

A LITERATURE REVIEW OF HOW FACULTY MEETINGS CAN BECOME MORE
SUCCESSFUL SO STAFF DEVELOPMENT CAN BE ENHANCED

By:

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this review of literature to my mother, father, siblings, and co-workers for encouraging and supporting me throughout this journey towards a Master's degree in Education Administration. I want to thank all of you for being my strength in times of weakness. I also want to dedicate this review of literature to Dr. Dennis J. Stanek, my advisor and professor, as well as other professors, for being wonderful mentors and instilling within me the basic knowledge necessary to pursue a career in administration. Thank you for sharing your experiences, beliefs, morals, and opinions. I have grown both professionally and personally because of the content, nature, and environment of the courses you have taught throughout this educational journey.

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ABSTRACT

A series of issues impacting the professional development of school communities, teachers and administrators, are addressed in this paper. The need for educational reform, in particular, the implementation of professional learning communities (PLCs) and guidance methods for school communities in danger of losing a sense of connection and collaboration is the major focus of this paper. The purpose of this review is to provide alternatives to enhance staff development. Transforming faculty meetings so successful outcomes can be achieved is the targeted area of interest. Many journal articles, books, websites, and other reference materials were researched in the writing of this paper. The findings support the transformation of conventional faculty meetings into PLCs in order to enhance professional development.

Chapter I: Introduction

Health care, business and educational organizations continue to fight for survival in times of great uncertainty and economic turmoil. When our society is faced with uncontrollable and stressful environments, finding support within established professional communities is imperative for all organizations. What defines a professional learning community (PLC)? According to Milton Cox (2004) of Miami University, a faculty professional learning community (FPLC) consists of cross-disciplinary staff engaging in collaborative groups to actively participate in teacher enhancing and community building activities. A PLC is an endeavor in which administrators and teachers continuously seek and share learning to increase personal effectiveness for the benefit of students. PLCs are characterized by five dimensions: shared and supportive leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and application of learning, supportive conditions, and shared personal practice (Bass, 2004).

School communities can evolve into PLCs by nurturing and developing each of these five dimensions. Although educators John Dewey and Alexander Meiklejohn established the concept of PLCs in the 1930's, many schools still struggle to understand and implement the idea of such a community. Research has shown the benefits of schools becoming PLCs, however, schools remain uncertain about what initial actions are necessary to successfully create a PLC (Cowan, & Leo, 2000).

Presenters at staff meetings offer rare but crucial opportunities for all teachers and administrators to collaborate and communicate. "Staff meetings are an integral part of

professional development. The staff meeting can be a creative process for growth of staff members and the road to innovative solutions to educational problems” (Matalon, & Calo, & Yahpe, 2005). Do administrators and teachers perceive staff meetings as PLCs? If this perception fails to exist, how do school communities integrate the idea and concept(s) of PLCs into staff meetings? What implications and applications will such a transformation provide?

Educational organizations are currently surrounded by overwhelming hype regarding conceptions of PLCs. “Increasingly, current educational reform is linked to the concept of professional learning communities PLCs” (Bullough, 2007). Educational leaders should encourage staff to support such an educational reform. However, staff members remain hesitant and skeptical, due to failures of other educational reforms.

“The professional learning community model has now reached a critical juncture, one well known to those who have witnessed the fate of other well-intentioned school reform efforts. In this all-too-familiar cycle, initial enthusiasm gives way to confusion about the fundamental concepts driving the initiative, followed by inevitable implementation problems, the conclusion that the reform has failed to bring about the desired results, abandonment of the reform, and the launch of a new search for the next promising initiative. Another reform movement has come and gone, reinforcing the conventional education wisdom that promises, ‘This too shall pass’” (DuFour, 2004).

Failure of educational reform can be avoided if administrators and teachers embrace and reflect on the concept’s merits. Staff must nurture the concept of PLCs until it becomes deeply embedded into the school culture. Because PLCs are still somewhat in their infancy, it is yet to be determined as to how viable they will be (Bullough, 2007). The EDUCAUSE community (formerly Education Communications (EDUCOM) and

College and University Systems Exchange (CAUSE)) recently identified encouraging faculty adoption and practice of educational innovation as one of the top-five teaching and learning challenges of 2009. Thus, it is critical that educational organizations continue to seek systemic ways to support teaching and learning innovation and to connect to successful programs. A critical component of an innovative teaching and learning environment continues to be sustainability (Diaz, Garrett, Kinley, Moore, & Schwartz, 2009). In order to sustain, starting small is crucial... improvement of faculty meetings provides the perfect foundation for such an educational reform.

Statement of the Problem

“Most scheduled gatherings of teachers are, in fact, meetings at which teachers yawn their way through lists of informational items announced and commented on by the principal. If any clear communication results from those meetings, it takes place in the parking lot long after the official meeting has ended” (Rooney, 2006). After surveying staff members, Principal Rooney at Pleasant Hill School in Palatine, Illinois, clearly understood faculty meetings lack value in the eyes of teachers. The negative perception of faculty meetings displayed above is not unique for the State of Illinois. Other states are infected with such pessimism and have been for a long period of time. In fact, in the spring of 1960, a questionnaire was given to eighty-nine teachers (both secondary and elementary) who were engaged in-group dynamics at Temple University. The questionnaire was centered around the effects of faculty meetings on teacher morale. Responses to the questionnaire reinforced teachers’ cynical attitude regarding staff

meetings (Amidon, & Blumberg).

“Professional development (PD) generally refers to ongoing learning opportunities available to teachers, and other education personnel, through schools and districts. Effective professional development is seen as increasingly vital to school success and teacher satisfaction” (Professional Development, 2004). Based on the definition above, surveys, like the one presented at Temple University, indicate teachers view faculty meetings as a waste of their valuable time rather than an opportunity for PD. Time has been identified as one barrier of successful meetings. Method of delivery, intent of faculty meetings, and poor school community relationships include other barriers involved in weakening the productivity of meetings (Eller, 2006).

Barriers are causing attendance levels to dwindle as frustrations amongst the attendees rise. As frustrations rise, productivity decreases, which can result in a loss of meeting value and importance. As a result, severe disconnect amongst the staff and administrative members can develop. Disconnection can lead to a powerless school climate, as well as, damaged school morale. The ability for staff members to grow professionally can become greatly hindered.

How can such a disastrous chain reaction be stopped? How can school communities find the strength to rebuild and grow when completely submersed within a fragile environment? The implementation of PLCs could be the answer. There are faculties throughout North America that refer to themselves as PLCs yet do none of the things that

PLCs do. Conversely, there are faculties that could serve as model PLCs and may never reference the term. A school does not become a PLC by enrolling in a program, renaming existing practices, taking the PLC pledge, or learning the secret PLC handshake. A school becomes a PLC only when the administration and staff embrace the PLC concept (Dufour, 2007). If educational leaders are ready and willing to embrace change, the transformation process should begin with the improvement of faculty meetings.

Research Question

How can faculty meetings become more successful so staff development can be enhanced? Success, in regards to staff meetings, is defined by the following:

- Staff/administrator commitment, motivation, and willingness to improve the school community
- Effective staff/administrator collaboration, cooperation, and communication
- Consistent staff/administrator follow-through of established goals

Enhancement, in regards to staff development, is defined by professional and personal growth, which, in turn, may lead to efficient pedagogy and exceptional “learner friendly” classroom environments (Eller. & Eller, 2006).

Definition of Terms

PLC's	Professional Learning Communities
FPLC	Faculty Professional Learning Communities
PD	Professional Development
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
EDUCOM	Educational Communications
CAUSE	College and University System Exchange
MCE	Mandatory Continuing Education
PCE	Professional Continuing Education
CE	Continuing Education
PEA	Progressive Education Association
TLN	Teacher Leaders Network
M.E.A.T.	Motivation, Education, Articulation, and Triangulation
NSDC	National Staff Development Council
EHS	Escanaba High School
S.M.A.R.T	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time Bound

Chapter II: Review of Literature

Barriers of Faculty Meetings

According to Booker T. Washington, “success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles that one has overcome while trying to succeed” (Eller, & Eller, 2006). In order to create more successful faculty meetings, barriers of meetings must be identified and eliminated. Neglecting any barriers will hinder the implementation of PLC’s.

PLCs could be the necessary tool for breaking down barriers of successful staff meetings. However, before administrators and teachers can buy into this concept or idea, the barriers of successful faculty meetings must be identified, addressed and analyzed thoroughly. Why do teachers recognize the importance and necessity of staff meetings, but, at the same time, dread attending the meetings? What are the meeting dynamics that cause this attitude and/or perception? World-renowned psychologist Nathaniel Branden emphasizes that the lack of staff investment with regards to staff meetings is a direct result from the lack of psychological return. Put simply, teachers are not receiving any psychological benefits from attending staff meetings. Motivation and incentive are nonexistent. Teachers go unrecognized. Feelings of competency, self-worth, self-confidence, appreciation, and self-efficacy are replaced by feelings of intimidation, disrespect, distrust, uncertainty, and bitterness (Rich, 1998).

Perhaps the group dynamics of the meetings, not the meetings themselves, create

the problems. Poor group dynamics can prevent staff from establishing and expressing personal beliefs and inhibit a healthy avenue for two-way communication. Failure to encourage and acknowledge staff contributions at the meeting is also common with poor group dynamics (Holland, 2008). Status of group dynamics could be a barrier of successful faculty meetings. What other barriers exist?

“Americans hold over 15 million meetings a day and spend over \$30 billion a year on meetings; however, most Americans consider meetings a waste of time and boring” (McKee, 1998). A common barrier of faculty meetings is time. In some cases, not enough time is devoted to meetings or to important topics. Contractual issues can cause conflicts with time. For example, some administrators can only schedule 30-minute staff meetings once a week. Problems arise when agenda items cannot be discussed due to the 30-minute time constraint. However, educational leaders cannot continue to conduct the meeting or a breach of contract will take place (Eller, & Eller, 2006).

Consequently, devoting too much time to the meeting or to one topic can be problematic. Ms. Herbert, Principal of Crow Island School, battled with staff meetings for fifteen years and confesses to wasting precious time at various staff gatherings. Ms. Hebert admits to spending too much time on minutia items, turning the faculty meeting into a 50-minute rapid firing of disconnected announcements and abbreviated discussions. Inappropriate use of time led to dreaded mandated gatherings amongst Ms. Hebert’s staff (Hebert, 1999). To further reinforce time as a barrier of successful faculty meetings, GroupSystems conducted a survey regarding typical staff meetings and

compiled all of the statistics. Results indicated twenty to twenty-five minutes of the fifty-minute meeting period were wasted on inefficiencies (Mehrmann, 2006). In addition, a group of forty chief executive officers (CEO's) of electrical contracting firms attended a time management seminar. When asked to make a list regarding life's biggest time wasters, staff meetings were ranked as number one (Mackenzie, 1998).

The perception and productivity of staff meetings cannot be improved unless educational leaders learn how to escape the "time trap" and do a better job of time management. Staff members have grown tired of wasting their time, primarily because time is so precious. Staff members' professional and personal lives are often very stressful and hectic. Therefore, the attitude remains ... try to "survive" the meetings or simply don't attend. In fact, McClain, a professor of forty-seven years at Seton Hill University in Greensburg, Pennsylvania wrote a guide to surviving faculty meetings in order to alleviate frustrations and publicly broadcast ill feelings regarding staff meetings. An excerpt from McClain's writing includes the following:

"Although I'm 47 years old and a full professor, academic meetings catapult me back to my grade-school days. I become uncontrollably antsy sitting on a hard chair as a person more grown-up than I, usually someone with authority over me, holds forth at the front of the room. Like the kid who seeks any excuse to leave his chair, I stand up too often: to get a drink, to throw away scrap paper, to close the door on the pretense that people outside are being too noisy. In my lap, like the Nancy Drew book that used to occupy me during elementary math lessons, rests my folder of illicit activities: an interesting journal article, quizzes to grade, Sudoku puzzles. I'm always embarrassed at my immaturity until I look around and realize I'm not alone. There's Professor A, whose scorn for a colleague's question is written on her face in the perfect middle-school sneer.

Professors B and C are whispering and giggling. Even the usually staid Professor D has been enticed into note passing. Meanwhile, Professor E puffs up like any teacher's pet, raising her hand to echo the administrator's proposal in slightly different words. As the speaker drones on, I long for Professor F, our class clown, who used to jump in several times every meeting with loud, inappropriate, yet hilarious jokes. Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, he didn't get tenure. Which brings up the problem: Too much poor behavior during meetings can damage your career. So I present a meeting-hater's survival guide..." (McClain, 2007).

An ongoing argument exists about whether or not staff meetings should be mandatory, in terms of continuing education and professional development, or simply the personal responsibility of all staff members. This argument does not question the merits of continuing education. Rather, deciding what elements of professional development should be mandatory is the main constituent of conflict. The issue of mandatory continuing education (MCE) for professionals is controversial because some professionals believe this raises question regarding professionalism and credibility. Some professionals claim mandating continuing education and professional development is unnecessary since being a professional implies voluntary commitment to life long learning.

"By definition, professionals are supposed to be autonomous, self-managed, and responsible for mastery of knowledge; MCE is punitive to those who participate voluntarily" (Kerka). Opponents of MCE state that by mandating continuing education, adult learning principles become violated, such as voluntary participation, the informal nature of adult education, and adult self-direction. Opponents also state evidence that

MCE results in improved practice is lacking and that mandatory attendance will not necessarily change attitudes, motivation, determination to practice responsibly, or ability to learn. Finally, opponents allege CE programs lack quality and relevance, and requiring participation may hinder learning by reducing motivation and individual responsibility (Kerka).

Proponents support MCE because expecting voluntary participation is unrealistic. Proponents declare individuals who need CE the most may be least likely to participate. Other reasons for support of MCE include the following:

- There is some evidence that well-designed programs can influence effective practice
- Mandates are necessary to protect the public from incompetent or out-of-date practitioners
- Although imperfect, MCE is better than such alternatives as examination or practice review
- By choosing a profession, professionals submit to its norms. A license to practice implies consent to be governed by the rules of the profession (Kerka).

Although some professionals argue that mandatory versus voluntary CE is a major barrier of successful professional development opportunities such as faculty meetings, other professionals declare getting individuals to understand the importance of professional development opportunities is the real barrier. A mail survey research method was used to determine the comparative impact of mandatory and voluntary CE systems for relicensure on the performance of health care professionals. Of the 1,901

questionnaires mailed to dental hygienists in Wisconsin and Minnesota, 63 percent (1,201) were returned. Analysis of the resulting data revealed the mandatory versus voluntary debate is not the primary issue. Rather than arguing about whether professional continuing education (PCE) should be mandatory, the focus should be on improving the content and delivery of PCE (Dowling, 1985).

“May there never rise in me the notion that I know enough, but give me the strength and leisure and zeal to enlarge my knowledge” (Lowenthal, 1981). Change is one of the few sure things when it comes to current society. Due to advances in knowledge and technology, as well as public demands for accountability and consumer protection, the number of states requiring continuing education for many professions has significantly increased in the last 10 years (Kerka). Professionals must understand MCE is not going away. Educational leaders must effectively communicate this message to the school community. Rather than debating the mandatory issue or arguing whether competency standards are appropriate for professionals, a more productive alternative might be to focus on alleviating the problems or barriers associated with CPE (Kerka). Looking at a more narrow perspective, research indicates that mandating staff meetings is not the primary area of concern. Creating staff meetings that members actually want to attend and participate in is the real matter in question.

Another barrier of successful faculty meetings that questions the effectiveness of MCE is the intent and purpose of the scheduled meeting, as well as, the administrator’s method of delivery. Faculty meetings represent a microcosm of what administrators think the school should be. If administrators use a competitive/individualistic format of lecture,

whole class discussion, and individual worksheets in faculty meetings, they have made a powerful statement about the way staff members should teach (Johnson, & Johnson, 1994). Often times staff meetings are run in a very businesslike manner. Valuable meeting time is sacrificed for ordinary purposes like housekeeping minutia (business) items. According to Dennis Reina, Ph.D., a corporate psychologist in Stowe, Vt., “where most meetings go wrong is they spend seventy percent of their time learning, thirty percent contributing, and zero percent deciding,” (Branka, 2009).

Administrators abandon the complexity of the leadership role in guiding teachers toward PLC’s and, instead, maintain the conventional role of agenda composer, timekeeper, and taskmaster (Hebert, 1999). Productivity expert David Allen states meetings should not be held for updates, getting slackers on track, getting all staff members on the same page, and whipping up enthusiasm. Embarrassing staff will not improve motivation. Staff concerns should be addressed one-on-one instead. Motivation should be a daily management challenge, not a one-time fix (Farivar).

Ineffective meetings take place when administrators call an unnecessary meeting. “A common culprit of ineffective meetings involves getting the staff together only to read a list of announcements” (Eller, 2006). The administrator can disseminate information, such as announcements, in a more efficient way versus reading to a group of individuals fully capable of doing such a task independently. According to J. S. O'Rourke IV, a professor of management at Notre Dame University, massive amounts of valuable time are wasted simply because managers think that face-time is important. The best way to determine whether a meeting should take place is to ask whether the transfer of

information is one-way or whether feedback is required from all participants. If not, sending emails or status reports could be a better option (Farivar). Stanley Fish, dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University of Illinois at Chicago, comments on his personal experiences dealing with staff meetings:

What was going on at these meetings I contrived to miss? Most of the time information was being dumped into the ears (certainly not the hearts and minds) of 20 or so department heads whose eyes had glazed over even before they sat down. Only two of the generally benumbed stay awake through the whole thing, and, they, of course, are the two who already know this stuff and actually care about it. At the end of the disengaging meeting, there's some time left for fake planning. By "fake planning" I mean planning that refers to outcomes that have already been determined in precincts no department head (or dean) ever enters, or to outcomes projected so far into the future that no one in the room will be alive when they are either realized or derailed by contingencies no one foresaw. A sense of isolation versus collaboration has filled the room and remains there until the next meeting, if there has to be a next time (Fish, 2004).

Fish concludes by stating two solutions to the dreary scenario painted above... do not have any meetings or implement real meetings. The second solution is the better way to go, but requires determining what the characteristics of real meetings look like.

Angela Peery, a teacher specialist for the South Carolina Department of Education, discusses the necessity of reformatting faculty meetings. In most cases whole faculty meetings are usually held once a month; a good chunk of those meetings end up being devoted to housekeeping duties. Peery encourages educational leaders to handle housekeeping issues through emails or memos. Housekeeping meetings should be run separately from faculty meetings. How can administrators ensure every meeting offers

some form of professional growth and/or development? Peery challenges educational leaders to seek answer(s) to the question previously stated (Israel, 2009).

According to William R. Daniels, senior consultant at American Consulting & Training of Mill Valley, California, “Staff meetings matter because that’s where an organization’s culture perpetuates itself” (Matson, 2007). Meetings are the most common and universally despised part of business life. In any organization, bad meetings do more than ruin pleasant days. Bad meetings make bad companies. A nonproductive meeting leads to a disinterested staff, which, in turn, negatively impacts morale and performance. Daniels introduces the seven sins of deadly meetings:

- Individuals do not take meetings seriously. Staff members arrive late, leave early, and spend most of the time doodling.
- Meetings are too long and should accomplish twice as much in half the time.
- Individuals wander off the topic. Participants spend more time digressing than discussing. Meetings get way out of control. According to Dr. Menon, Psychologist Specialist in Management Science and Author of Award Winning Management Books, discussion wanders to unconnected matters and trivialities, wasting time. Meetings are mostly conducted as rituals. Much importance is not attached to remarks and recommendations are not carried out (Menon, 2005).
- Nothing happens once the meeting ends. Staff members do not convert decisions into action.
- People do not tell the truth. Plenty of conversation takes place, but not much candor.
- Meetings are always missing important information, so critical decisions become postponed.
- Meetings never get better. Individuals make the same mistakes (Matson, 2007).

Another barrier of successful faculty meetings includes poor school community relationships. “Lack of meaningful relationships has a negative impact on the leader’s ability to organize and run effective meetings” (Eller, & Eller, 2006). Perhaps poor relationships stem from a weak or unorganized school culture. Stress brought on by a constant change of state mandates, as well as, the educational impacts caused by a poor economy contribute to the relationship status of school communities. Good meetings cannot occur if a severe sense of disconnect exists between the administrator and teachers. Some reasons for relationship problems include: lack of respect for the leader by teachers, lack of respect for teachers by the leader, top-down management style of leadership in which the teachers have no say in decisions in the building, verbal intimidation of teachers by the leader, lack of direction from the leader, and situations in which the teachers feel the leader does not listen, respond, or consider voiced concerns, ideas, comments, etc (Eller, & Eller, 2006).

Components of Successful Faculty Meetings

Horror stories of bad meetings are plentiful, but the qualities that characterize a good meeting are harder to implement. Whether meetings include team check-ins or department updates, the regular meetings held every week or every month are often the hardest to get fired up about. But, making meetings better is not simply a matter of ordering coffee and bagels. Productive, valuable, and engaging meetings require a clear goal, an open dialog, and a strong leader. Here is how to make meetings matter (Farivar).

Scheduling meetings for a main purpose includes one component of successful faculty meetings. Often called without an agenda, or an agenda that could have been addressed through emails, the faculty meeting is rapidly becoming the bane of teachers. In many cases faculty meetings serve as self-aggrandizement for administrators that use such meetings to reinforce control. Faculty meetings should only be convened when real business needs are to be covered and administrators earnestly seek out collaborate counsel from professional colleagues (Streich, 2008). What is the purpose for having a meeting? Shaping staff culture and building team morale, as well as, enhancing communication and strategic thinking include the main reasons for scheduling all-staff meetings (Reiland, 2010). Teachers enjoy meetings centered on teaching versus minutia. Meetings should address the needs of teachers (Jones, 1995).

In order to prevent staff members from getting overwhelmed, tired, or frustrated due to information overload, staff meetings should focus around a central theme. The theme may contain one to three subtopics. Sticking to the theme ensures the meeting's purpose will be maintained (Mehermann, 2006).

Teresa Tulipana, Principal at Hawthorn Elementary School in Kansas City, Missouri reconstructed staff meetings using Matt Redmond's book titled "Sixty Minutes to a solution." The school community at Hawthorn Elementary makes sure every minute counts in collaborative staff meetings. Hawthorn Elementary no longer wastes time with conventional faculty meetings. Devoting this time to collaborative team meetings, data review meetings, crisis response team meetings, book reviews, and a myriad of other

topics has allowed Tulipana's staff to grow and develop as a team (Tulipana, 2007).

Successful staff meetings are planned and controlled. Meetings are a venue for voicing opinions, discussing the latest organizational policies and procedures, increasing the effectiveness of decision-making, addressing employee problems and concerns, and setting goals. But, if staff meetings are not planned, and action plans and milestones are not decided upon, the staff meeting will not be meaningful, nor productive. Educational leaders should establish school performance goals and develop action plans for achieving those goals. Specific action plans should be outlined. Each staff member should contribute to the project ("Conducting Successful Staff," 2008).

Good educational leaders do take successful faculty meetings seriously. Attendees will never take meetings seriously if the educational leader fails to. If administrators constantly postpone meetings, cancel meetings when other priorities surface, or schedule meetings at the last minute, employees are likely to view staff meetings as a low priority. Furthermore, lack of following-through with established meeting dates and times demonstrates a lack of respect for employees' schedules.

Ground rules should be established to ensure that the meeting is conducted in an efficient and orderly manner. Some of the essential ground rules include the following:

- Only one person may speak at a time
- Involvement and participation is encouraged
- Private discussions are not to be held during the meeting

- When speaking, stick to the subject at hand
- Never criticize others' suggestions or personally attack other team members (Levin, 2007).

Educational leaders may need some assistance keeping meetings on track.

Department heads or a chairman of the meeting can help keep the meeting on topic and on schedule. Individual department heads or chairman may serve as a guide, facilitator, motivator and coordinate of group efforts (Menon, 2005). Meetings are conducted more smoothly when the organizer enlists others to help handle details such as timekeeper, minute taker, and displayer of brainstorm ideas. Assigning meeting tasks to coworkers provides a good way to engage staff (Farivar). Proper timing also determines the success rate of a meeting. The day of the week as well as the time of day can have a significant impact on meeting effectiveness. Typically, Mondays and Fridays are the best days for staff meetings. Monday morning meetings are good for setting an agenda for the week and ensuring staff is on the same page. Friday afternoon meetings are good for following up on the past week's goals and objectives. Meetings that occur in the middle of the week are often rushed and poorly executed since staff members are typically busy with other work demands. The time of day should also be a consideration when scheduling meetings. Energy levels typically dwindle by mid-afternoon, so morning meetings may be best for developing project plans and fostering creativity ("Conducting Successful Staff," 2008).

Effective communication between administrators and teachers is another component of successful faculty meetings. Effective communication is the responsibility

of the communicator. Only the communicator can ensure that the communication is both received and understood as intended.

“The first step to a successful staff meeting is to invite all of your subordinates to discuss what's going on in their worlds. Specifically ask, "What have you accomplished in the past week and what have been your challenges?" It's not only important for individuals to talk about themselves; it's also critical that all members of the staff hear what their peers are doing. Too many times employees dig foxholes for themselves and develop an entitlement mentality where they believe they are doing all the work. Once they hear what everyone else is working on, however, they tend to develop a greater appreciation for their peers' contributions” (Eller, & Eller, 2006).

By providing staff members the opportunity to communicate before, during, and after meetings, respect and appreciation for the administrator enhances. Sharing good news amongst staff members is a great meeting opener to help set a positive tone and encourage teachers to be engaged in the meeting. “A good manager should be an active listener who encourages participation by asking door-opening questions, inquiries that show you are paying attention and you value your co-workers' input” says Irv Schenkler, director of management communication at New York University's Stern School of Business (Farivar).

Nonverbal communication displayed by the administrator can greatly impact the mood of the meeting. According to A. Barbour, author of "Louder Than Words: Nonverbal Communication,” 7% of communication is verbal and the rest nonverbal. Pitch, volume, and rhythm carry 38% of a message, while body language, facial expressions, and eye movement account for 55%. As a meeting facilitator, non-verbal cues can be used to communicate beneficial messages that make all attendees feel

included, which in turn, has a positive impact on group dynamics. Meeting attendees often speak during meetings while staring at the facilitator. Barbour encourages facilitators to avoid eye contact with one attendee and look at other group members, which will encourage the speaker to do the same (Farivar).

Do administrators always need to be the leader of staff meetings? Administrators find that bringing in outside resources can help improve the quality of staff meetings. According to Sherri Goffman, Principal at West Haverstraw (New York) Elementary, one of the best faculty meetings experienced by staff members included a motivational speaker. Goffman surveyed staff members and concluded from the data that staff members much appreciated the inspirational change the guest speaker brought to the meeting (Hopkins, 2008).

Staff meetings have proven to be successful when members of the school community get involved. According to Jim DeGenova, Principle of Reed Middle School in Hubbard, Ohio, staff meetings led by members of a school staff can produce very productive meetings. Giving teachers, individually or in groups, an opportunity to shine can help develop school leaders and build staff morale. A second grade teacher sharing items learned in a graduate level course was one of DeGenova's most engaged meetings. DeGenova mentions the importance of administrators participating in the meeting even if leading is not the administrator's current role. "The staff became so interested in sharing new learning, that type of meeting soon became standard practice in the building.

Everyone learned from each other, which helped to develop staff morale and raise the level of expertise of the entire staff,” states DeGenova (Hopkins, 2008).

Transforming faculty meetings into PLCs seems to be the critical component for success. An eight-year study sponsored by the Progressive Education Association (PEA), Carnegie Foundation, and General Education Board was performed to learn how the implementation of PLCs would serve youth, teachers, and administrators more effectively. Teachers and administrators from thirty schools, both secondary and postsecondary, participated in the study. Schools involved in the implementation of PLC programs had dramatically different backgrounds and circumstances. Some schools were elite private institutions and others were large public schools. Tulsa, Denver, and Des Moines were the main testing locations. Teachers and administrators attended workshops to learn how to implement the tenets of the PLC program. Within the workshops, social scientists and education specialists joined teachers and administrators to work on authentic problems teachers encounter regularly. Team building activities and collaboration skills were major components of the workshop (Bullough, 2007).

Although statistical analysis of the data was not provided, written feedback from participating administrators and teachers implied the implementation of PLC programs changed relationships between the roles of administrators and teachers. Staff members experienced shared leadership with administrators. Teachers experienced a heightened sense of importance and increased levels of responsibility. Administrators gained more trust and respect amongst the staff members. A true sense of community was being established as teachers grew more engaged. “Powerful teacher education is more than a

matter of learning about and practicing promising teaching techniques; it involves engagement in exploring, with others, pressing personal and professional problems and issues” (Bullough, 2007).

The meetings and workshops of the Eight-Year Study provided resources and support teachers needed to tackle compelling problems and issues in ways that deepened understanding, broadened perspective, enabled personal growth, and built community. Faculty meetings must reflect the characteristics previously mentioned in order to be successful. Any educational reform can fall victim to failure if lacking the necessary components of success. “Sustained school reform requires both a foundation of trust among teachers and life-enhancing relationships with one another” (Bullough, 2007).

Another study explored the relationship between PLC structure and teacher improvement, focusing specifically on, Central Middle School, a first-year middle school. The study site was located in a large, southeastern school district and served a population of predominantly white, middle-class students. The study focused on the 2004–05 academic year and relied on both quantitative data, from a teacher activity survey, and qualitative data, from teacher interviews. In an attempt to identify the relationship between PLC activities and teacher improvement, sixth, seventh, and eighth grade core academic teachers completed a survey concerning the PLC activities in which they had participated. The surveys were distributed to 20 eligible teachers at Central Middle School; 15 surveys were completed and returned, representing a response rate of 75%. Surveys at Central Middle School were compared with surveys distributed to teachers

drawn from a national sample that included 93% of all districts in the United States.

Using the Eisenhower Professional Development Program, the following six high-quality professional development features were used to demonstrate either an indirect or direct qualitative and quantitative relationship to teacher improvements (Graham, 2007):

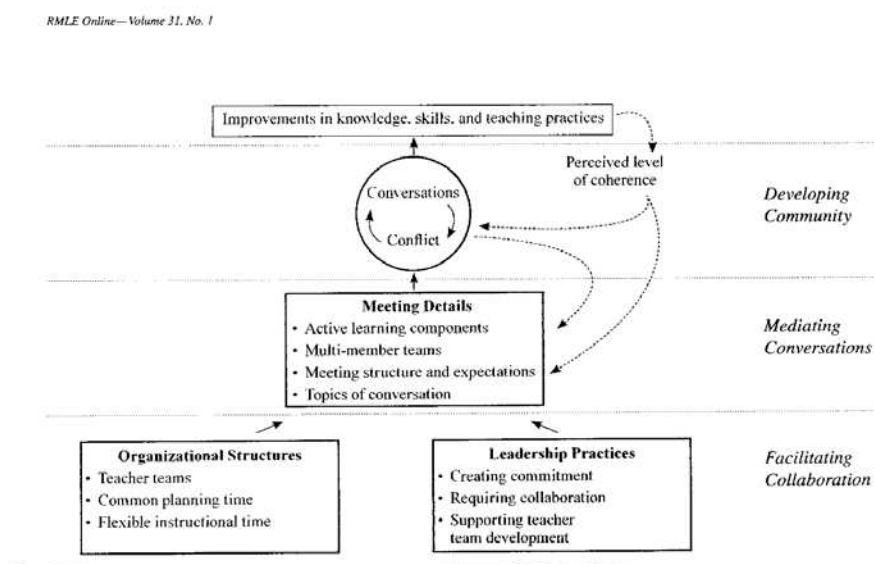
- Activity type (for example, traditional workshops versus reform models, such as study groups or peer mentoring)
- Activity duration (including both contact hours and span of time covered)
- Collective participation (i.e., whether participants are grouped by some common characteristic, such as grade level, discipline, school)
- Focus on content (i.e., the degree to which professional development expands teacher knowledge of content areas)
- Promoting active learning (the extent to which teachers are “active” during professional development, such as observing other classrooms, planning classroom implementations, or reviewing student work)
- Fostering coherence (the extent to which professional development connects to individual, school, and district goals and needs)

The survey results indicated content focus, active learning, and coherence exhibited a positive relationship to changes in teachers’ knowledge, skills, and teaching practices.

The more evident these three professional development features, the more teachers indicated increasing levels of change in personal knowledge, skills, and practices. The results of the study are summarized in a model presented graphically in *Figure 1*. Within the model, three layers of factors describe the relationship between professional learning community activities and teacher improvement. At the first layer, a variety of organizational structures and leadership practices facilitate collaboration. At the next layer, team meeting details serve to mediate the substance of teacher conversations.

At the third layer, a cyclical process of conversation and conflict support the development of community, which in turn supports changes in knowledge, skills, and teaching practices (Graham, 2007):

Figure 1



To collect more individualized, qualitative data, ten purposefully selected teachers were interviewed about professional learning community practices. Interviewees were selected on the basis of grade level, subject area, and teaching experience to represent a broad spectrum indicative of the general population of teachers in the school. Teachers concluded professional collaboration and support offered during PLC activities greatly enhanced teacher improvement. Teachers emphasized the importance of administrator support of PLC implementation. “I think that all of the success is attributable to [the principal]—he is a motivator, whether through fear, praise, intimidation, he uses lots of strategies to get people to work in the PLCs. I attribute it all to him—he is the engine behind the machine” (Graham, 2007).

Participants of PLC implementation at Central Middle School have concluded that a strong positive relationship exists between PLC activities and teacher improvement; however, this relationship is complex and contingent upon multiple factors at multiple levels. Certain foundational factors such as common planning time, teacher collaboration required by the principal, and organizational support for teacher team development creates an environment in which PLC activities could contribute to teacher improvement, but these foundational factors may not be enough. PLC acceptance and commitment by staff and administration also influence results. Individuals must believe “the best staff development happens in the workplace rather than in a workshop” (Graham, 2007).

Other organizations, aside from schools, encountered similar problems realizing communication and collaboration skills amongst employees need improvement. Karen Marcelo, Executive Director of Hinsdale Orthopedic Associates, S.C., and Carol Anthony, an independent consultant and organizational change specialist, developed a management team to proactively lead changes to enhance business culture by improving teamwork, morale, and office systems. With a strong sense of loyalty and work ethic as positive driving forces, the team decided to embark on a mission to improve the health of the practice.

Before the administrative team began their attempt to implement characteristics of PLCs, preexisting conditions of the health care organization had to be identified, which included the following:

- Most leadership staff was relatively new-hired within the last three years
- Systems and procedures were not standardized across locations
- Morale was not positive, complaints were high
- Teamwork was fragmented between departments
- Customer service was suffering
- The practice needed direction
- Administration wanted to be proactive in addressing problems and issues
- There needed to be an organized approach to addressing these issues (Anthony, 2010)

The administrative team required physicians to participate in a one-day retreat that focused on team building, coaching skills, and personal style and communication. The trained physicians then facilitated other meetings in other locations. The focus of the meetings included concepts such as change and transition management, project management, and S.M.A.R.T goal setting (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time Bound), recognition and reward systems, employee involvement, practice communication methods, and facilitating effective meetings. After three months of facilitated meetings, feedback and follow-up took place. Outcomes included an increase in productive meetings and development of employee task forces such as a communications committee and employee motivation committee (Anthony, 2010).

The management team received much positive feedback from the participating employees. “Ensure that employees feel a part of the process. Provide continuous opportunities for employees to be heard. Provide training, tools and expectations for all

employees to perform their job responsibilities. Communicate, communicate, communicate, and when in doubt, communicate” (Anthony, 2010).

Chapter III: Results and Analysis Relative to the Problem

Members of the Center for Teaching Quality (CTQ) remind school communities that students should be the heart and soul of education. “What is best for students?” According to the CTQ, student learning can only be improved through development of effective teachers and administrators; supportive teachers and administrators that model transformational leadership (Rasberry, & Mahajan, 2008). A review of the literature and case studies clearly indicates changes within school communities need to take place. Several barriers, discussed in the literature review, reveal the need for improvement of staff meetings. Unsuccessful meetings do not provide opportunities for staff development. Insufficient professional development remains a personal concern and, therefore, questions prevail... How do educational organizations enhance professional development? What must happen in order to ignite the process of enriching staff growth? How can school communities ensure goals will not flounder and perish? The answer lies within the literature. School improvement teams must look to implement activities and concepts of PLCs. Staff meetings seem to be the perfect forum for implementation.

Case studies discussed in the literature review have shown the implementation of PLCs to be successful in terms of staff growth and development. “Professional learning communities have made our school more democratic, returning the power to the teachers.

We no longer look for our principal to make and hand down decisions, but we convene in our circles of influence and tap the expertise within ourselves to make the difference we wish to see in our classrooms, our school, and our community” states a seventh-grade language arts teacher (Rasberry, & Mahajan, 2008). PLCs reduce isolation and promote collaboration. Going from isolation to collaboration is the key educational reform schools need to implement if building professional development remains the goal.

Although no doubt exists in regards to the successful impact of PLCs, much is still unknown. If the concept of PLCs has been around since the 1930’s and has been proven to be successful, why do school communities continue to struggle with PLC implementation? What is hindering the implementation process? What barriers mentioned in the literature review have had more devastating, negative impact on PLC implementation? Does the condition of the economy impact the implementation process? What other factors influence this process? In addition to implementation, is sustainability also an issue? What is preventing PLC concepts from becoming a permanent fixture of all school communities? Will the implementation of PLCs have the same impact on elementary schools as it does on secondary schools? The concerns and /or questions mentioned above comprise the “unknown” components of the literature review. As educational organizations gain more experience with PLC concepts, the answers to the previous questions may begin to unravel. Commitment to PLC concepts must persevere in order to ensure positive impact of PLCs.

School communities must begin nurturing and supporting staff empowerment. A

sense of empowerment will not be achieved if teachers and administrators fail to accept, appreciate, and engage in professional development opportunities that occur during staff meetings. Why strive for a sense empowerment? A glance at Harvard Business Review titles captures an impressive list of case studies and empirical investigations into how organizations' various forms of empowerment enable employees to compete more effectively in the new global economy. Empowerment leads to action and positive changes. Currently, PLC implementation favors the building of empowerment within school communities. Therefore, the Teacher Leaders Network (TLN) is getting school communities to transform from vertical hierarchies to horizontal collaborative communities. Working with peers, PLCs collect and analyze classroom data, share best practices, and make instructional decisions as a team. Together, teachers engage in deeper learning as teaching professionals to better meet the needs of students (Rasberry, & Mahajan, 2008). Sharing of ideas and classroom experiences constitutes a major characteristic of PLCs, which encourages teacher empowerment and creates stronger school communities.

After reviewing all the literature regarding components of successful faculty meetings, administrators and teachers must play an equal role in order to ensure effective outcomes of meetings. Employer and employee relationships, especially levels of communication and recognition, have a major impact on meeting outcomes. Administrators need to know the genuine challenges and accomplishments of their teachers; the individuals working in the trenches (Falcone, 2000). Pursuit of staff development should be a personal responsibility; however, in the absence of healthy

relationships, motivation diminishes. Administrators must create environments in which subordinates recognize motivation as their personal responsibility. “Structured weekly staff meetings provide a good place to open the lines of communication while increasing the amount of recognition for a job well done” (Falcone, 2000).

According to Jackie Bailey (2009), the founder and President of Emerald City Consulting, putting more M.E.A.T. (motivation, education, articulation, and triangulation) in your meetings will provide the nutrition needed in every organization and yield the sweet taste of success. In addition to the four key aspects of meeting success, another important component includes follow through and/or follow up. Credibility of meetings will not be possible without incorporating frequent checkpoints to make sure the agenda items are completed in a timely manner.

In summation, although further research regarding PLCs is necessary and imperative, PLC implementation could be a major success if staff and administrators are ready for a change and willing to work. However, failure to recognize the need for school improvement will cause any attempt to implement change to flounder. The key component of successful PLC implementation is strong relationships. Change cannot occur without connection.

Chapter IV: Recommendations and Conclusion

Recommendations

In the words of U.S. Senator Bill Bradley, “In reality 'learning' and 'change' are synonymous. Change is not an issue if it makes sense to and is 'owned' by those involved, rather than being arbitrarily imposed. An appreciation that change is a continual process, involving confusion and difficulty, is vital for future learners. It is not change that kills it is the transitions” (Eller, & Eller, 2006). Education can be very trendy. Educational organizations and school communities are a frequent target for educational reform. The ability to adapt to reform is crucial for all school communities. In order to survive, taking action, and responding to change remains imperative. The educational expectations of students have risen due to a more competitive global economy. Higher student expectations, raises the bar for educators, both in terms of capabilities and qualifications. Teachers must take professional development seriously if becoming more successful is a priority. Teachers must understand that professional development is a prerequisite for success. According to Eller (2006), “The toughest thing about success is that you’ve got to keep being a success.”

Transforming staff meetings into PLCs could be one way that staff members learn how to become more successful. School communities in similar situations as Escanaba High School (EHS) should embark on such a journey. Administrators and teachers involved in the transformation process must understand the process will not be successful

if implementation, follow-through, and follow-up are lacking. Therefore, a PLC committee needs to be established. The committee's primary responsibility should include establishing the necessary structure and organization. Where does the school community stand? Where does the school community want to go? How will the school community get there? The questions just mentioned cannot be answered unless careful strategic planning takes place. A vision needs to be created. The following includes important considerations a school community must face while attempting to engage in staff meeting transformation (Eller, & Eller 2006).

- ***Understand strengths, weaknesses, and inhibitions of current staff meeting.***

What determines the school communities' capabilities before a move forward begins? What issues or concerns need to be addressed? Perhaps a staff survey or questionnaire, similar to those in ***figure 2*** and ***figure 3***, could be completed by staff members. The surveys below were found on "www.surveymonkey.com" by Sheila Eller (2006):

Figure 2

ABC School Questionnaire	
Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. I will keep your responses confidential but will use the information to improve our school and our staff meeting processes.	
Use a scale from 1 to 4. A rating of 1 is the lowest possible score and a rating of 4 is the highest possible score.	
1.	Rate our school's ability to work with and help students. _____
2.	Rate our school's ability to provide a stimulating professional atmosphere for teachers. _____
3.	Rate the effectiveness of our staff meetings. _____
4.	What do you think are our biggest challenges to good staff meetings? _____
5.	How can our staff meetings be improved? _____

Figure 3

XYZ Questionnaire	
Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. I will keep your responses confidential but will use the information to improve our school and our staff meeting processes.	
1.	In general, how does the present organization of our staff meetings help you as a teacher?
2.	What barriers or problems are present in our staff meetings that get in the way of our effectiveness?
3.	How can we improve our staff meetings?
4.	What are you willing to do to improve our staff meetings?

- ***Build a seedbed.*** Like farmers, administrators must take the time to make sure the ground has the right amount of nutrients and moisture to ensure the fragile seeds have a chance to grow successfully. Crucial components include good communication and data collection. Suggested action items:
 - Communicate with key staff members about the need to improve meetings
 - Form a PLC Committee and principal's advisory team
 - Data collection and distribution
- ***Plant the seeds.*** The growth process starts. The initial implementation process begins. Monitoring is crucial during this step. Suggested action items:
 - Inform staff, share and establish goals
 - Get community involved, bring in a meeting facilitator
- ***Nurture and watch for growth.*** How can administrators nurture staff members? Suggested action items:
 - Thanking staff for participating
 - Pointing out incidents of growth
 - Providing staff reinforcement
 - Sharing with the general community include some nurturing activities.
- ***Pull the weeds.*** Left unchecked, weeds can choke the best of gardens. Likewise, problems can choke best efforts to implement energized staff meetings. Problems can take many forms. The most common problems include, negative and reluctant staff members, lack of follow-through, and lack of time. Suggested action items:
 - Remain open, honest, and firm
 - Deal with the concerns directly

- Remind staff you want the issues not the attitude
- ***Harvest the crop.*** If administrators work carefully with staff, many benefits will be reaped. Staff members will be better suited for working collaboratively and solving problems collectively. Teachers will develop a need to assume more leadership roles and take ownership of success. Suggested action items:
 - Allow teachers to help conduct/plan meetings
 - Form special teams and task forces
 - Form parent group meetings

Areas for Further Research

Over the past twenty-five years, the educational literature has devoted considerable attention to the topic of PLCs. Across the country, school districts from Maine to California are adopting PLCs as a strategy to increase student achievement by creating a collaborative school culture focused on learning. Proponents of reform and professional organizations have endorsed the concept of PLCs. For example, the National Staff Development Council (NSCD) (2001) has included learning communities as one of the organization's standards for Staff Development, suggesting that PLCs are recognized as a strategy for school improvement, specifically professional development (Feger, & Arruda, 2008).

More research needs to be done on local schools, if any that have successfully implemented PLCs. The concept of PLCs has been discussed throughout local school

districts; however, little has been done regarding implementation. “Although PLCs have emerged as arguably the best means by which to continuously improve instruction and student performance, school districts are way behind in instituting this concept” (Schmoker, 2006).

More research should be done regarding technological impact on staff meetings. Will increase use of technology in schools reduce the amount of face time amongst administrators and teachers? At Cirencester Deer Park School, Gloucestershire, head teacher David Carter says the use of laptops has reduced the number of staff meetings by 40 percent ("Laptops reduce need,"). Although technology has reduced the number of minutia meetings, face time should also be a priority. Hopefully, technology does not hinder staff development by reducing valuable personal contact. Technology could be very beneficial with regards to analysis and synthesis of data; two important activities of PLCs and staff development.

A personal concern and, therefore, another area for further research is the impact budget crisis could have on the formation of successful faculty meetings. Currently, EHS is experiencing some negative impacts regarding school community strength, due to time and money constraint. Relationships are beginning to unravel. Could lack of time and money contribute to this problem?

Finally, more research should be done regarding the psychology of meetings. The social-psychological impact on meeting dynamics is an interesting topic that should be

further researched. Meeting dynamics and/or group dynamics could be a major player in dysfunctional cultures that educational organizations may contain.

Summary and Conclusion

Certainly, school communities are in desperate need of rebuilding. Also, staff development needs enhancement. Transforming staff meetings into PLCs might be the best solution. According to Dennis Sparks, the executive director of the National Staff Development Council (NSDC), “The most important strategy for sustained, substantive school improvement is developing the ability for school personnel to function as professional learning communities” (Schmoker, 2006).

Why professional learning communities? Why now? Educational organizations have relied far too much, with miserable results, on a failed model for improving instructional practice. Effective team-based learning communities provide the best opportunity for professional development because it is continuing and authentic. Action must be taken, it is time for school communities to start seeking solutions to concerns rather than complaining about factors that could be changed and managed with a commitment to PLCs. Administrators and teachers need to start investing time into individual professional development. However, like any other investment, it is only worth what you put into it.

Currently, times are very challenging within the educational arena. Perhaps, we

could all agree that the state of education is in dire need of improvement. The trials and hardships of education are well known. Currently, a career in education is not promising. Because of this, the turnover rate of teachers is high while making it difficult to recruit young, talented teachers. The educational product we are currently delivering to our youth is not up to par. Therefore; we are struggling to compete with the rest of the world in that regard. Thus, we are losing morale, losing the pride. My advice to the schools and school districts of our state and of our country is this; blame no one, expect nothing, do something! Can an educational organization have a soul? Organizations develop a soul when molded into a family... the major emphasis of PLCs.

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