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Cultures Built to Last: Systemic PLCs at Work™

By Richard DuFour and Michael Fullan

Study Guide

This study guide is a companion to the book *Cultures Built to Last: Systemic PLCs at Work™* by Richard DuFour and Michael Fullan. In *Cultures Built to Last*, two of North America's most prominent educational thinkers team up to examine how to improve education. Combining Richard DuFour's extensive knowledge of PLCs with Michael Fullan's best-practice research for meaningful change in schools, districts, and whole systems, this book takes PLCs to the next level.

This guide is arranged by chapter, enabling readers to either work their way through the entire book or to focus on the specific topics addressed in a particular chapter. It can be used by individuals, small groups, or by an entire team to identify key points, raise questions for consideration, assess conditions in a particular school or district, and suggest steps that might be taken to promote a healthy school culture.

We thank you for your interest in this book, and we hope this guide is a useful tool in your efforts to implement PLCs systemwide.

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Chapter 1

Clarity Precedes Competence

1. What does the term *professional learning community* mean? What are the characteristics of high-performing PLCs, and what are the core ideas that make up the process?
2. What questions must PLC team members ask themselves throughout the process to keep the focus on educating all students?
3. According to the authors, “PLCs can play a central role in dramatically improving the overall performance of schools, the engagement of students, and the sense of efficacy and job satisfaction of educators” (p. 4). What can PLC leaders do to emphasize these benefits to the PLC?
4. What roles do district leaders play in achieving and sustaining high-performing districts?
5. How can states support their schools’ PLC process?

Chapter 2

Creating Coherence and Clarity

1. What is a *driver*? Why do educators working toward school reform often choose the wrong driver for their efforts?
2. Within coherence making, what is the difference between *alignment* and *mindset*? What roles do they play in whole-system reform?
3. What common mistakes do leaders make that hinder coherence? Have you made any in your PLC? How can these mistakes be overcome to achieve greater collectiveness?
4. Why is establishing coherence just as important as structural alignment?
5. What is *systemness*? How do you make sure there is no distinction between the system and individual in a PLC?

Chapter 3

The Loose-Tight Dilemma

1. How should leaders engage people in the complex process of cultural change? Should they be *tight* or should they be *loose*?
2. What is initiative fatigue? How can districts prevent this?
3. What is the carrots-and-sticks approach, and what are the dangers of implementing severe sanctions?
4. Why is an increase in site-based autonomy associated with a decrease in student achievement?
5. Successful districts are characterized by interdependence—vertical and horizontal partnerships. How prevalent is interdependence in your PLC? How can you promote interdependence?
6. How can leaders ensure they are being attentive to ongoing two-way communication?

Chapter 4

The Loose-Tight System in Action

1. What key areas of responsibility must PLC leaders address in order for the Common Core State Standards to come alive in their schools?
2. What can leaders do to ensure all staff members have clear knowledge and understanding of what the CCSS initiative entails and why it is worth their effort?
3. Compare an *intended* curriculum with an *implemented* curriculum. Which should be the focus of leaders in a loose-tight district?
4. How should leaders monitor progress within a school, between schools, and beyond the schools of a district?
5. What is *reciprocal accountability*? Why does it support overall improvement? What are strategies for demonstrating reciprocal accountability?
6. A distinguishing trait of PLCs is that learning is ongoing for everyone involved in the process. How can leaders create a climate of ongoing adult learning in the PLC process?

Chapter 5

Sustaining the Improvement Process

1. If they're not mindful, how can school or district leadership hinder sustainable improvement plans?
2. What steps must leaders take to create organizations capable of sustaining the improvement process?
3. How can leaders effectively influence the thinking and behavior of team members so that there is widespread commitment to long-term goals and short-term practices?
4. "One study of school systems (countries, states, and provinces) that had success in going from good to great found that those systems relied on collaborative practices to sustain the systems' improvement" (p. 67). What must be done at the district and classroom levels to create this improvement?
5. Why is widespread leadership necessary for sustainable improvement efforts?
6. How does your team celebrate the success of short-term actions? How can leaders plan for short-term wins?