Introduction

This guide will be very helpful in suggesting a new kind of leadership model in your school. Oftentimes, we see a leadership hierarchy that looks like a tree, flowing from the highest executive down to the most junior associates. While this works in some cases, when thinking about leadership in a school, we need to shift our thinking away from a classical model and move towards a distributive leadership model.

A distributive leadership model narrows in on key influencers within a school network and strives to capture a more precise depiction of how information flows between influencers. By aligning these influencers with your core mission as a school, they will be able to work with others in the school and soon, everyone will be aligned with your core mission. We will illustrate this in more detail in later pages.

This guide will be split up into two modules: 1) Changing your mindset from classical hierarchy to distributive leadership, and 2) Using the “Golden Circle” as a way align influencers in your school to your core mission. See the “table of contents” for more detail into what each module will contain.

Keep in mind that this paper is not suggesting that you change the organizational hierarchy within your school, just the leadership. By the end of this document, there will still be the Superintendents, Principals, and Vice Principals, teachers, janitors, bus drivers, etc. What this document will do, however, is remodel how you think about implementing changes to your school. We are modeling an effective way to create and organize the leadership mechanisms in a distributed way so that it contributes to the overall mission of driving student learning.

After reading this guide, you should be able to come away with several tangible actions, or practical concepts to implement into your school.
Module 1

Transforming your leadership model from a classical hierarchical model to a distributive leadership model
Two Effective Tools to Change Culture and Transform Groups

The goal of this module is to provide you with several principles that you will be able to implement into your day-to-day environment. When doing this, we must think about what tools are effective in changing culture.

We have learned, through practical experience, that two effective ways change the culture and transform groups into consistently high performing teams are (1) a distributive leadership execution model that reaches and empowers influencers at all levels of the organization, and (2) allow these individuals to define clear impactful actions aligned to a simple core mission and vision. This empowers the whole team to deliver better results.

1. A distributive leadership model to reach and empower influencers at all levels of the organization

2. Giving these individuals the ability to define clear and impactful actions aligned to a simple core mission and vision. This empowers the whole team to deliver better results
Two Effective Tools to Change Culture and Transform Groups

When thinking about the organizational structure of a school, most people see the board at the top, where influence and information trickle down to the superintendent, principal, assistant principals, department heads, teachers, and cascading down to the most junior contributor. The challenge with this model is that it reflects the organization from a classical up and down model, rather than an integrated and distributive model, which allows influence and information to flow in multiple directions. The difficulty with thinking about and modeling a traditional leadership structure is that it only models communication in the organization as going up and down, not side-to-side.

Instead of looking at a school leadership model in the hierarchical sense, visualize it more as a center of influences mapped into a dot plot, or an interconnected network of nodes, with each dot representing an individual in your school, connected in a web. Additionally, giving individuals the power to create a mission and vision for themselves will help them feel like an integrated part of the organization. They will be enabled to “influence” those around them to become more deeply engaged in the school’s learning-focused mission and will drive better results.
When hearing the words “organizational charts,” most think of the classical model created by the Scottish-American engineer Daniel McCallum (1815–1878).
Modeling Classical Hierarchy

Simple Exercise:

Take a minute to think about and draw out the organizational structure within your school. For example, start with yourself and draw out from there. Chances are, it will look much like the model shown on the previous page.

A traditional organizational chart shows line responsibilities, who reports to whom. It also reflects regulatory accountability, and for some people most importantly - who is the boss by title.

However, it also represents the distance between the “leadership” at the top and the most junior people at the bottom, and, depending on the organization, the intermediaries between them. By modeling this way, there is a separation of areas - or organizational silos. In reality, many people functionally work outside of their “line” of work, and that isn’t shown on the classical hierarchical model.

This organizational model can be referred to as “Trickle Down Leadership.” With this type of leadership, you often hear expressions such as:

- “We need to push things down through the organization”
- “We need to delegate things down through the organization.”
- “We need to make a cultural change down through the organization.
- “We need to escalate this up to the manager.”
Trickle Down Leadership

Trickle Down Leadership perpetuates organizational silos and the idea that the most senior people in the organization are the real leaders and main influencers. Everyone below them on the organizational chart are assumed to only be doing the work. This illustrates an idea that is referred to humorously as “Seagull Management.”
Trickle Down Leadership

The seagull manager is the one that is constantly hovering around, watching and yet never seemingly getting close enough to help or add value. Then suddenly and unexpectedly, they swoop down into an area, make a lot of noise while drawing all the focus to them, and ignore everything you are doing. They then grab pieces of “credit” and rapidly fly out - leaving you to have to clean up the mess with your team.

Overlaying this on the classical hierarchical organizational leadership model illustrated above, the “seagull manager” could be a senior person, someone higher on the leadership tree. While they sit higher on the organizational structure, the people below them are doing the work. Let’s illustrate this in a school setting.

In a school, you may have encountered a seagull manager. They can be bad actors within a school that can cause general roles to be less fulfilling and have less impact on others. Seagull managers wait for their employees to complete a project, successfully teach students, etc., and don’t add much value to the actual projects. Then, at the last second, they come in to take the credit.

The idea of a classical organization perpetuates this problem; it concentrates more power with people at the top, and less on the people who are delivering the core services of the organization. Changing your leadership model from a classical model to a distributed model (illustrated later in the module) lessens the risk of having seagull managers. There are also some important aspects that the classical hierarchical model doesn’t represent.
What the Classical Leadership Model Doesn’t Represent

The classical leadership model leaves out several important details of a school. Some of these including:

How things actually happen day-to-day. For example, there are a lot of issues and people that are not directly related to us. A janitor who is tech-savvy might step in to help a teacher having technical issues because the IT attendant called in sick.

Just because someone is higher on the organizational ladder does not reflect how effective they are in driving results.

Here is a simple example:

Say that you are a principal in your charter school, and you need your day to go with as few mishaps as possible; your week has been stressful, and you just want one smooth day in your week. What is more disruptive to day-to-day delivery?

An assistant principal calling in sick.

OR

Your IT help desk going out on medical leave unexpectedly.
What the Classical Leadership Model Doesn’t Represent

There is a high likelihood that your day will be disrupted more if your IT help desk won’t be in school today. You will likely be able to complete your assistant principal’s job duties until they are back in the office. However, if there is a technical emergency, you might not have the expertise to fix the problem. Even though the IT department is not “high” on the classical model, their absence is a bigger disruption than an assistant principal being gone.

This isn’t to take away from the importance of jobs that might be “higher up” on the classical model structure. There is still a great need for school boards, principals, assistant principals, and so on. However, starting to think about your school in a more distributed fashion removes emphasis off of these “higher-up” positions, and redistributes them in a way that more accurately represents the day-to-day school functions. Let’s finally illustrate what the distributive leadership model should look like.
Effective Execution and Leading Cultural Change Are Done in a Distributed Fashion

Implementing a distributive leadership model is a game-changer in schools. Gaining a deeper understanding of the distributive leadership model and how effective it can be in changing culture will elevate your charter school to a point where you can focus on student learning as the ultimate outcome.

In this simple example, every person in a school is represented by a dot. Each dot, instead of trickling down like the classical model, is connected through a web of lines. It shows the functional interactions between people every day, and the circle of influence each person could have on the people around them. Dots we call “influencers” are people within the school that have influence with others. These do not necessarily have to be people with hierarchical leadership positions on the organizational chart.
Think about this example:

Four history teachers are sitting down talking about their syllabus and the structure of their class for the upcoming year. One teacher has been teaching for 30 years while the rest have been teaching for 10 years or less. Three of the teachers are inclined to take advice from the longest-serving teacher, and although they all have the same title, the teacher that has been teaching the longest is the “influencer” since people around them are willing to listen to what they say. If you get that teacher aligned with your core mission as a school, they will be able to pass that mission along to their “circle of influence.”

Simple Exercise:

Take a second to think about the employees that work in your school. Then, map out the key influencers in each department, or area of expertise. Maybe there is a history teacher that everyone looks up to, or an IT employee that knows your systems really well. Map out who these “influencers” are in your school.
How Does a Distributive Model Help to Execute and Change Culture?

Distributive leadership focuses on collaboration, shared purpose, responsibility and recognition of leadership influence irrespective of role or position within an organization.

Identified characteristics of distributive leadership include the building of trust, the creation of a learning culture, and the sharing and dissemination of information. (Brown and Littrich, 2008)

So how does it work in practice:

What a leader is doing is purposefully driving cultural change and effectiveness from the inside out.

In your school, on a daily basis, you probably spend a significant amount of time outside your “line of responsibility.” This could be with different levels of leadership, cross-functional and “support groups”, or colleagues in other departments.

*Reminder that this is not an organizational change, but a new way of thinking about leadership, and effectively making changes in your school.*
How Does a Distributive Model Help to Execute and Change Culture?

The simple exercise that you completed on page 13 should have revealed your school's key influencers. This is crucial in the process of implementing change. By identifying and empowering influencers, we do not force change down through an organization, but we transform it from the inside out. This is more sustainable and more effective.

By pulling these influencers in for their input and insight, you help them view how critical they are to the overall success of the initiative. When people are allowed to have input into an initiative and not just the person who has to do the work, they become invested, and accountable to drive success.

Some of you may already do this subconsciously or intuitively, and maybe you do it in a different way.
Module 1: Conclusion

When organizing a school, it is important to consider your different options of leadership and organizational models; the classical hierarchical model that fosters an environment of seagull management and doesn’t fully represent the day-to-day interactions, or the distributive leadership model which reflects who has the greatest influence in an organization, promoting efficiency and greater effectiveness.

By identifying several key “influencers” throughout your school, you have taken one of the most crucial steps towards implementing change, and you will more easily be able to align the organization as a whole to your school’s student-focused mission. This will foster an environment of leadership on all levels, teamwork, and the building of trust and you will more easily be able to get work done within your organization.

Continue on to Module 2 to discuss how to align influencers with your school’s core values.
Module 2

Using Simon Sinek’s golden circle to align influencers in a distributed leadership model to the core values of the organization and empowering key influencers.

Reminder: You will be using your identified “influencers” as a mechanism to implement change in your school. This will not become the new hierarchy of your school, however, when wanting to spread change, you will want to go to these centers of influence to spread the word more effectively.
How to Get All of Your Team Aligned to the Same Mission?

The process described in Module 1 can seem like a daunting task. How are you supposed to align your hundreds or even thousands of employees to the same learning-focused mission? How does an effective leader recognize influencers and leaders and encourage them to help make the appropriate cultural change?

The answer emerges with the creation of an organization-wide “why,” and empowering the influencers and leaders in your school to define clear impactful actions. When you bring your employees in on this process, you will get more engagement and a sense of outcome ownership within the school.

For a charter school founder, the first step is to create a “why” internally with other founders. You need to decide why you are starting a school, and why you want to help students. Identifying and clearly stating your “why” will then lead to the next step of aligning influencers with the mission and driving the outcomes leaders envision.

Clear Learning Partners is committed to helping schools focus on 100% student proficiency. As an example, a common “why” that we want to see in schools is to educate students and maximize learning outcomes. But to do this, schools need to realize that everyone in a school, regardless of title, is a teacher.
Every School Individual is an Educator First, Regardless of Their Title.

We challenge each of you, regardless of the formal title, position, or responsibility, to define yourselves as an “educator” or a “teacher”. One intention of this document is to motivate you as the reader to create an administrator’s creed. Something like “Every individual regardless of formal responsibility is, first and foremost, an educator/teacher. All other conditions are secondary.”

“Every individual, regardless of formal responsibility is, first and foremost, a teacher. All other conditions are secondary”
Every School Individual is an Educator First, Regardless of Their Title.

Consider this example:

A bus driver is the first interaction that a student might have with a school employee. Even though the bus driver is not a “teacher” in the literal sense, wishing the student good luck on a test could help the student be seen. They would give the student the confidence needed to succeed because someone remembered that they had a test and took the time to wish them luck. Even though every school employee is not a teacher, everyone has the opportunity to positively impact a student and should think of themselves as someone engaged with, and supportive of, the student learning experience.

If each person in the distributive organization were to embrace their primary purpose as a teacher - it would be transformational.

The creation of a “why” is the first step in getting every employee aligned to the same mission. Take some time and think about what your “why” is.

The next step, after you have completed your “why,” is to get everyone in your organization aligned.
How to Spread the ‘Why” Through Your Organization

Most organizations view culture as “top-down” as described before; they think the most effective way to spread the “why” is to have everyone report it down to the people who report to them.

As you can see from the graphic, most organizations try to embed their culture from the top down. However, this has some serious consequences. Much like the “telephone” game, messages get distorted as each person reports to the next. Additionally, depending on the size of your organization, the “why” could need to move through numerous levels of people, and across different areas and functions. In the end, it might not even reach some of the key people who are lower on the organizational chart.
A Simpler, More Effective Way to Get Employees to Support Your ‘Why’

A simpler and more effective way to get individuals to support and embrace effective culture change is by using the “Golden Circle.” It is so simple that some people may just overlook it immediately. But we have found it to be one of the most effective tools in empowering individuals in getting buy-in, collaboration, and driving results.

Shown below, we have stated our organization’s (CLP’s) “why.” After we have done this, we will go through the process of naming “what” we want to see happen; what the performance expectation will be. After we name what we want to see happen, we will fill in “how” we are going to make it happen. These are clear, actionable items that will make the “what” happen. This should provide a framework for future decisions. It is important that you bring in your identified influencers into the process of filling out the “what” and the “how.”

*The Golden Circle* by Simon Sinek

![Diagram of the Golden Circle](image)
The “Why” is the core value or simple mission of the team or organization. This must be set by the leader as the key building block to what you want to achieve. This is the leaders’ key accountability and should not be delegated. If you do not know the why - no one will follow you. The leader must put a stake in the ground.

The “What” is the expected outcomes or objectives you want to achieve - this can be established in partnership with key stakeholders, influencers, and others.

The “How” is the key to getting buy-in and moving the organization forward. The employees/individuals who will be executing the plan must be integral participants in designing the path forward.

Simple Exercise:

Take a break from this document and think about how you would fill out the golden circle for your school. What is your Why? What are you expecting to achieve at the end of this? How are you going to achieve your goals?

After completing your Golden Circle, connect it back to the distributive leadership model that we learned in Module 1. Once you have your internal “Why,” and you have identified who the “influencers” are in your school, bring them into the process of creating goals, and creating a plan to achieve those goals. Instead of pushing a culture change “down” through the organization, work it from the inside out.
Once your Golden Circle is filled out, a couple of things should happen. First, you should have clearly identified influencers in your school. These people will be the leading force in embedding a mission-aligned culture through your school.

Next, you should have a clear and impactful “why” statement. This should be learning/student-focused and will primarily reflect the vision and purpose envisioned by school administrators.

After you have created your “why,” you should bring your school influencers in on the process of creating “what” actions you envision. Ex. Improved learning outcomes, more student involvement, parent involvement, better student-teacher relationships, etc. There should and will most likely be multiple statements in the “what” category.

After that, you will work with the influencers to create clear, actionable items that will target each of the statements articulated in the “what” section. “How” will you improve learning outcomes? “How” will you increase student involvement? Etc.

Once you have completed the simple exercise in Module 1 by identifying your influencers and your golden circle is completed, you can send your influencers off with the mission of spreading your “why” and actionable items to their circles of influence. Give it some time, but once people start seeing your influencers act in a way that is authentically aligned with your school’s “why” – they will start doing the same.
Module 2: Conclusion

At the beginning of this document, we said we wanted to give you several actionable items that you could implement into your school after reading this. Here is a list of immediate items you can implement:

1. Identify influencers in your school
2. Create a “why” statement
3. Work with the influencers to create actionable items
4. Implement these actions into your daily work-life and spread them throughout your influencer’s circles of influence.

We hope that the process of creating the golden circle will be a powerful tool in helping you become a more effective school leader. By allowing your employees to be engaged in creating actionable items, they become more engaged with your core mission. In creating your golden circle, you will affect positive change in your school culture from the inside out.

If you have any further questions, please visit our website at clearlearningpartners.org or email us at support@clearlearningpartners.org