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Starting a Movement: Building Culture From the Inside Out in Professional Learning Communities

By Kenneth C. Williams and Tom Hierck

Study Guide

This study guide is a companion to the book *Starting a Movement: Building Culture From the Inside Out in Professional Learning Communities* by Kenneth C. Williams and Tom Hierck. *Starting a Movement* provides a model that K–12 educators, staff, and stakeholders can use to keep their actions consistent with their school’s mission in order to support their professional learning community (PLC) transformation.

This guide is arranged by chapter, enabling readers to either work their way through the entire book or focus on the specific topics addressed in a particular chapter. It can be used by individuals, small groups, or an entire team to identify key points, raise questions for consideration, assess conditions in a particular school or district, and suggest steps that might be taken to promote a healthy school culture.

We thank you for your interest in this book, and we hope this guide is a useful tool in your efforts to create a healthy culture in your school or district.

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Chapter 1

Wanted: Leaders at Every Level

1. What is a guiding coalition, or leadership team, and why is it necessary? How do members of a guiding coalition or leadership team work interdependently? What are the differences between a leadership team and a working team?
2. Using the inventory in figure 1.1, how do you rate your school team on the continuum from working team to leadership team? Why do you think you have assigned this rating to your team?
3. In your own words, describe the characteristics that Lyle Kirtman identifies as competencies that high-performing leaders should have.
4. Which members of your school staff do you think would effectively take part in a guiding coalition? What qualities do they have that would fit this role? How do a competent leader and an influencer differ?
5. What are the first and second groups of people to try an innovation? How are they unlike the masses?

Starting a Movement: Building Culture From the Inside Out in Professional Learning

Communities—Study Guide

6. Why do the authors advocate that school leaders and leadership teams focus their work on taking a transformational role? How does a transformational role differ from a transactional role?

7. Name the two fundamental beliefs on which a culture of collective responsibility is based.

Chapter 2

What Is Authentic Alignment?

1. Briefly describe the four pillars that form the foundation of a PLC.
2. Which attributes do you associate with the words *alignment* and *authenticity*? What does authentic alignment make connections between in a school, and what is a school's greatest hope for a PLC's value when authentic alignment is not in place?
3. What are the four stages of authentic alignment, and, in your own words, what are the goals of these stages?
4. To make their work authentically aligned, what must staff members align and focus on, and what should they not get hung up on?
5. What is meant by the saying *culture eating structure for lunch*? How have you seen this occurrence unfold in your own school?
6. How do the terms *vision* and *mission* differ? What is a mantra, and how does it relate to a mission statement?

Starting a Movement: Building Culture From the Inside Out in Professional Learning

Communities—Study Guide

7. What query would you add to the list of questions on page 51 that you should repeatedly ask as you monitor the authentic alignment of your school's work in pursuing a PLC?

Chapter 3

Exploring: The Why

1. How does Jeffrey Abrahams define *mission statement*? How does this utilization compare to how your school uses its mission? What must staff members do to make Abrahams' definition a reality?
2. What are four problems that frequently lead to schools drafting weak mission statements?
3. Reflect on the sequence of steps that typically takes place after a school has decided on its mission statement's phrasing. How do these steps compare to your school's process for sharing and reviewing your mission statement?
4. What does *t-shirting* mean? What are *pockets of excellence*?
5. Why do the authors advocate for keeping a guiding mantra restricted to three to five words? How does a mantra differ from a slogan or tagline?
6. Briefly describe each of the qualities of a good guiding school mantra. Which of these qualities features most deeply in your school's mantra, and which is employed in the

Communities—Study Guide

weakest way? What would you change to strengthen this weakest quality's presence in your mantra?

7. Consider the examples of mantras and I-messages provided in table 3.1; then come up with your own example of a mantra and an I-message.

Chapter 4

Envisioning: The Eye

1. In your own words, define *vision* and *shared vision*.
2. How is a school's vision, as established during the Eye stage of the PLC process, an expression of optimism in addition to a means for action and decision making?
3. Why should educators be cautious in using the terms *mission statement* and *vision statement*? How are these two terms distinct from each other?
4. How are a traditional school vision and a shared vision of a PLC different?
5. What is the best way to lead people into the future?
6. Answer the four questions presented on page 85 for reflecting on your school's vision.
What do your answers tell you about how you can renew your and your colleagues' inspiration for your work?
7. What is the first step in making your vision for your school become a reality?

Chapter 5

Connecting: The How

1. What is a secondary focus in connecting through the work of a PLC? Briefly describe the three levels of commitment to a PLC covered in the connecting step.
2. In what ways is making use of the collective expertise of others helpful in a collaborative culture? What shift does a collaborative culture represent? How do the authors find this shift comparable to the difference between a thermometer and a thermostat?
3. Which three criteria does Douglas Reeves suggest exercising in priority determinations? What do these three criteria each involve?
4. Complete the survey featured in figure 5.2. What do your results tell you about the steps your team should take next in defining what each student needs to learn?
5. Why do the authors support assessment *for* learning instead of assessment *of* learning? How is assessment *for* learning often wrongly interpreted?
6. How do the new paradigms arising from the shift in analyzing and using data differ from the old ways of measuring effectiveness?

7. What challenges often arise when executing a response to intervention (RTI) system to address when students do and do not learn what they are expected to learn?

Chapter 6

Integrating: The Now

1. From what does school leaders' frustration over their lack of power to change school culture stem? What should school leaders focus on instead?
2. What two qualities do the guiding questions of the Now stage have?
3. What five essential qualities does creating a culture of collective responsibility in a PLC require?
4. Answer the five questions on page 129 regarding what you must do to sustain a culture of collective responsibility. What do these initial answers tell you about what you must do on a daily basis?
5. Scrutinize the critical issues featured in figure 6.1, and take the three steps described on pages 129–130. What do these steps teach you about the greatest issues facing your collaborative teams and the best ways to address them?
6. Consider the example comments from resistant teachers who wish to avoid PLC work, which are provided on pages 130 and 136. How would you address these questions in

Starting a Movement: Building Culture From the Inside Out in Professional Learning

Communities—Study Guide

hopes of keeping the PLC process moving forward smoothly? How have you seen resistance to growth arise among staff members in your school, and what was done to address this resistance or reach a compromise?

7. Toward what purpose does the Now stage foster reflection and clarity in developing a culture of collective responsibility?

Chapter 7

Communication: Stories and Celebrations

1. What is the moral of Tom’s story, in which he worked with an elementary school on its school culture and the supports it gave to its students?
2. In what two ways does effective communication travel? How can schools use communication to efficiently focus on a culture of collective responsibility, and through what two methods can PLCs strengthen communication?
3. Why is storytelling a requirement in shaping a school culture based on collective responsibility? How does Steve Denning define a *springboard story*? Why does Denning believe that telling a story is more effective than making an argument in delivering a message?
4. In what five ways can you use stories more effectually to extend commitment to a culture of collective responsibility?
5. When you share stories that express the challenges that come with PLC transformation, what two realizations will you reach?

Communities—Study Guide

6. What are some celebration methods that you have used or seen used in your school?

When are these celebration methods utilized?

7. What does aligned celebration help to achieve? What vital human needs can acknowledging people's accomplishments or progress nurture?