

# Preface

## Why Read This Book?

This book is about developing group culture, increasing facilitator knowledge and skill, and developing the most precious resource groups have—the members themselves. In short, this book is about leadership for better schools—schools that are better for students, better places for leaders to grow as learners, and better environments for inquiry.

The book can be considered a field guide for two reasons. First, it is written based on my interactions with many groups in the field; second, because the original form of much of the content came in columns, the ideas presented are specific and practical, but not without theoretical foundation. It was inspired by more than 40 years of working with groups on several continents and the resulting columns I wrote for the *Journal of Staff Development*, a publication of the National Staff Development Council, now named Learning Forward. In those columns, I developed many specific ideas that I lay before you now.

The tools, tips, and principles I present here will make working committees, task forces, and grade-level and department teams and faculties not only more effective and efficient, but smarter and able to resolve cognitively complex issues regarding student learning more effectively. Readers also will learn to discern which problems may be solved and which are ongoing tensions that need to be managed.

## Who Is This Book For?

Productive groups are developed, not born. This book is a developmental field book for all those laboring in schools and seeking collective improvement in student learning. It is written for anyone needing a current, practical guide to group work.

Here, readers will find not only what makes effective teams, but how to develop teacher skills as facilitators and informed group members in informal and formal settings, small groups and large.

The book takes readers beyond the idea of *professional learning communities* to the practice, describing specific ways to weave the collaborative fabric of a faculty, develop group member skills, and improve facilitation strategies. District and building administrators, K–12 teachers, university students, and teacher leaders of all types—mentors, coaches, and committee and department chairs—will find it useful for working with staffs, parents, or communities.

## What's New About This Book?

In *The Adaptive School* (2009), Bruce Wellman and I describe how professional development and ongoing focus on developing the system as an adaptive entity can help groups develop their capacity for productivity. In this book I extend, add depth, provide how-tos, provide more detail about the principles, and bring together more tools and tips for unlocking group potential. The structure of the book should make the material easily accessible to groups, from novice to veteran.

Readers will learn to work together more effectively. This book contains the most current research, revisions to the norms of collaboration and related assessment instruments, and detailed instructions for facilitating and intervening with counterproductive individuals or group behaviors.

A focus on collective intelligence enhances my previous work and provides information to guide readers through the latest research on the concept, what factors are involved, and

how to increase collective IQ, leading to the ability to solve increasingly complex issues.

### **Special Features**

Special features of this book include the newly updated seven norms of collaboration, a sample team assessment survey, instruments for assessing meeting effectiveness, an extensive bibliography, and practical examples and suggestions embedded throughout the text.

Readers who use this text will be better able to

- Develop productive, collaborative work cultures,
- Improve collective focus on student learning, and
- Acquire the principles and understanding to engage in a continuous cycle of self-improvement.