

Resource 17: Creating a performance culture

Culture implies the commonality of assumptions, values and norms. They are shared by the majority of staff, although not everyone will share all the values and norms. However, even if teachers do not share specific assumptions, these will still influence their behaviour, because they comply with the expectations of others, or resistance against these expectations. School culture can therefore be defined as the shared assumptions, values and norms of staff that influence their functioning. (Visscher, 1999)

Visscher's notion of commonality is central to this debate. Performance management will never go beyond the superficial level of engagement if it does not become embedded in assumptions, values and norms, which point to a distinction between the management of a system and the leadership of a process. The debate about the relationship between leadership and management is littered with semantic distinctions but, for the purposes of this discussion, leadership is seen as creating the cultural perspective, with management reinforcing it with an appropriate operational infrastructure. In this sense they are symbiotic - which is worse, management without leadership or leadership without management? Both situations are dysfunctional, but it's leadership that secures engagement and commitment and creates significance, and this is what makes the difference in an area as complex as performance management.

A school's culture is its most enduring aspect. The explicit roles of the school, the policies and procedures, feel much more 'tangible' but they are also much easier to change. An administrator can change the roles with a decree. But you can't tell the staff of a school to 'change your culture.' Culture is deeply rooted in people. It is embodied in their attitudes, values and skills, which in turn stem from their personal backgrounds - from their life experience (including their professional experience) and from the communities they belong to (including the professional community of a school).

Figure 1 (overleaf) represents the tension between the formal, structured approach to performance management and the affective approach. Of course, any diagram will create an artificial dichotomy between these elements. They should not be seen as polarities but as parts of a continuum. The precise location of a performance management approach is determined by a range of complex interchanges between variables. It is the purpose of this discussion to consider the implications of particular approaches for the effectiveness of any attempt to enhance performance.

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Figure 1: A typology of performance

	The Formal Domain	The Affective Domain
<i>The performance imperative</i>	<i>External policy driven</i>	<i>Internal morally driven</i>
Definition of performance	Policies and procedures Performance criteria Job descriptions Focus on conformity	Values and norms Images and metaphors
Organisational processes	Managerialism Short-term planning Line management Focus on consistency Functional training	Leadership Shared meaning and practice Dialogue and debate Focus on improvement Personal development
Motivation	Extrinsic For reward	Intrinsic, for growing
Culture	Individualistic Competitive	Cooperative, collaboration
Measurement	Objective Quantitative Imposed	Subjective Qualitative Negotiated