be done either more aggressively or more courteously; in any case, less as it was done and more as the new hero's style conveys.

For years, AT&T had developed an organization of almost consciously average, low-key, likeable people called "Bell-shaped men." All of them, even those high in the executive ranks, were exemplified by the repairmen who traditionally took their sweet time installing telephones and making sure they worked, even though many of these accounts were not profitable for AT&T. But when phone service was deregulated, AT&T employees suddenly needed to learn marketing in their newly competitive business environment. Thus Archie McGill, a former IBM executive, was made vice president of business marketing, and he became a compass hero. He had cut his teeth in a much more competitive environment, as a result, his approach to business is very different from traditional AT&T norms. McGill and his people challenge traditional AT&T norms. McGill and his people challenge traditional practices, and, according to the *Wall Street Journal*, step across organizational lines. Thus, at AT&T, McGill stands out. In hiring McGill, management brought in not only important new skills but a symbol of the new direction.

— Deal and Kennedy

Heroes and heroines need to be recognized -- for themselves and for the values they represent. Otherwise, anti-heroes (teachers who are bitter, resentful, or retired on the job; students who are nonproductive or destructive) will fill the void.

— Alfonso

Heroes and heroines are tangible examples of values and provide role models for others to emulate. In any school there are people - teachers, students, staff, administrators, and alumni -- who embody and represent a school's core values: a teacher who turned down a corporate offer to stay in the classroom close to the students; a student who learned to read despite major learning handicaps; a custodian who knows each student by name; a principal who successfully fought the district superintendent and initiated a new program for parents; or a former student who once struggled with math and caused trouble and now is a well-recognized physicist. Potential heroes and heroines exist in any school. The problem is that they are rarely anointed or regularly celebrated.

- Deal

Culture-Shaping Tools

Toolbox D

8. Focus Attention

Most instructional leaders are time poor; too many things to accomplish in too little time. A leader's choices about his or her own time allocations powerfully symbolize desired values and beliefs. When teachers observe that a principal spends far more time maintaining an ordered campus than on improving instruction, unspoken values have been expressed. A principal who records the amount of time she devotes to various activities and then consistently reports to her faculty that over a quarter of that time has been spent in classrooms has made a powerful statement. Focusing attention can also be examined backwards that is conscientiously identifying what will not be done. Or as Jacobsen said it best, "Good management is the art of selective neglect."

One of the best mechanisms that founders, leaders, managers, or even colleagues have available for communicating what they believe in or care about is what they systematically pay attention to. By paying attention I mean anything from what is noticed and commented upon, to what is measured, controlled, rewarded, and in other ways systematically dealt with. Even casual remarks and questions that are consistently geared to a certain area can be as potent as formal control mechanisms and measurements.

If leaders are aware of this process, then being systematic and paying attention to certain things becomes a powerful way of communicating a message especially if the leaders are totally consistent in their own behavior. On the other hand, if leaders are not aware of this process, or they're inconsistent in what they pay attention to, subordinates and colleagues will spend an inordinate amount of time and energy trying to decipher what the leader's behavior really reflects, and even project motive where none exist.

- Alfonso

Thus, in changing culture, managers must be continually alert to the cultural fallout from all of their routine actions. Many managers, for example, develop questioning routines grounded in important values. The questions that the managers ask when subordinates make proposals, give presentations, or talk about their work tell these subordinates -- and others listening -- what expectations must be met to secure the managers approval.

- Firestone

To begin with, managers concerned about cultural change give it as much attention as they give any other truly top-priority task -- a lot. They put culture at the center of their agenda and consciousness, not in the *get to it as soon as possible* category. This is not mere exhortation; it is an empirical conclusion drawn from the careers of the two Tom Watsons, Alfred Sloan, and from our own observation of other chief executives who have been effective culture-shapers in industries as diverse as oil, electronics, scientific instruments, engineering services, and government.

- Deal and Kennedy

The principal authenticates the actions of individuals and groups who in their daily activities fulfill the basic cultural values and norms. Mitchell suggests an analogy to art critics and connoisseurs who help lay society to distinguish fine art from the common. In this role the principal uses various modes of attention focusing and authentication. The less public activities include writing a note to a student, teacher or parent who has done special or ordinary things very well. The more public activities are ceremonial or ritualistic in character. These include recognition dinners and assemblies for teachers, students and parents; honor rolls; academic, citizenship, and community service awards and prizes; obtaining press coverage beyond the usual for activities that highlight the achievements of the school or groups within it; and originating stories about new heroes or heroines and circulating them through school.

- Deal and Kennedy

9. Create Ceremonies and Rituals

and lead the show. They sequence, pace, and announce the acts. And, perhaps most important, they create new acts. Like circuses, schools are full of rituals and ceremonies. Canny school leaders can reinvigorate and modify existing ceremonies or create new ones and thereby shape the culture to improve student performance.

A high school principal in Alaska wanted teachers and students to value academic performance more highly. Given her highly competitive community, she established a monthly series of academic assemblies focused on achievement. The principal of a small elementary school began each monthly staff meeting with a whimsical award to one staff member. The awards celebrated norms such as concern for vulnerable students, collegiality, communication with parents, and so on. With only eight teachers, each teacher would receive at least one award per year.

In the English Navy, officers who acted with conspicuous gallantry or intelligence were "mentioned in dispatches." A middle school principal imported this ritual into her own school, and based on her own frequent observations in classrooms each month published a one-page list of "mentioned in dispatches." Each teacher's deeds were described in brief but sufficient detail to provide engaging examples.

The old heroes of corporate culture were attentive to the orchestration of all rituals of work life – from hirings and firings, to rewards and meeting formats, to writing styles, modes of speech, and the way to conduct a retirement dinner. They knew how significant these rituals were because they gave the culture a tangible, cohesive form. Today most managers will recognize formal procedures like budgeting or strategic planning as being important and manageable; but they miss or ignore all the rest of what goes on around them: the life of the culture.

In strong culture companies, *nothing is too trivial*. Any event that occurs in a work context is an event to be managed. These companies take pride in the way they do things and work hard to make sure that way is right. They regard the carrying out of activities in the correct way as tangible examples of the strength of the culture. Consider breakfast, for instance. You'll never see IBM salespeople along with the hordes of others congregating at Howard Johnson's every morning, because IBMers are encouraged to see their time as too valuable to waste in a roadside diner. When IBMers want coffee they will share it with a client or colleague. The point is for IBMers to begin the day not discussing baseball or the price of steak but to get a head start by focusing on the company, the industry, and their habits as professionals. In its early days, Holiday Inns had similar intentions via prayer breakfasts. In another company, everyone gathers for a regular Friday lunch, during which the entire staff mingles as equals in a camaraderie the otherwise busy work routine doesn't permit. Only in this benign atmosphere can serious things be discussed – and not be taken too seriously.

Many rituals or ceremonies seem like just a lot of hoopla. Yet the underlying purpose is very serious, as in the case of one large company we know: the company recognizes many successful efforts by transforming an old Navy back-patting ritual into the presentation of a plaque called the "Attaboy." When someone receives five "Attaboys" at this company, they are eligible for one "Gotcha," which is a still higher tribute, personally signed by the head of the company's United States operations.

The presentation of each Attaboy plaque is accompanied by a big ceremony. All work comes to a halt as a manager marches out into the hallway and rings a bell. Everyone files down from the executive suite and other offices, interrupting whatever they were doing to gather around. With a great flourish, the manager announces that another "Attaboy" is to be awarded. He reads its contents:

"I hereby announce, by the power vested in me, the award of one big Attaboy to _____ in return for his/her exemplary service in _____ program." There are congratulations all around, and when the winner goes back to his/her office, he/she probably tacks the Attaboy to the office wall.

Managers earning \$150,000 a year or more earnestly compete for these plaques. "Attaboys" are a symbol of recognition, and there is enough humor in the process to make it more fun than competitive. In awarding the "Attaboy," the company laughs at itself in a gentle way. Employees can't take the ceremony seriously – but it's a very serious ceremony. People care so much about these awards that when they complete a successful project, they automatically joke "Do I get an 'Attaboy' for that?": The "Attaboy" ritual acknowledges achievement, and thus makes the corporate do's and don't clear to everyone in the culture. The bottom line gets a boost along with morale.

Strong culture companies create a great deal of hoopla when someone does well and exemplifies the values the company seeks to preserve. And the best-run firms always make certain that everyone understands why someone gets a reward, whether it's trivial or grand ceremony.

At Intel, when someone does something well, the founder calls him or her in, reaches in his desk, and produces a handful of M&Ms as a sign of recognition. The ceremony began years ago, and now everyone keeps a supply of these candies ready. The giving and receiving makes everyone feel good.

At Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, a bronze star is passed from one achiever to the next. At the same time, a "Martyr of the Week" award consoles the person having the roughest time. The point here is the recognition that even a good worker can have a bad time.

Savvy corporate leaders spend a lot of time on rituals, not just devising them but taking part in them. They participate in new employees indoctrinations, they orchestrate the celebration that takes place with a promotion, and they make sure that everyone knows why the person is being promoted. They take special advantage of retirements by anointing the retiree as a cultural hero – the embodiment of the company's core values and beliefs.

But there are more than the obvious unexpected opportunities for celebration. Good managers spend a lot of time instituting ritual under the guise of designing and fine-tuning the management process – such as an improved format for operating committee meetings, a revised membership for the executive committee, a new and improved strategic planning process. All of these are rituals through which management dictates what someone will be doing for some time. If we agree that management should have some idea of what it wants its employees to do (arguable, of course, in some quarters), then the attention to ritual is good.

– Deal and Kennedy

Recently one perceptive principal in the Atlanta area held a "funeral" for a school that was being closed and merged with his own. He had students and faculty ritually close the school and march in a parade the six blocks to the new school carrying pictures of past principals and teachers.

In one Missouri elementary school, the principal gives out the "Rose Award" to children who have succeeded at something special that day. They sit on a rose-covered carpet to have their accomplishments read to them in a formal, yet nurturant way. The award communicates the values and norms of the school and signifies the importance of rewarding accomplishments. The "Rose Award" has become a significant ritual prized by faculty, students, and their parents. These ceremonies, rituals, and traditions provide a social glue to the school, bringing diverse elements together in a common bonding event to cement the ties they have to the purposes of the school.

- Petersen

Another strategy for building school culture is through ceremony. Pep rallies, assemblies, sports contests, and graduation have long been recognized as forces that promote school spirit. Individuals experience cultural values through ceremonies. However, the ceremonial life of a school is not restricted to assemblies and pep rallies. It includes retirement parties, parents' night, PTA meetings, and other episodic events where people gather to negotiate and celebrate the meaning of a school. In some schools, symbolic events are mandatory exercises, in others sacred occasions. The former add nothing of value to a culture; the latter are a primary source of cultural values and renewal.

Recently, a group of interested parents in Massachusetts decided to host a celebration in honor of teachers in Concord High School. They decorated the cafeteria and put silver candle holders on tables covered with white linen. Each teacher received a corsage on arrival bearing the terms: guru, mentor, guide, and teacher. Parents and teachers sang songs together around a piano bar, drinking wine and eating cheese. Dinner was potluck; each parent brought a dish. After dinner, speeches and choral music from students completed the evening. A representative of the National Association of Independent Schools (himself a parent) remarked at the conclusion: "People wonder what private schools have that public schools often lack -- this is it!" An important ceremony with deep and powerful messages. An inexpensive way of honoring teachers that could be expanded to other aspects of life in school.

- Deal