

# On the SAME PAGE

## Four strategies to encourage a variety of voices to join together in creating organizational change

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“Collaborative agency” refers to teachers’ shared belief in their ability to positively affect students. It’s the “how” of teacher beliefs—the group dynamics of cohesion, socialization, functional diversity, and innovation opportunities that shape teachers’ beliefs and actions.

If the team is so cohesive that teachers have many overlapping interactions and feel attached to one another, it’s easy for all members to learn about new approaches, be reflexive about their own practice, and feel supported in trying something new. They might even feel a responsibility to try out new ideas in their own classrooms and help others do the same.

Four strategies underline collaborative agency, and they can be used in virtual or in-person settings:

### 1. Increase cohesion by sharing similarities and taking turns.

People feel more attached to others with whom they share something positive. It might be beneficial to start team meetings with members sharing positive experiences, with a goal of everyone identifying how their experiences connect. Team meetings need to be designed so that team members have discussions among themselves, relying on equity-oriented, reciprocal turn-taking so as many people as possible are involved.

### 2. Strengthen socialization—norms and roles.

Teams should dedicate time in every meeting to set and reinforce norms aimed at keeping everyone engaged, encouraging multiple perspectives, building understanding, and ensuring that everyone feels respected. This might include (1) having people pick a norm as a focus for the day, or (2) acknowledging moments when norms are upheld with a “shout-out.” Teams should also establish roles beyond timekeeper or note-taker to divide labor among people with specialized expertise in service to the team.

### 3. Encourage functional diversity—the power of multiple perspectives.

When educators exchange ideas, consider what works and why, weigh alternatives, and create new approaches together, they can solve persistent and pressing problems of practice. Design teams to include teachers with different expertise and perspectives on content, pedagogy, student needs, or the requirements of teaching well in a particular context.

### 4. Create innovation opportunities with the gifts of time and thinking routines.

Too often, team time focuses only on the most urgent matters: checking items off a list, making announcements, or reviewing documents. These tasks can be accomplished outside of meetings to allocate time to tasks best accomplished together, such as generating new ideas, prototyping possible solutions, and imagining the “what-if” conditions needed to bring new ideas to life.

One of the hardest parts of putting these tips into action is that all four strategies are needed simultaneously to foster collaborative agency. That’s why it’s difficult for teams to make dramatic changes to entrenched practices. But harness the four strategies all at once, and you can harness the full potential of teacher teams for transformative change. ●

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