# TYPOLOGY DESCRIPTIONS

Once the Cultural Typologies Worksheet is completed, add the number of points assigned in each column and record that number at the bottom of the worksheet. The total points provide a picture of your school's culture. Each column represents a typology that describes the culture of the school. Schools typically have a mix of typologies, with one or two that are predominant and a few points in one or two other columns. Discuss the (a) the accuracy of that picture and (b) the issues you must address to move toward a truly collaborative culture.

**COLUMN A** **Toxic** – A culture where teachers focus on the negative aspects of the school's operations and personnel. Energy is expended to prevent change. Past failures resurface regularly and staff tend to place their personal need and convenience ahead of students' interests and needs. Communication is directive and one-way. Quality teachers view the school as a place to get away from while average and complacent teachers remain. There is a pervasive sense of hopelessness and pessimism. Ceremonies that attempt to celebrate student success seem phony and become a point of contention and ridicule.

**COLUMN B** **Fragmented** – A culture where a teacher is isolated from other teachers and is insulated from outside interference. This culture fosters individualism and discourages collaboration and external support. Teachers are usually unaware of what other teachers are doing in their classrooms. Autonomy is valued; teachers are very self-reliant. Nothing new is considered because staff members are content with their existing practice. Leaders are seldom available. Help is viewed as arrogance on the part of the giver and incompetence on the part of the receiver.

**COLUMN C** **Balkanized** – A culture where collaboration and sharing occur within like-minded groups, friends, or cabals. This culture has subcultures of teachers that are strong and compete for position, resources, and territory. These groups may be departments in high schools, teams in middle schools, or grade levels in elementary schools. The collective acceptance about learning, teaching styles, discipline, or curriculum is restricted to members of the smaller groups. Sharing views with other groups creates conflict. This culture leads to poor communication, indifference, and groups (even the most effective teachers) going separate directions.

**COLUMN D** **Contrived Collegiality** – A culture where the forms of collaboration are determined and structures are created by the school leadership. The school leaders try to speed up the process by forcing collaboration and controlling the situations that foster it. The teacher becomes regulated and predictable. This culture is meant to support new approaches and techniques, but it is superficial and actually reduces teacher motivation to cooperate beyond normal expectations. This culture initially discourages true collegiality, although that is a credible starting point. Some contrivance is necessary for the development of a true collaborative culture.

**COLUMN E** **Comfortable Collaboration** – This culture finds teachers engaging in conversations that do not ask critical questions about their work and how to improve. It is limited to advice giving, trick-trading, and material sharing. Teachers meet frequently and discuss new ideas, but conversations are restricted to comfortable support for each other. Criticism is non-existent or minimal. Teachers are generally aware of what other teachers are doing in their classrooms and occasionally visit each other to discuss successes they have had with problem students.

**COLUMN F** **Collaborative** – A culture where teacher development is facilitated through interdependence and the majority agree on educational values. There is a commitment to change and improvement among teachers. Help, support, trust, openness, collective reflection, and collective efficacy are at the heart of this culture. Teachers are aggressively curious about teaching and learning. The focus of discussions among teachers is student achievement. Teachers spend time observing each other as a means of critically analyzing teaching methods. School leaders are adamant in challenging ineffective teaching practices while encouraging the individual development of each teacher.

A significant portion our work on this typology activity reflects the writings of Fullan & Hargreaves (1996) and Deal & Peterson (1999). In addition, we have used the work of other culture experts and the findings from our research as the basis for our working definitions of the six typologies. These definitions and accompanying Cultural Typology Worksheet were designed for use by school improvement teams attempting to assess and describe their existing school culture.