A professional learning community craze is sweeping the country.

School after school is setting aside time for teachers to meet in grade-level groups or subject area teams. PLC time is noted on calendars that parents hang on refrigerator doors. Students start school later or leave school earlier so teachers have time to meet with colleagues.

But, as many schools are learning, professional learning communities don’t just happen because a principal sets aside time for teachers to meet and slaps a new label on that meeting. That’s especially the case when teachers have been accustomed to working in isolation.

Principals and teacher leaders must be very intentional about helping groups of teachers become communities of learners. And, somewhere between the naming and becoming highly productive teams, many schools get lost. How do you move from being a group of people with a common characteristic — such as teaching the same subject or grade level — to being a team or a community with a common vision and focus?

Ann Delehant, who consults with many school districts on team development issues, said many teachers don’t immediately recognize that professional learning communities is “the new name for a team.”

“A professional learning community is not a new thing. It’s not a new fad. A PLC is what we call a team with an intentional focus on learn-
Transform your group into a team

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ing,” she said.

Although many educators understand the need to devote time to group or team development, they often neglect to spend time on the basics when working on PLCs because they don’t perceive PLCs to be teams that require the same kind of support, she said.

Understanding the four stages of group development is a good place to begin learning how a PLC might evolve from being a group to being a team. In 1965, psychologist Bruce Tuckman reviewed the literature on group functioning and described the four stages of group development as forming, norming, storming, and performing. (See illustration on Page 3.)

In the initial stage — “forming” — group members have high expectations and anxiety about how they fit in. They are testing themselves and each other. At this early stage, they depend on some authority or facilitator to create a structure for them. During this period, group members are likely to be polite but impersonal, watchful, and guarded in their behaviors.

Conflict characterizes the second stage of development — “storming.” Group members rebel against each other and against authority. Storming behaviors, he said, are each individual’s response to being influenced by the group and by the work that is required to achieve the assigned tasks. Group members may describe themselves as feeling stuck. They may opt out of the process or they may compete with other group members for power and attention.

If groups successfully resolve their storming issues, they arrive at the third stage — “norming.” At this point, group members have overcome their feelings of resistance and begin to feel that they are a cohesive group. Harmony, trust, and support develop. Participants develop a sense of cohesiveness and “intimate, personal opinions are expressed,” Tuckman wrote. At this stage, the group is developing skills and agreeing on procedures for doing the work. They are confronting issues represented by their work, not other individuals.

If group members persist, they reach the fourth stage — “performing” — in which they become a team rather than a group of disparate individuals. They work collaboratively and interdependently, share leadership, and perform at high levels. They are flexible and resourceful, close and supportive.

Groups may spend different amounts of time at each stage and they may move through them in a different sequence but each group will experi-

Continued on p. 3

NOT ALL GROUPS ARE TEAMS: HOW TO TELL THE DIFFERENCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WORKING GROUPS</th>
<th>TEAMS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strong, clearly focused leader</td>
<td>Shared leadership roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual accountability</td>
<td>Individual and mutual accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The group’s purpose is the same as the broader organizational mission</td>
<td>Specific team purpose that the team itself delivers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual work products</td>
<td>Collective work products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Runs efficient meetings</td>
<td>Encourages open-ended discussion and active problem-solving meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures its effectiveness indirectly by its influence on others (e.g. student learning goals)</td>
<td>Measures performance directly by assessing collective work products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discusses, decides, delegates</td>
<td>Discusses, decides, does real work together</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Transform your group into a team

Continued from p. 2

each stage. You can use the survey on Pages 5-7 to help your groups determine which stage of development they are currently in.

Instead of relying on Tuckman, Delehant introduces school teams to M. Scott Peck’s model of community development — pseudo-community, chaos, trust building and listening, and community. For some schools, this language may be more successful than the traditional language of Tuckman, she said.

In Peck’s “pseudo-community,” members are afraid of differences and afraid of conflict. They are trying to get along, often pretending that they don’t have major differences.

“Pseudo-community is like early dating. This is the stage where all women love football,” Delehant said. Any time there is a new member of the group, the group goes back to pseudo-community and works its way back through the stages, typically in a smoother fashion than their initial foray, but not necessarily.

Peck’s second stage is the “chaos” stage. In this stage, there is struggle and often considerable conflict. Some members may feel that the situation is out of control because everyone is expressing different opinions. Some will try to “heal” the situation and convert others. Many want to return to the stage where everyone was nice to each other, Delehant said.

In Peck’s third stage, which he calls “emptiness,” group members are consciously removing their personal barriers to creating a community. Members will confront their expectations, prejudices, and ideologies and agree to suspend these points of view in favor of considering ideas presented by others. In a school situation, this might mean teachers agree that they will listen to ideas regarding the examination of data or they may agree to try to design a common lesson or assessment with other teachers.

The process of shedding these barriers is essential before members can move into Peck’s fourth stage which he labels “community.” At this stage, the group has become a team in which members trust and feel comfortable working with each other. They feel safe about exposing their vulnerabilities and resolve to work together on common problems and issues.

Whichever approach to thinking about team development is most appealing, Delehant urges facilitators and principals to spend time on the basics, including understanding the team development process.

“Teams need to have conversations about ‘how to do the work’ instead of just plunging in to do the work. They need to spend time building trust and relationships with each other. If they don’t do this in the beginning, teams will have to stop and do this eventually,” she warns.

“Every group has the delusion of uniqueness. They think they’re special. They tend to feel better when they know that there are predictable stages that they will go through. It makes them feel better to know that conflict is natural,” she said.
Developing norms

**Directions**

1. Indicate to the group that effective groups generally have a set of norms that governs individual behavior, facilitates the work of the group, and enables the group to accomplish its task.

2. Recommend to the group that it establish a set of norms:
   - To ensure that all individuals have the opportunity to contribute in the meeting;
   - To increase productivity and effectiveness; and
   - To facilitate the achievement of its goals.

3. Give five index cards and the same kind of writing tool to each person in the group.

4. Ask each person to reflect on and record behaviors they consider ideal behaviors for a group. Ask them to write one idea on each of their cards. Time: 10 minutes.

5. The facilitator should shuffle all the cards together. Every effort should be made to provide anonymity for individuals, especially if the group has worked together before.

6. Turn cards face up and read each card aloud. Allow time for the group members to discuss each idea. Tape or tack each card to a display board so that all group members can see it. As each subsequent card is read aloud, ask the group to determine if it is similar to another idea that already has been expressed. Cards with similar ideas should be grouped together.

7. When all of the cards have been sorted into groups, ask the group to write the norm suggested by that group of cards. Have one group member record these new norms onto a large sheet of paper.

8. Review the proposed norms with the group. Determine whether the group can support the norms before the group adopts them.

Which stage is your team in?

OBJECTIVES
To identify the present stage of the teamwork model that your team is presently operating in.

DIRECTIONS
This questionnaire contains statements about teamwork. Next to each question, indicate how often your team displays each behavior by using the following scoring system:

1 = Almost never  2 = Seldom  3 = Occasionally  4 = Frequently  5 = Almost always

Questionnaire

1. _____ We try to have set procedures or protocols to ensure that things are orderly and run smoothly (e.g., minimize interruptions, everyone gets the opportunity to have their say).

2. _____ We are quick to get on with the task at hand and do not spend too much time in the planning stage.

3. _____ Our team feels that we are all in it together and shares responsibilities for the team’s success or failure.

4. _____ We have thorough procedures for agreeing on our objectives and planning the way we will perform our tasks.

5. _____ Team members are afraid or do not like to ask others for help.

6. _____ We take our team’s goals and objectives literally, and assume a shared understanding.

7. _____ The team leader tries to keep order and contributes to the task at hand.

Continued on p. 6

POWERFUL WORDS

“No one of us can be effective as all of us.”
— Unknown

“Build with your team a feeling of oneness, of dependence on one another, and of strength derived from unity in the pursuit of your objective.”
— Vince Lombardi

“Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; and working together is success.”
— Henry Ford
Which stage is your team in?

8. ____ We do not have fixed procedures, we make them up as the task or project progresses.

9. ____ We generate lots of ideas, but we do not use many because we fail to listen to them and reject them without fully understanding them.

10. ____ Team members do not fully trust the others members and closely monitor others who are working on a specific task.

11. ____ The team leader ensures that we follow the procedures, do not argue, do not interrupt, and keep to the point.

12. ____ We enjoy working together; we have a fun and productive time.

13. ____ We have accepted each other as members of the team.

14. ____ The team leader is democratic and collaborative.

15. ____ We are trying to define the goal and what tasks need to be accomplished.

16. ____ Many of the team members have their own ideas about the process and personal agendas are rampant.

17. ____ We fully accept each other’s strengths and weakness.

18. ____ We assign specific roles to team members (team leader, facilitator, time keeper, note taker, etc.).

19. ____ We try to achieve harmony by avoiding conflict.

20. ____ The tasks are very different from what we imagined and seem very difficult to accomplish.

21. ____ There are many abstract discussions of the concepts and issues, which make some members impatient with these discussions.

22. ____ We are able to work through group problems.

23. ____ We argue a lot even though we agree on the real issues.

24. ____ The team is often tempted to go above the original scope of the project.

25. ____ We express criticism of others constructively.

26. ____ There is a close attachment to the team.

27. ____ It seems as if little is being accomplished with the project’s goals.

28. ____ The goals we have established seem unrealistic.

29. ____ Although we are not fully sure of the project’s goals and issues, we are excited and proud to be on the team.

30. ____ We often share personal problems with each other.

31. ____ There is a lot of resisting of the tasks on hand and quality improvement approaches.

32. ____ We get a lot of work done.

SCORING SYSTEM:
1 = Almost never
2 = Seldom
3 = Occasionally
4 = Frequently
5 = Almost always
Which stage is your team in?

PART 2: SCORING
Next to each survey item number below, transfer the score that you give that item on the questionnaire. For example, if you scored item one with a 3 (Occasionally), then enter a 3 next to item one below. When you have entered all the scores for each question, total each of the four columns.

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<th>Item</th>
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This questionnaire is to help you assess what stage your team normally operates in. It is based on Tuckman's model of Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing. The lowest score possible for a stage is 8 (Almost never) while the highest score possible for a stage is 40 (Almost always).

The highest of the four scores indicates which stage your team normally operates in. If your highest score is 32 or more, it is a strong indicator of the stage your team is in.

The lowest of the three scores is an indicator of the stage your team is least like. If your lowest score is 16 or less, it is a strong indicator that your team does not operate this way.

If two of the scores are close to the same, you are probably going through a transition phase, except:

- If you score high in Forming and Storming, you are in the Storming stage.
- If you score high in Norming and Performing, you are in the Performing stage.

If there is only a small difference between three or four scores, then this indicates that you have no clear perception of the way your team operates, the team’s performance is highly variable, or that you are in the Storming stage (this stage can be extremely volatile with high and low points).

Source: “What stage is your team in?,” a tool created by Don Clark. Used with permission. This tool is available for free download at www.nwlink.com/~donclark/leader/leader.html
resources / team development

The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace

Details Peck’s beliefs about community development which involve pseudo-community, chaos, emptiness, and community.

“Developmental sequence in small groups”

Foundational research for the forming, norming, storming, performing model.

How to Make Meetings Work

Provides basic instruction about how to manage meetings to make them more productive.

How to Make Collaboration Work

Introduces five principles of collaboration that have proven successful in a variety of settings.

“How norms of collegiality and experimentation: Workplace conditions of school success”

Foundational research and support for building a collaborative work environment.

“The discipline of teams”

One of the seminal articles about team development. Available for purchase through www.harvardbusinessonline.org. Enter title of the article in the search function. Reprint # 93210