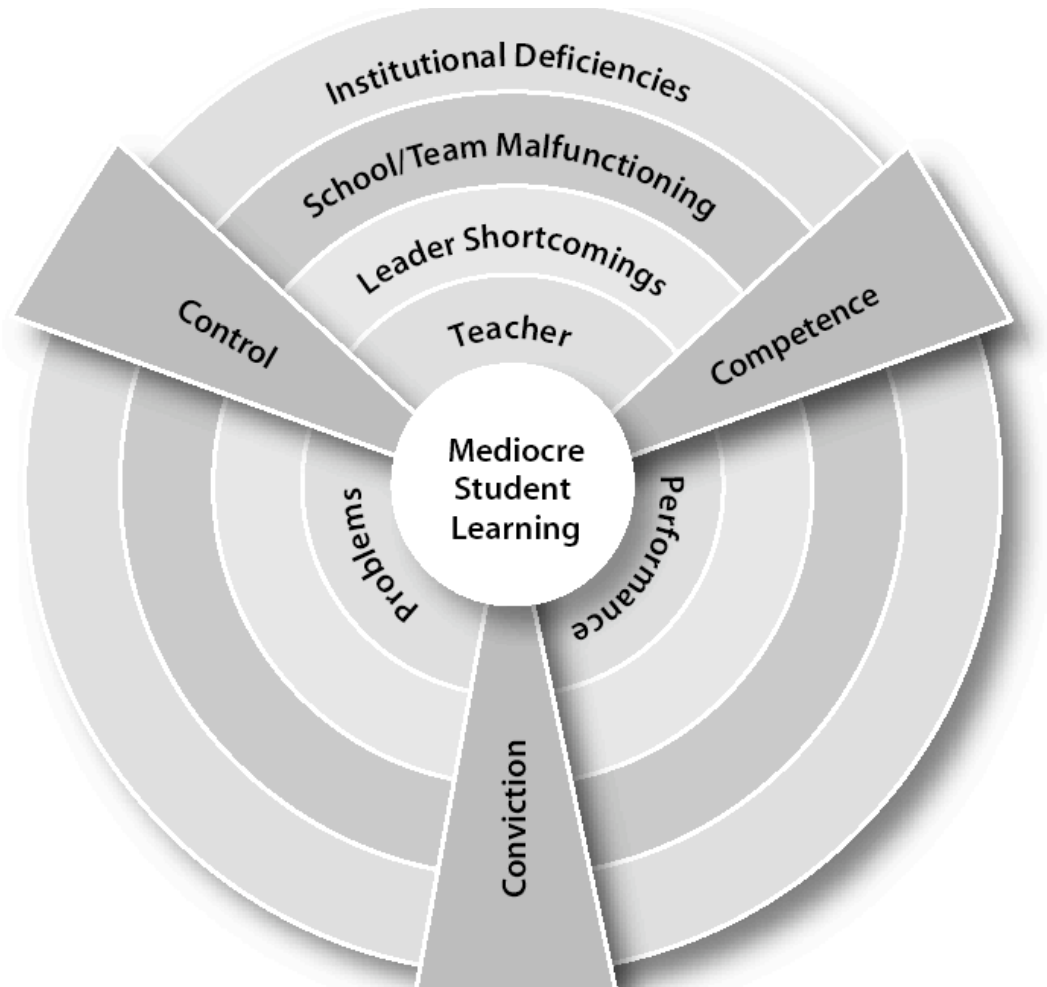


ACSA Leadership Summit
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8:30-10:30



Skillful Leader

Confronting Conditions That Undermine Adult and Student Learning

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Objectives

Participants will be able to:

- Explain and apply a set of indicators of excellence for groups who are engaged in solving problems of student learning
- Diagnose the presence of mediocre group work and the specific nature of malfunctioning groups in their own work settings
- Propose a set of skills and strategies for confronting and changing ineffective professional communities and stretching groups from “good to great.”

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I. FRAMING THE CHALLENGE: Why we need powerful professional communities

- Voices of Students
- Ice Breaker: “What a PLC is...is not”
- Portraits of “Regressive” Communities
- Identifying and Assessing Low Performing Groups in Your Own Work Setting

II. THE “3 C” FRAMEWORK: WHAT GROUPS NEED TO BE SUCCESSFUL

- Capacities of Collaborative and Accountable Communities
- Sharing Exemplars
- Closing the Community Performance Gap

III. INTERVENTION AND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

- Adaptive vs. Technical Work (Heifetz)
- Visions of Community
- Assessment Tools
- Final Voices



PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY QUICK PORTRAITS

0. Toxic Community

- Interactions characterized by frequent exchanges of complaint, disappointment and criticism
- Finger pointing and blaming are most common responses to achievement problems
- Communication between administration and teachers is poor
- Benefits to students are rarely the primary consideration in decision-making
- Faculty organizes and aligns itself in recognized cliques; those who don't agree with self-appointed spokespeople hide or stay away.
- Most attempts to structure interaction meet with resistance and cynicism
- New teachers experience significant “negative induction” (“Don't kill yourself; you're going to cause the rest of us extra work.”)
- Extensive use of “they's” and “them's” by both administrators and teachers
- Conversations among veterans dominated by “marking time” talk
- No trust between teachers and administration—frequent grievances
- Evaluation viewed by teachers as trivial and full of “gotchas” and by administrators as “something to get through”

1. Laissez-faire Community

- Polite exchanges typical of faculty room conversation; many folks stay away.
- Teachers sometimes work together over school management tasks but rarely over instructional issues
- Decision-making emphasizes the sanctity of the individual classroom.
- Each individual determines what s/he will be responsible for academically
- Teacher performance evaluations rarely deal with student achievement or positive or negative contributions to the school community.
- Seniority-not students' needs- determines teaching assignments and allocation of resources such as classroom space, materials etc.
- Administrators do “don't-let-on deals” and encourage quid pro quo exchanges
- Veteran teachers are friendly but reluctant to share ideas or materials with colleagues or with new teachers.
- Problems are viewed as things to be avoided or ignored.
- Veterans protect each other and tell “war stories” (“We've paid our dues; we've been in the trenches and know it all.”)
- Blaming students is common in meetings; however, many teachers have good relationships with students within their classrooms
- Professional development is attended but not embraced
- Teachers take no responsibility for their professional development; administrators view professional development as a one-size quick fix
- New teachers are expected to sink or swim—and be quiet and self-effacing while doing so



2. Congenial Community

- *Teachers enjoy sharing positive stories about students*
- School is joyous and positive—humor is abundant
- People support each other; administrators offer frequent targeted praise and find many small ways to reward members for their contributions
- “Sunshine Fund” has ample money. People are supported in times of illness or personal difficulty
- Teachers care about students and talk about seeking “the best” programs, materials, modifications for them
- Cooperation is high on annual ritualized curriculum projects such as the 7th grade Medieval Festival
- Preserving positive relationship at all costs is a primary value; confrontation and conflict are discouraged
- Communication is marked by cooperation but not challenge or directness
- Standards are not necessary because everyone is presumed to be excellent—or at least working hard
- Data is not necessary because everyone “understands” everyone else
- Questions or doubts are seen as rejections of who we are and what we stand for
- New teachers feel loved but not necessarily stretched or taught

3. Collaborative Community

may have some elements of a congenial community plus

- Teachers practice the behaviors of a collegial culture (Little '78)
High Frequency of
 - A. *Talking about teaching*
 - B. *Observing one another*
 - C. *Making materials and planning lessons together*
 - D. *Teachers teaching each other about the practice of teaching*
 - E. *Teachers asking for and willing to provide one another with assistance*
(Rosenholtz'86)
- Teachers problem solve together
- Time is allocated for curriculum meetings, and those meetings are substantive and productive
- There is extensive focus on students and student performance with most emphasis falling on ways to catch up individual students
- Some teachers and administrators choose to use goal setting
- School and district goals are written but not always known/addressed by all teachers
- Risk taking and collegial problem-solving are encouraged and supported but not always formally documented
- Student performance standards are well known and referenced; adult performance standards are inconsistently known and applied.



4. Accountable Community

May have some of the characteristics of a Collaborative Community plus.....

- Policies and practices demand and support student effort and excellence. Adults require students to redo work and are willing to stick with individuals until they can earn credit for reaching high standards.
- Adult conversations focus on identifying and solving increasingly complex problems rather than on defending the status quo. Gaps and problems related to achieving standards are viewed as opportunities for community growth
- Teams know how to manage time wisely, stay focused on important goals, and are able to “push back” respectfully against too many new demands on their energies if doing so is necessary to pursuing agreed upon actions
- Administrators and teachers accept responsibility for students’ failure to learn, do not blame students, and seek solutions both inside and outside the group.
- Teacher and administrator interactions and decision-making are shaped by a shared sense of urgency and hope and by high levels of trust in one another’s good intentions and capabilities
- Both teachers and administrators model openness and vulnerability; individuals who do not keep up part of an agreement or temporarily let a team down do not try to cover up their lapses or to shift blame onto others
- Members of work groups and teams do not shy away from uncomfortable information or interactions. They have learned how to tolerate and manage productive conflict and how to surface “elephants” and “brutal facts” that might undermine group functioning.
- Clear standards and criteria are used to evaluate faculty, staff and administrator performance. All members of the organization give and receive feedback in relationship to performance standards
- Supervisors do not inflate performance ratings; exemplary targets are set supported, and pursued tenaciously
- Teachers and administrators use multiple sources of data to assess teaching and learning and to diagnose performance gaps
- Professional conversation and communication are supported by clear, mutually established norms



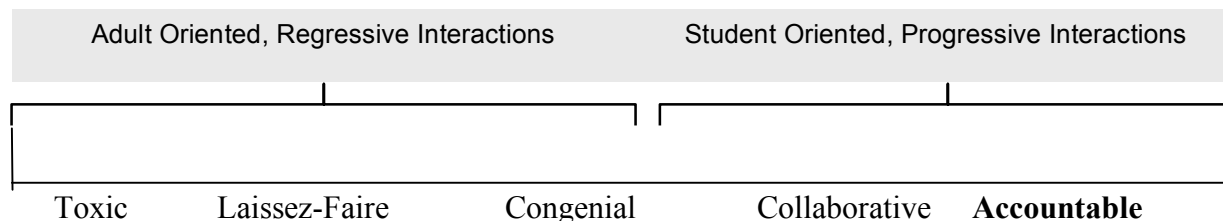
TAKE A SNAPSHOT WITH THE CONTINUUM OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Fill in the names of the communities to which you belong or with which you work regularly. Using the profile descriptors on the previous pages, draw a line along the continuum to indicate the current level of development for each group

Community name or brief description	Toxic	Laissez-faire	Congenial	Collaborative	Accountable
<i>e.g. grade 3 team</i>	_____				



Continuum of Community Capacities



THE 3 C'S

Conviction: *Holding and consistently acting on a set of beliefs or stances that move the school or institution closer to its mission of making sure children learn and achieve at high levels.*

Conviction includes a constellation of beliefs or stances that fall into categories such as

- **Ability to Learn**

One can “get smarter” both as a student and as an adult who is trying to help students.

Intelligent behavior can be developed through effective effort, i.e. through hard work, use of strategies and investment of time.

And

If we work together effectively, we are likely to be smarter than if we struggle alone.

- **Development of Expertise**

Each of us is individually responsible for engaging in productive problem solving, for contributing to group knowledge and understanding, and for making our voices and opinions heard within the professional community.

- **Need for Autonomy vs. Collective Commitments**

Once we have jointly committed to a group strategy to benefit students, none of us has the right to ignore or go against that decision when the classroom door is shut—or when the going gets rough.

- **Ownership and Responsibility for Results**

It’s my job—it’s our job-- to do whatever it takes to help students master difficult concepts and meet rigorous intellectual challenges independently and effectively. When students do not learn we have the responsibility to figure out why and to take action to remedy situations we can influence.

- **Urgency and Hope**

The situation is urgent; we cannot wait for other times and other days. There are no children to waste. They have only this time with us and every minute counts. We have the moral and ethical obligation to hold onto hope even when causes seem lost.



Competence: *Having and using a repertoire of skills and substantive knowledge about effective collaboration/teamwork and adult interaction; having and using problem-solving skills to address student learning needs.*

Skills for group competence can be divided into rough sets

Taking on the Tough Stuff

- Dealing with Conflict
- Confronting the “Elephants” (a.k.a. Unpromising Practices and “Brutal Facts”)
- Communicating in difficult situations

Developing Problem-Solving/Decision-Making Skills

- Helping the group get smarter (a.k.a. making conversations progressive)
- Knowing and using problem-solving processes to arrive at collective action
- Knowing and using “step-back” or checking strategies

Anchoring the Work

- Using Standards and Data
- Establishing and Enforcing Norms

Sustaining Transparency

- Making practice public
- Examining one’s practice with curiosity and vulnerability

Control: *Adequate structures, processes and resources to support groups charged with improving student achievement and carrying out the mission of the school.*

- **Nuts and Bolts** (Time, Space, Technology and Materials)
- **Focus of Effort**
- **Influence or Authority**
- **Incentives, Rewards, Sanctions**
- **Freedom from Distraction** (Inappropriate Interference, Micromanagement, Competing Urgencies)
- **Alignment of Key Systems** that Impact the Work (e.g. Supervision and Evaluation, Professional Development, or Student Assignment and Scheduling)



Adaptive vs Technical Change

(Sources Heifetz and Linsky Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading 2002)

Skillful leaders working to develop collaborative and accountable communities are aware of the distinction between asking people to make **technical** or **adaptive** changes.

Technical changes require little adjustment and few changes in behavior. They can be carried out with an existing repertoire simply by adjusting routines and procedures. Technical changes can often be mandated, are usually top-down and are easily assessed by levels of compliance. Examples include structural changes like: creating common planning time and creating longer instructional blocks. While the intention of such changes may be to stimulate conditions for better instruction, teachers can avoid going through painful adjustment by **reducing implementation to what they already know how to do**, thus reducing the stress of change. For example, they “adjust” by attending common meetings but not by modifying classroom practice based on the data examined or the agreements reached. Instead of using long blocks to differentiate their instruction, they might respond to longer blocks by using their same repertoire for 90 instead of 45 minutes.

Adaptive changes force people out of their comfort zones and require them to adopt new practices that demand substantial changes of behavior. Adaptive changes require **ownership** and cannot be mandated.

Closing achievement gaps cannot be solved by technical solutions alone but require adaptive change often calling for solving problems for which there is no currently known solution or prescription. Examples include: giving up some individual autonomy and adopting shared practices known to impact student learning; willingness to expose practice to scrutiny of colleagues and meaningfully distributing leadership to the staff. These changes demand a “change of heart” –not just compliance, and almost always results in a short term a period of insecurity, the likelihood of mistakes and perhaps even a feeling of incompetence.

Leaders can implement technical solutions without a professional community but cannot implement adaptive solutions to problems, such as closing achievement gaps, without the ownership and “pooled intelligence” of the entire community.

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

IMPLICATIONS FOR STUDENTS and IMPACT ON LEARNING

- ✓ What is the likelihood that this meeting will have a direct positive impact on teachers' instructional decisions and therefore students opportunities to learn? Why?

- ✓ What types of students are most likely to be affected positively by this adult interaction? Negatively? Why?

- ✓ What changes are most likely to occur in all teachers' classrooms as a result of this interaction? Why?

- ✓ As a result of this interaction, what is the likelihood that **adaptive** rather than just **technical** changes will occur?

- ✓ Were there any missed opportunities to pool intelligence in order to improve student learning?

- ✓ Coaching ideas?



PRACTICE APPLICATION

DIAGNOSING COMMUNITIES

For each observation, take literal notes: write down the key quotes, phrases or actions that you see as indicators of each community’s level of development:



Group #1 _____

Notes:

Level on Community Continuum—and Why:

Implications for Students:

Likely reasons for current level of performance:

PART TWO

Capacities Needed:

Where we might start:





Group #2 _____

Notes:

Level on Community Continuum—and Why:

Implications for Students:

Likely reasons for current level of performance:

PART TWO

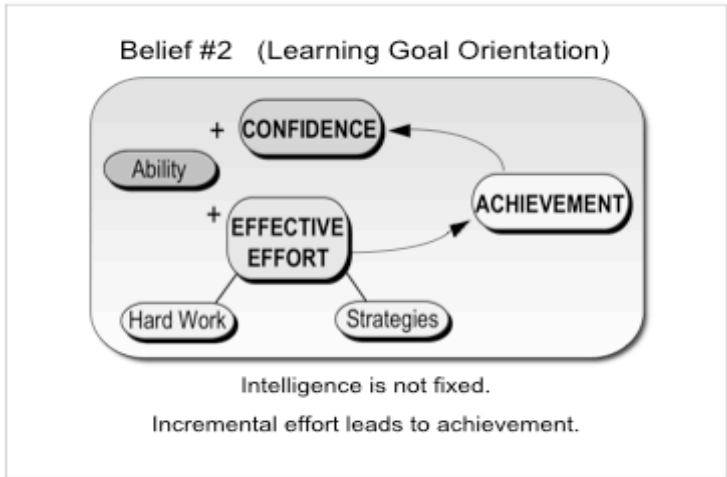
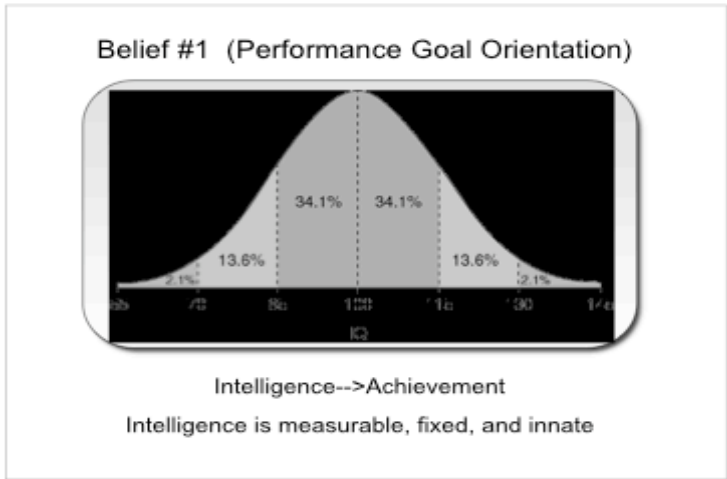
How this group is similar to one in which I work:

How this group is different from one in which I work:



TWO BELIEFS ABOUT ABILITY AND ACHIEVEMENT

What connections can you make between these ideas and the behavior of your highest and lowest functioning professional communities?



Building Accountable Leadership Communities (Adapted from *The Skillful Leader: Confronting Mediocre Teaching* 2000)

The key to confronting mediocre teaching and confronting other conditions that undermine learning depends on building strong leader communities. Here are four community-building ideas to help confront mediocre teaching.

1. Calibration Exercise: groups observe a videotaped lesson (or observe a class for 15-20 min).

Purpose: To build consistency and validity in defining shared definition of excellence and shared recognition of gaps in performance.

Tips

- ✓ Do not establish an advance focus
- ✓ Have members give a holistic rating 1-10 and prepare data to support rating
- ✓ Share ratings and strength and stretch data
- ✓ Discuss possible feedback and recommendations

2. LASW (Looking at Supervisor Work): groups examine leadership products

Purpose: To raise the standard and consistency of supervisor work and to align the work of administrators with that of teachers.

Tips

- ✓ Members bring multiple copies of teacher performance observations or summaries written about teachers who are below standard in some area
- ✓ Reports are read and responded to with questions and suggestions
- ✓ Readers should pay particular attention to: 1. Details of evidence and examples. 2. “Soft ball” suggestions, and inflated language which bury concerns and overweight positive areas

3. SOS Case Study Teams: members present case problems to small group

Purpose: Create a leader community where members faced with difficult personnel issues are expected to ask for help and/or give assistance.

Tips

- ✓ Every member is expected to share a case during the course of the year
- ✓ Clearly **define** case problem before moving on to solutions. Symptoms and underlying problems are often confused
- ✓ Individual who gets case help must report back to the group with progress reports

4. SOS Tenure Check Teams: Members present cases of teachers for whom they have reservations about granting tenure.

Purpose: To increase the shared accountability for granting tenure in order to elevate the quality of teachers receiving tenure.

Tips

- ✓ The ethos is that tenure is not an automatic process and must be earned—“If in doubt let them out.” If a principal has “no reservations”, he/she should share with the group explanations for each tenure decision.



CAPTURE YOUR THINKING

