

Creating and Sustaining a Performance and Development Culture in Schools

Introduction

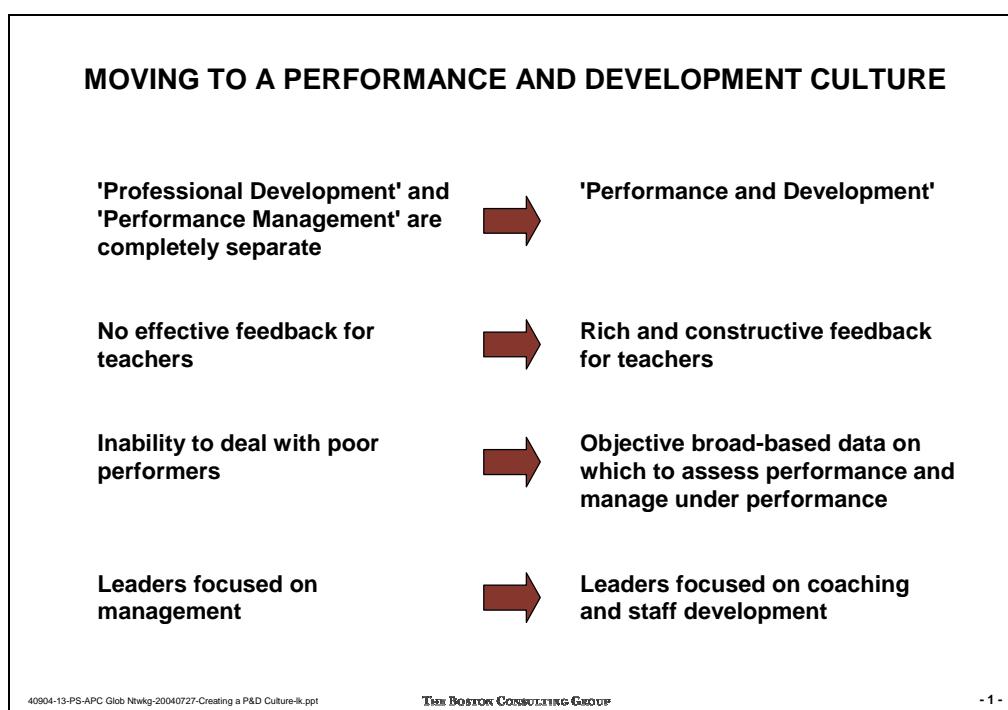
In 2003, the Victorian Department of Education and Training asked BCG to develop a 10-year workforce development strategy for government schools. As part of the assignment, we had discussions with principals, leadership teams and a cross-section of teachers in 25 Victorian schools.

From a range of recommendations on workforce development, the one I want to talk about today – one that we believe is crucial to improving student outcomes – is that schools need to develop a "performance and development culture".

We believe that schools need to move away from the traditional 'minimum standards-based' approach to managing teacher performance and development, becoming more like professional services firms in the way that they manage and continuously develop their staff.

This may seem a radical shift in the way we think about teacher development, but some of our best schools have already adopted this model, with considerable success.

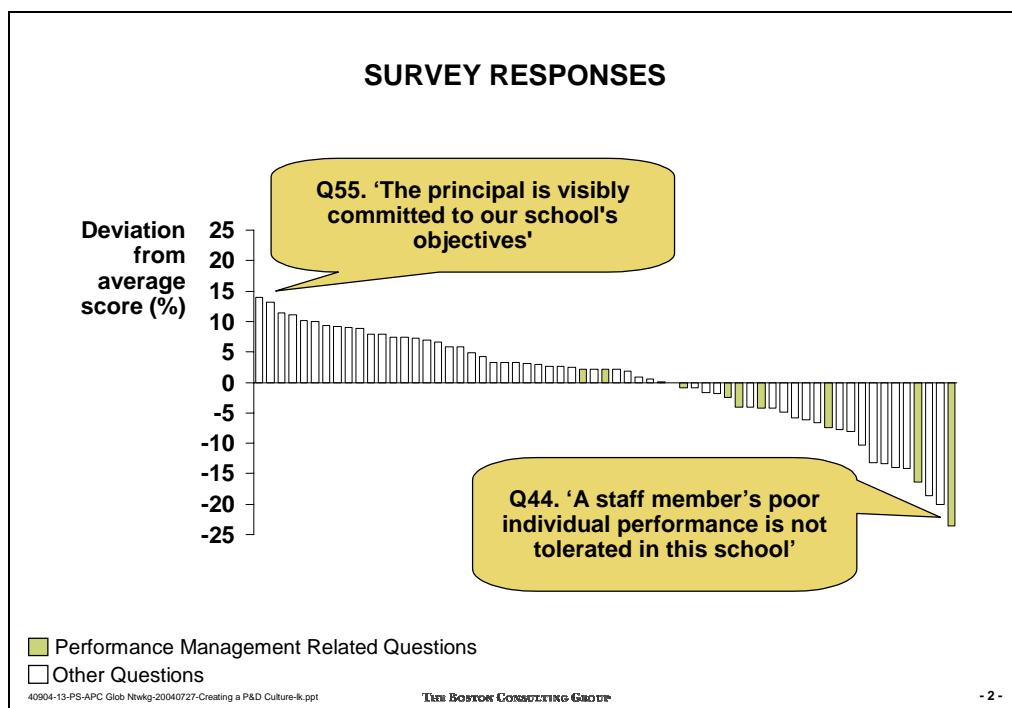
The exhibit below summarises the journey that we believe schools need to embark upon in moving to performance and development culture.



Teachers prefer to work in schools where there is effective performance management.

To understand how teachers feel about their working environment, we conducted a climate survey of a small but representative number of Victorian government schools. The survey asked teachers to rate their level of agreement with 55 statements about their individual schools.

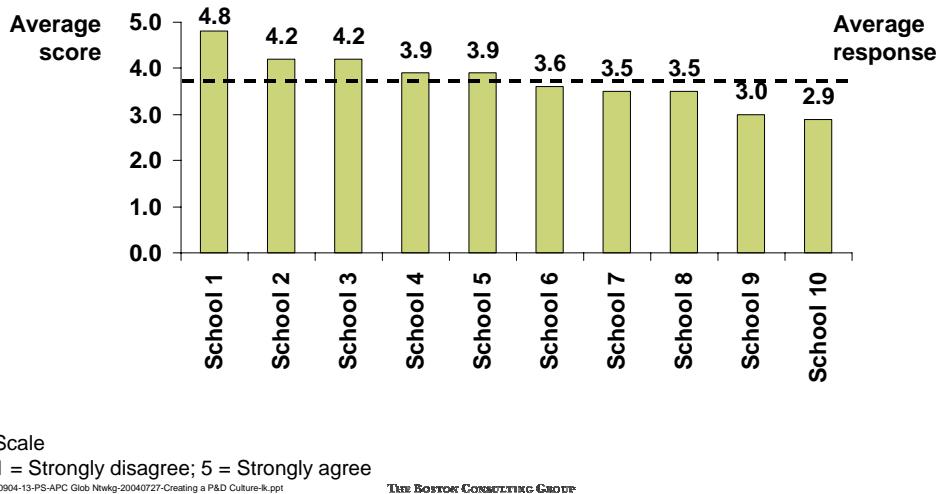
Six of the 55 statements related to effective performance management. As the exhibit shows, these statements attracted some of the lowest scores. And the statement "A staff member's poor individual performance is not tolerated in this school" scored lowest of all.



The focus groups we ran with teachers reinforced this view. It's clear that most teachers hate it when their schools tolerate staff who are not committed to achieving results for their students.

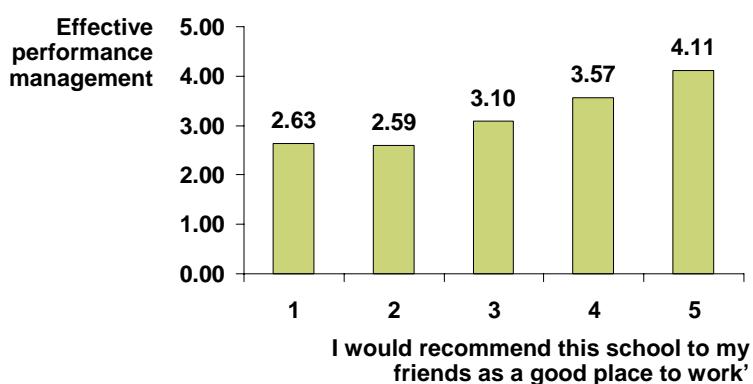
Even in our small sample of schools, however, we observed diverse results on performance management, with some teachers enthusiastic about the practices in their schools but many rating them very poorly.

SCHOOL SCORES ON EFFECTIVE PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT



Not surprisingly, the schools that teachers would “recommend to friends as a good place to work” were often those that also scored well on the effective performance management questions.

TEACHERS LIKE SCHOOLS WITH EFFECTIVE PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT



What is wrong with teacher performance management and professional development today?

It's not difficult to understand why many teachers are concerned about performance management and professional development.

Most teachers are alone in the classroom, few work in teams, and they rarely learn from each other or from more experienced teachers.

Most teachers receive negligible constructive feedback about how they are going and how they could improve.

Most school leaders are neither trained in, nor comfortable about, giving constructive feedback or developing staff.

The performance management system in Victoria and elsewhere requires a teacher to provide evidence that he or she has "met the standard". Around 95% of teachers do so as a matter of course. Good teachers generally see the system as a complete waste of time that does nothing to help them improve further. Principals find it equally ineffective in dealing with underperformers – some have told me that 'the one decent piece of work an underperforming teacher will do during the year is to assemble material to show that they have met the standard.' This is a system that neither helps to weed out the 5% of consistent underperformers nor contributes to the continuous professional development of the other 95%.

Teachers want to be seen and treated as professionals

Teachers are professionals and want to be treated as such. They want to work in an environment that nurtures, recognizes and rewards their ongoing professional development.

The Doctor model

Many people when they think of professionals think of doctors. However, when you break down the performance management and professional development features of the doctor model, its not that far away from where teachers are today.

| DOCTOR MODEL | | |
|-------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Model features | Doctor model | Teacher model today |
| Pre-service training | 7 years+ to become a doctor | 'Are you qualified & accredited to teach?' |
| Learning from peers or more exper. prof. | Limited for most parts of profession | Limited |
| Professional development feedback | Limited for most parts of profession | Limited |
| Feedback from customers | Anecdotal only | Little feedback from students & parents |
| Performance management | None (only in extreme cases via peer review) | Not very effective: "have you met the standard?" |
| Major form of ongoing development | Seminars/literature Further qualifications | Seminars/literature Further qualifications |
| Role of leaders in relation to prof. devt | Very limited – even in hospitals | Not traditionally a core role for school leaders |

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Beyond doctors' own initiatives, there is very limited support for, or monitoring of, their performance or professional development.

The professional services model

I want to discuss an alternative model for professional development, one that exists in professional service firms like my own. This is a model that recognizes the importance of pre-service training but puts a huge emphasis on ongoing professional development. The focus is on continuous development for everyone, from the strongest to the weakest staff member.

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES MODEL

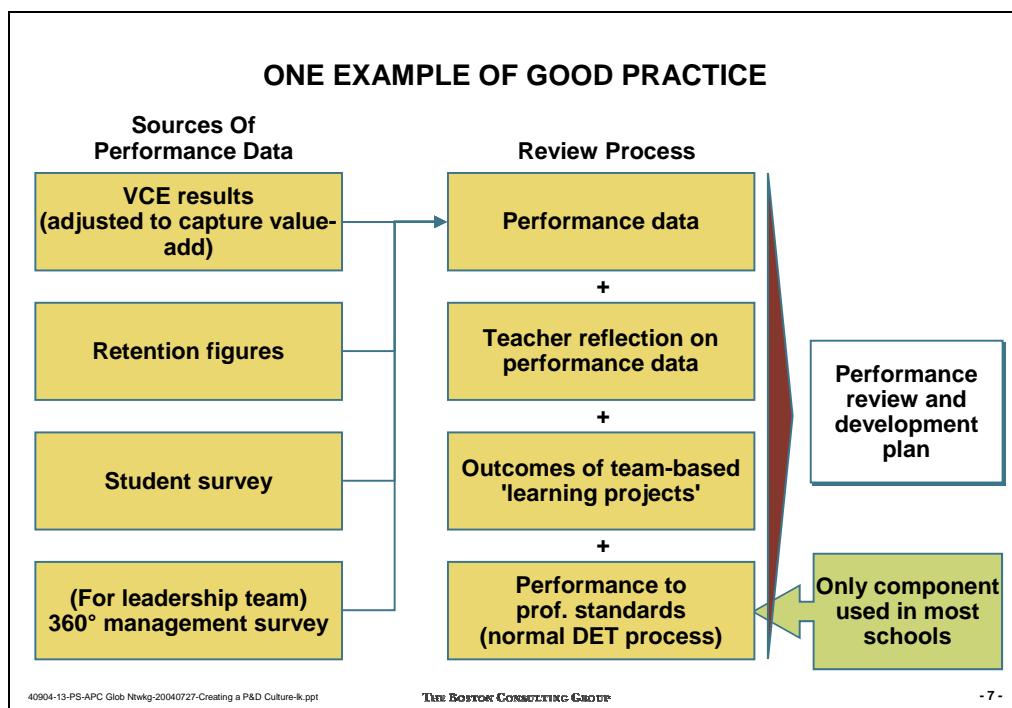
| Model features | Doctor model | Professional services firm model |
|-------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| Pre-service training | 7 years+ to be doctor | Important, but 'on the job' learning is more important |
| Learning from peers or more exp. prof. | Limited for most parts of profession | Significant |
| Professional development feedback | Limited for most parts of profession | Constant, using rich, objective data |
| Feedback from customers | Anecdotal only | Constant |
| Performance management | None (only extreme cases via peer review) | Rigorous, tied closely to prof. development |
| Major form of ongoing development | Seminars/literature Further qualifications | 'Apprenticeship' & team-based learning |
| Role of leaders in relation to prof. devt | Very limited – even in hospitals | Staff development a key leadership role |

The professional services model is about continuous learning and development, based on comprehensive, timely information on each staff member's professional strengths and weaknesses. It's also about leaders being given the tools and the responsibility needed to manage and develop their staff. I believe it's a model that would work well in our schools.

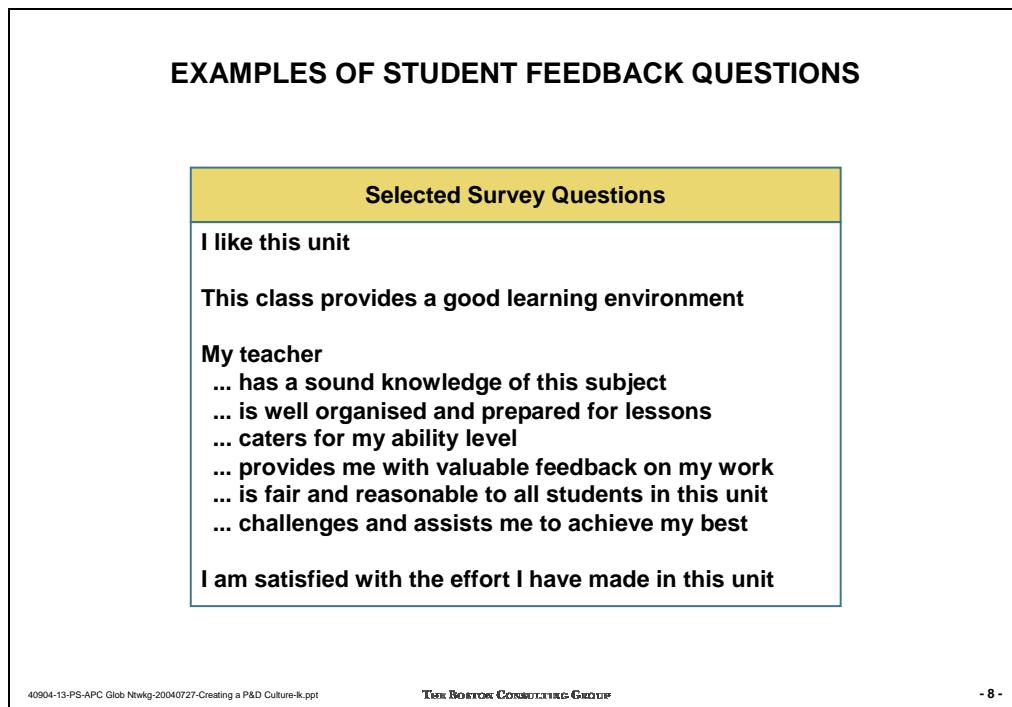
And I may be biased, but if I were a new teacher I think I would prefer that kind of working environment to the medical doctor model.

Some schools are far closer to the professional services model

Some Victorian schools are already moving in this direction. For example, Bendigo Senior Secondary is an excellent school with a deservedly strong reputation. When people in the education community talk about Bendigo SS, most focus on the school's ICT resources, but its approach to teacher performance and development is just as important. The next exhibit shows the data given to Bendigo teachers before their annual performance reviews, giving them time to analyse and reflect on their professional development over the year. Professional services firms typically use such rich data to frame and guide performance management and development discussions.



Bendigo is the only Victorian school that I'm aware of – government or independent – where students provide specific feedback on all their teachers by subject. Some of the questions students are asked to answer are shown in the next exhibit.



Curious about student feedback, I took the opportunity last year to ask my Year 8 son to rate his 10 teachers on a 5-point scale against these questions. It took him 10 minutes to complete the survey and then we had a fantastically informative discussion about what was and wasn't working for him in his classes. His favourite subject was drama and his favourite teacher was his drama teacher, so I wasn't surprised when that teacher rated highly on most questions. However, the drama teacher scored badly on 'My teacher provides me with valuable feedback on my work'. When I asked my son why, he said 'because he never tells me'.

Now, imagine that that answer was the same for all students in this teacher's class. What incredibly valuable feedback for a highly performing teacher!

In my view, student feedback is one of the most under-utilised development tools in schools.

Glen Waverly Secondary is another outstanding Victorian school. Darrell Fraser, the principal, was recently appointed Head of the Schools Division in the Department of Education. His approach to leadership development helped to make Glen Waverly an exceptional school. That approach included the introduction of a feedback group for each leadership team member, comprising the teachers working in that member's department or area of responsibility. The group convenes at year-end to review the leadership team member's performance. Using an external facilitator and a 'transformational leadership framework', the group highlights the leader's strengths and areas for development. The facilitator documents the outcome and presents it to the leadership team member and the principal. The materials are fed directly into the leadership team member's annual review and her or his performance plan for the following year. This is a very simple and powerful model for supporting continuous professional development.

Bellfield Primary is another outstanding school, this time in an underprivileged Melbourne suburb. The school has seen enormous improvement in its student outcomes since the arrival of John Fleming as principal 10 years ago. John Fleming, who is literally loved by his staff, is a great example of "principal as coach".

John Fleming regularly visits teachers' classrooms. He observes teaching and examines students' work. This allows him to give rich, constructive feedback and tailored advice on how individual teachers can meet their specific challenges. It also provides him with a basis from which to encourage staff and reinforce their areas of strength. In our focus groups, staff told us that they initially found this kind of feedback confronting but now value it as constructive rather than punitive.

In each of these examples, the school leaders see staff development as a core leadership function. Each of the schools has its own way of providing constructive, actionable feedback to teachers and leadership teams. And each has a "performance and development culture" that is much closer to the "professional services model" than the "doctor model" in its approach to performance management and professional development.

Creating and supporting a performance and development culture

The Victorian government schools I've described have what we might call a "performance and development culture" – and it shows in the outcomes they achieve for their students. The challenge now is to make these practices more widespread.

BCG's report recommended the introduction of an accreditation model for a performance and development culture in schools. The model provides a framework that outlines performance and development expectations, but allows schools to shape their actual practices to suit their own situations. The Victorian Government has adopted this approach, and the Minister has stated that she expects all schools to become accredited by 2008.

The exhibit below outlines the accreditation model. An initial 45 schools have been nominated to go through the accreditation process this year.

ACCREDITATION MODEL FOR P&D CULTURE

| Element | Metric |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Teacher induction | Mentoring program for all new teachers |
| Teacher effectiveness feedback | Annual review uses data from 3 of: • Adjusted student outcomes • Student feedback • Parent feedback • Observation • Student attendance |
| Tailored professional development plans | Plans clearly linked to individuals' strengths & development needs |
| PD that meets individuals' professional development needs | All teaching staff participate in relevant, effective PD |
| Staff believe school has professional development culture | Staff believe school culture supports personal/professional growth & development |

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In conclusion

All teachers deserve to work in school with a performance and development culture, where continuous development is nurtured, feedback is broad and rich, and where consistent underperformance is simply not tolerated. Over-reliance on 'minimum standards' is unlikely to get us there.

Adoption of these principles can be a significant lever for cultural change in our schools and for sustainably improving student outcomes.