

# Build Your Team

*The man who goes alone can start today; but he who travels with another must wait till that other is ready, and it may be a long time before they get off.*

—Henry David Thoreau

**T**he quote above illustrates one of the most challenging elements of data team work—getting started. Research confirms that in schools where professional learning communities (PLCs) exist, those schools are four times more likely to be improving academically than in those schools where faculty members operate in isolation (Ann Lewis in Schmoker, 2011). Many times, faculty members have been to trainings and read books, but for some reason—perhaps many reasons—fall short in the actual implementation of effective PLCs that gather, analyze, and use data in meaningful ways to improve outcomes for students and working conditions for adults. If a team waits until all members are ready, meaningful work may not get done. Sometimes, team members just have to decide to get started. Using the 10 data tools in this book helps a team get ready and embark upon the journey of improvement. A successful journey is dependent upon positive relationships and trust among professional colleagues. Positive relationships begin with understanding one’s teammates.

## THE POWER OF RELATIONSHIPS ■

The quality of relationships among professional colleagues in an organization has a profound impact on the organization’s productivity, its workplace climate, and the quality of its outcomes. Collaboration creates talent, diverse perspectives, and synergy. Conflict among professional colleagues destroys these—sending individuals packing. The data analysis tools in the following chapters can be used by individuals but yield the richest outcomes if they are used by collaborating members of learning communities, such as data teams.

Often the pressure of deadlines for reports, rigorous timelines, and strategic plans causes organizational members to rush to begin doing the work, such as analyzing data, rather than taking time to reflect upon the nature of the work to be done and how they might prepare to do the work. As a consequence, schools often find themselves *data rich* and *information poor*. If data teams have not taken time to talk about how they do the work and developed norms to govern themselves, many find themselves in conflict internally. As a result, time and effort are diverted from the task of analyzing data. When this happens, data team members find excuses to skip meetings and team effort disintegrates. This chapter is strategically placed before the others because there is a critical need to address how to do the work before the work of data analysis actually begins.

Recently, a high school math teacher who had been on a data team reflected,

As a result of talking about how we want to be treated as team members, what our beliefs about teaching and learning were, and how we would want to address conflict before we got into analyzing site-level data, I learned much about some of my colleagues with whom I had shared coffee for ten years but never really knew!

How a workplace feels—the emotional climate—impacts both morale and productivity. In the paragraphs that follow, we offer strategies to enhance the quality of working relationships among members of data teams as they embark upon using the data analysis tools in their own settings. These strategies also contribute to building a more collaborative, learning-focused workplace, a key ingredient in highly successful schools.

## ■ **TOOL 1: THE SMALLEY TEAM-BUILDING PERSONALITY TEST**

The personality test developed by Dr. Gary Smalley and Dr. John Trent is a tool teams have found helpful (Smalley & Trent, 1999). This brief assessment (see Tool 1 on page 123 for a blank version to photocopy) can be completed in just a few minutes and correlates to the more extensive Dominance, Influence, Steadiness, Compliance (DISC) personality tests that were developed in 1928 by John Geier and the work of Dr. William Marston (Moulton, 1999). Smalley and Trent have linked the four components of DISC to the character traits of four animals: lion (dominance), otter (influence), golden retriever (steadiness), and beaver (compliance).

Each column in Figure 1.1 represents an animal based on its personality traits and the relational and communicative strengths and weakness of each personality trait for team settings. Most people tend to have one or two dominate personality types. One of the keys to developing high-functioning teams is to understand the traits of each team member and how he or she contributes to working together effectively for the common good of all students.

**Figure 1.1** Interpreting the Results

	<i>The Lion</i>	<i>The Otter</i>	<i>The Golden Retriever</i>	<i>The Beaver</i>
<b>Team member strengths</b>	Takes charge, is a problem solver, competitive, confrontational, and enjoys change.	Optimistic, energetic, motivates others, and is future oriented.	Warm and relational, loyal, enjoys routine, is a peacemaker, sensitive, and feeling.	Accurate, precise, focuses on quality control, discerning, and analytical.
<b>Team member weaknesses</b>	Direct or impatient, busy, cold-blooded, impulsive or takes big risks, and insensitive to others.	Unrealistic or daydreamer, impatient, manipulator or pushy, and avoids details or lacks follow-through.	Misses opportunities, stays in a rut, sacrifices own feelings for harmony, and is easily hurt or holds a grudge.	Critical or strict, too controlling, pessimistic of new opportunities, and loses overview.
<b>Preferred communication style</b>	Direct or blunt, one-way communicator, and weakness—not a good listener.	Can inspire others, optimistic or enthusiastic, one-way communicator, and weakness—high energy can be used to manipulate others.	Indirect, two-way communicator, great listener, and weakness—uses too many words or provides too many details.	Factual, two-way communicator. great listener, and weakness—desire for detail and precision can frustrate others.
<b>Team structure needs</b>	Recognition, responsibility, opportunity to solve problems, and challenging activities.	Approval, opportunity to verbalize, visibility, and social recognition.	Emotional security and agreeable environment.	Quality and exact expectations.
<b>Actions to improve</b>	Add softness and become a great listener.	Be attentive to others and be more optimistic.	Learn to say <i>no</i> and to confront.	Understand that total support is not always possible.

Source: Smalley and Trent, 1999. Available at <http://smalley.cc/marriage-assessments/free-personality-test>

In the Smalley model, team members discover the major and minor personality traits that correspond to accompanying strengths and weaknesses. When team members understand one another, their ability to work together and form a strong bond is enhanced. As a result, the team is more productive and effective.

*Lion*

- Strengths: visionary, practical, productive, independent, decisive, leader
- Weaknesses: cold, domineering, self-sufficient, unforgiving, sarcastic

*Otter*

- Strengths: outgoing, warm, friendly, talkative, enthusiastic, compassionate
- Weaknesses: undisciplined, unproductive, exaggerates, egocentric, unstable

*Golden retriever*

- Strengths: calm, easygoing, dependable, quiet, objective, diplomatic
- Weaknesses: selfish, stingy, procrastinator, unmotivated, indecisive, fearful

*Beaver*

- Strengths: analytical, self-disciplined, industrious, organized, sacrificing
- Weaknesses: moody, self-centered, touchy, negative, unsociable, critical

### **Another Team-Building Strategy: Using Objects to Reflect Personalities**

Individuals are polite when they first begin working together. But as time goes on, personality differences and differences in beliefs about teaching and learning tend to surface as the team examines data. These differences can gradually lead to conflict, diverting focus from the task of data analysis and action planning. To reduce the possibility of this happening, it is useful to take time to do a personality inventory (Figure 1.2). While many inventories exist from which to choose, Harvey Silver, speaking to a group of participants at an Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) conference in New Orleans, once shared a “four-paneled windowpane” of personalities featuring household objects and asked participants, “Are you more like a paper clip, magnifying glass, teddy bear, or slinky?” He then asked participants to brainstorm attributes of each object and record the information in the windowpane labeled with that object.

After the information was recorded, participants were asked to analyze their perceptions of which object was most like their personality, noting “the intent is not to put anyone in a box,” but rather to reflect upon personality attributes and traits. Participants then went to one of the four corners of the room, each labeled with one of the household objects, to indicate their perceptions of their own personality styles. Doing this activity helped faculty members in one school better understand actions and reactions of their colleagues during their work as a data team.

During this activity one teacher reflected,

I always thought Justin was *unfeeling* as a person. As a result of doing the personality windowpanes, I realized he was a paperclip and really

**Figure 1.2** Personality Inventory

<p><b><u>Paper Clip</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organized</li> <li>• Punctual</li> <li>• Neat</li> <li>• Practical</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Magnifying Glass</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asks questions</li> <li>• Detailed</li> <li>• Thinker</li> <li>• Observant</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Teddy Bear</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relational</li> <li>• Warm</li> <li>• People first</li> <li>• Friendly</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Slinky</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Humorous</li> <li>• Energetic</li> <li>• Visionary</li> <li>• Talkative</li> </ul>

was *task first, relationship second* in his work style. I, on the other hand, was a teddy bear who valued *relationships first and tasks second*. I came to understand why Justin perceived me as *fluffy*. And sometimes, he hurt my feelings. It also helped us realize why Carmella always asked *why* questions. It turned out that she was a magnifying glass and really wasn't asking questions to stall us in decision making but honestly needed to know *why* before she could move forward. Understanding the impact of personality styles on our working relationships gave us a tool to express discomfort, dissatisfaction, or frustration in our work. It helped us separate practice from person. It enabled us to enhance the quality of the work we did as a team because we could identify how specific behaviors were impacting processes, such as brainstorming, in which we were engaged.

## HIGH-FUNCTIONING TEAMS ■

Teamwork is difficult and complex. High-performance teams understand differences in style and personality and learn how to manage or prevent disappointment in performance or unnecessary conflicts. Many times, individuals on teams become irritated because other members of the team come late to meetings, text during meetings, or don't fulfill their commitment to the team. To address these maladies, successful teams take the time to develop norms to govern working relationships. There are a number of approaches to developing

norms. One is to give each member of the data team two sticky notes and ask them to write how they wish to be treated during meetings on one sticky note. On the other, write how they wish the team to function. When they have finished this individual task, ask them to share what they have written. Suggest that they build categories of sticky notes based on similarity of content.

For instance, what would the category be if four sticky notes read the following?

- I wish to be treated with respect.
- Respect.
- Listen to one another and treat each other with respect.
- Honor and respect each member's contributions.

The category name, based on similarity of content, would be *respect*. After categories are formed and named, group members create norms to assure that each category is addressed. For example, the category labeled *respect* might be addressed with a norm that reads, "We agree to treat all team members and their contributions with respect."

The norms are then posted and group members are asked if any changes are needed or if they support governing themselves with the norms as written. If members support the norms, they sign the norm document. Each member of the team receives a signed copy of the document. A large print version of this is posted where the team meets. Norms are reviewed before the work of data analysis is begun, revisited during the meeting if members are not adhering to the norms to which they agreed, and reflected upon at the end of every work session. During the initial few meetings, this action may seem artificial and awkward, but over time it provides an avenue for addressing unproductive behaviors and increasing productivity.

In an effort to improve performance, a data team brainstormed actions that "pushed their buttons" or irritated them, then planned proactively what they would do if that action occurred. The list included things, such as

- coming to a meeting late,
- side conversations,
- texting or doing other work during the meeting,
- dominating a discussion in a way that precludes others' participation,
- putting others down, and
- not following through with commitments.

By creating this list ahead of time, not only were team members able to brainstorm consequences but the list also provided a way to make public the expectations for interactions within the data team meetings.

### **Improvement Means Change, and Change Means Conflict**

Although there are strategies teams can use to prevent unnecessary conflict, not being afraid of conflict and dealing with it appropriately when it occurs are trademarks of data teams that are committed to improving outcomes

through effective change. In the best-selling leadership fable, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* (Lencioni, 2002), Patrick Lencioni addresses the five pitfalls of teams:

- absence of trust,
- fear of conflict,
- lack of commitment,
- avoidance of accountability, and
- inattention to results.

Although any one of these areas could be problematic, school data teams most frequently struggle with a fear of conflict. Staffed with adults who work with children for their avocation, one can understand why the fear of conflict and avoiding conflict at all costs is so prevalent in schools. Most teachers are not accustomed to or trained to work with adults. Teacher preparation programs focus on developing the teaching skills of the individual teacher. There is very little team or case-based learning. Even though we know the most effective learning happens in groups, schools have for generations been organized as collections of individual adults who work with groups of children. Being able to work through conflict in order to initiate change that leads to improvement is something every effective data team must be able to do on a regular basis.

The first step in overcoming conflict is getting past the idea that conflict is negative. Conflict is a reality for teams that do meaningful work together and try to improve outcomes. Improvement does not occur without doing something differently. Doing things differently requires change, and change is uncomfortable for most people. In his recent book, *Leading Change in Your School*, Douglas Reeves (2009) identifies seven myths that get in the way of change and school improvement efforts:

- Myth 1, plan your way to greatness—Research shows that large, complex strategic plans are actually *inversely* related to growth in student achievement gains. If a plan must be written, keep it to a page and start with a clear vision and values.
- Myth 2, just a little bit better is good enough—Deep implementation takes time and commitment. Breakthrough results do not happen quickly.
- Myth 3, we want you to change us . . . really—Any change meets with resistance because change is loss. People who demand change generally direct that change at others, not themselves.
- Myth 4, people love to collaborate—In the early stages, collaboration is not something people seek or enjoy, but only those committed to collaboration are able to effectively implement data teams in their schools.
- Myth 5, hierarchy changes systems—It is relationships within the network (the people actually doing the work) that bring about sustainable change, not authority. Hierarchy is limited by time and resources. Networks and teams of individuals are not.
- Myth 6, volume equals VOLUME—The loudest voices do not represent the majority. There is never 100% agreement for any change. When

leaders invest their time and energy into those who want to improve, breakthroughs become reality.

- Myth 7, the leader is the perfect composite of every trait—Hero leadership does not get the job done. It takes a team.

In order to overcome these myths, teams must embrace and work through conflict to experience success. Schools and organizations that seek to avoid conflict by burying it or pretending it doesn't exist eventually stall in the implementation of their improvement efforts. Ideas on how to improve are a dime a dozen—very cheap and easy to come by. Being able to actually *implement* change that endures and results in lasting improvement is difficult and does not occur without high-functioning teams willing and able to work through the myths and conflicts associated with change.

### **Understanding How Change Occurs**

In the best-selling book, *Switch: How to Change When Change Is Hard*, Heath and Heath (2010) discuss the role of understanding, emotions, and boundaries (or pathways) when it comes to implementing effective change. Some change efforts simply require someone to understand why the change is necessary. For instance, smoking in America dramatically decreased when the Surgeon General stamped the ill effects of using tobacco on the label (understanding). However, some people today continue to smoke even though they know it is bad for them because they are emotionally attached to the habit. Quitting for those folks requires intensive support or the establishment of boundaries (real or imaginary) that prevent them from accessing cigarettes. Every improvement activity requires some sort of shift or change. Effective leaders help staff members to understand that friction or conflict is a necessary part of the equation and they work with people's emotions around change to help people make the switch. They also create structures or boundaries to support meaningful change.

## ■ **TEAM MEMBER ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

Another useful strategy for working with data teams is to have rotating role responsibilities. For example, the roles and responsibilities described in Figure 1.3 might be assigned to individual members.

The role assignments usually last just one meeting and then the individual who has played a specific role nominates another team member to assume that role for the next meeting. Rotating role responsibilities assures that team members stay engaged and learn how to support and understand one another in the various components of the work.

### **TIPS Framework for Data Teams**

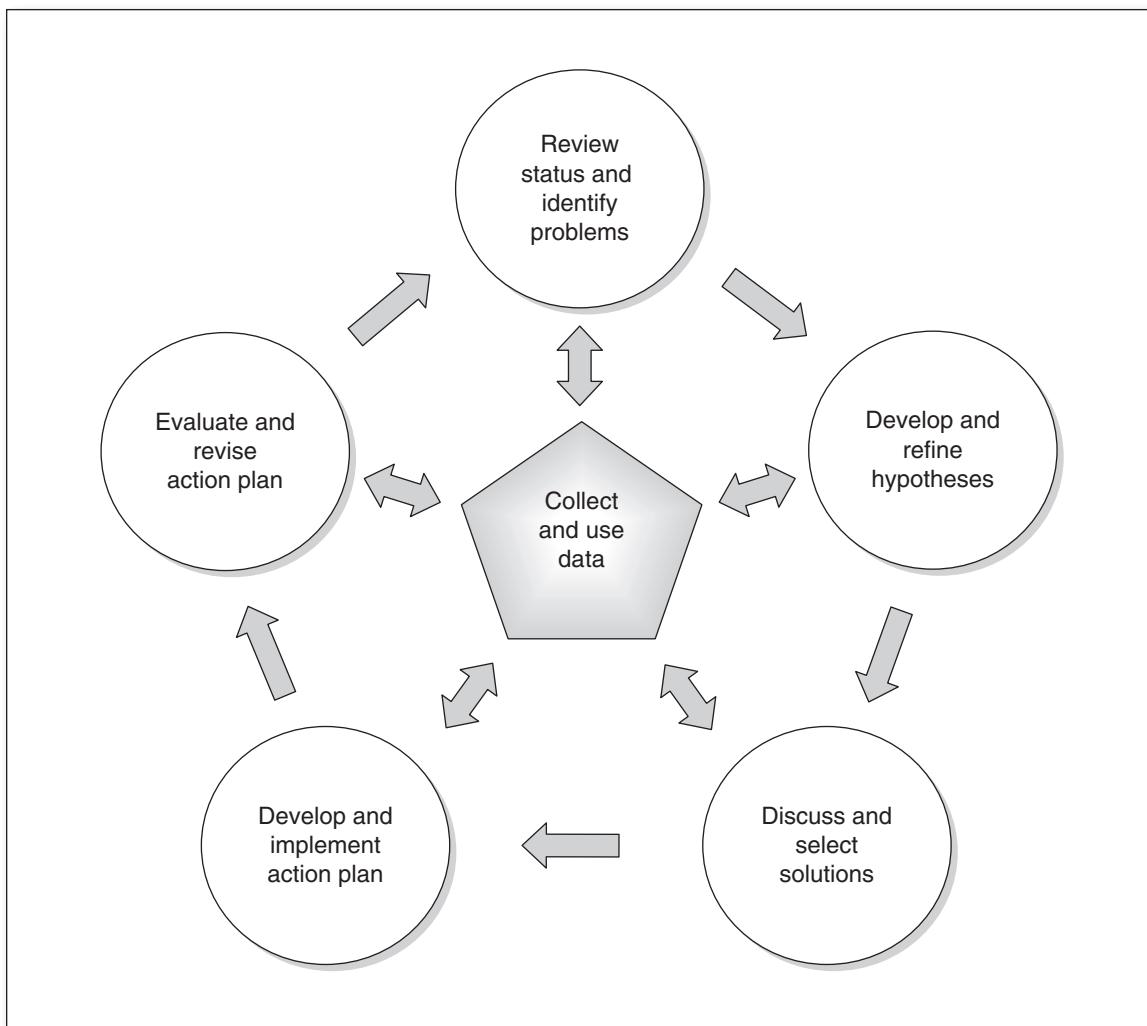
Developed by Dr. Rob Horner and Dr. Anne Todd (2010) at the University of Oregon, the TIPS data team framework stands for Team Initiated Problem Solving. Using this model (illustrated in Figure 1.4) clearly communicates what



**Figure I.3 Team Member Roles and Responsibilities**

<i>Role</i>	<i>Responsibility</i>
<b>Facilitator</b>	Call meeting to order, outline work to be done, clarify communications, remind team members of norms if they are not being followed, and summarize proceedings at the end of the meeting.
<b>Recorder</b>	Record contributions of individual members on chart paper or electronically.
<b>Observer / encourager</b>	Observe verbal contributions and body language and encourage quiet members of the group to add their perspectives to the dialogue and the work.
<b>Climate / norms monitor</b>	Monitors climate of the work group, calls group members' attention to moments of discomfort, and suggests solution strategies.
<b>Timekeeper</b>	Reminds group members of how much time has elapsed and how much remains for a given task.

**Figure I.4 TIPS Framework for Data Teams**



Source: Horner and Todd, 2010

is expected at each stage. In this model, data teams conduct the following five activities during each meeting:

- review status and identify problems,
- develop and refine hypothesis,
- discuss and select solutions,
- develop and implement action plan, and
- evaluate and revise action plan.

In the TIPS model, the data team has four distinct roles that members play: facilitator, minute taker, data analyst, and active team member. It is the facilitator's responsibility to chair the meeting, move the team members through the five stages in a timely manner, and make sure everyone is participating and actively involved. Although everyone is responsible to think about the data presented and use it to make decisions, it is the data analyst's job to make sure the right data are brought to the meeting and describe to the team what the data represent so that they can be used effectively to make decisions.

The minute taker is responsible for tracking the problems the team identifies, the proposed solutions, and team member's actions. This is done electronically as the meeting progresses and sent to team members at the end of the meeting. The rest of the team members are active participants who come to the meeting prepared to participate in a meaningful way, think, and take action as necessary. TIPS is designed so that efficiency and effectiveness are the cornerstones of data meetings that lead to team members taking action and keeping each other accountable for results.

## ■ ADDITIONAL HELPFUL HINTS

Staff members are busy professionals. While no time is ideal for a data team meeting, scheduling the meeting in advance, along with identifying the desired outcomes at the end of the previous meeting, allows members of the team to plan proactively. Publishing an agenda ahead of time with time allocations for each agenda item also contributes to team productivity.

If team members need to come to a meeting having studied data, provide them with that data at least a week in advance. If homework is to be assigned, ask two people to be responsible. This eases the burden of work and encourages collaboration. If team members are unfamiliar with knowledge of how to disaggregate data by group, such as low socioeconomic status (SES), conduct training as needed. This provides critical foundational skills for the work that data teams do.

Analyzing data and action planning based on that data is difficult work. Taking time to acknowledge and celebrate the contributions of team members and the accomplishments of the team can boost morale and create energy for future collaborative work. Providing feedback on the results of implementing action plans developed from data analysis can create a sense of efficacy and momentum for continuing to do the work that culminates in student learning gains.

The chapters that follow provide a wide array of data analysis tools applicable to a spectrum of unique contexts. Together with the process skills from this chapter, the content regarding data tools, illustrated with specific examples, add to the reader's repertoire of strategies to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in their schools.