Creating a Performance Culture?
Informal Institutions and Education Reform

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A dissertation
submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Washington
2013

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Abstract

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Performance management, despite its popularity as a strategy to improve public service quality, has had mixed results. One reason is that successful reform depends not just on changes in formal systems but also on changes in organizational values. This mixed-method dissertation analyzes a large urban school district to assess the role of performance pressure and organizational climate in the development of performance management values.

In contrast with prior research, it finds that pressure has a negligible effect on espoused performance values and a negative and significant impact on the adoption of performance management behavior. By contrast, organizational climate has a strong and positive impact on performance values. Follow-up analyses suggest, first, that pressure may not be necessary for organizational change, and second, that values conflict and features of the managerial and policy context itself—policy complexity, fiscal austerity, and contested outcomes and outcome measures—reduce organizations’ responsiveness. These findings raise serious questions about the efficacy of high-stakes accountability reforms, and highlight the need for policymakers to consider alternate approaches that foster organizational trust and the build capacity for reform.