

Dismantling the Culture of Nice to Build Collective Leader Efficacy

School leaders play a powerful role in shaping the mindsets and effectiveness of their leadership teams and teachers. At NIET's 2022 National Conference, participants developed a deeper understanding of collective leader efficacy and its impact as well as the conditions and mindsets that leaders need to support continuous improvement.

This document shares more about collective leader efficacy and provides insights that any school leader could use and benefit from. By strengthening leadership and leadership teams, student learning accelerates.

Collective Leader Efficacy through Instructional Leadership Teams

What it is: Shared belief that the leadership team as a collective can make a significant contribution to increasing student achievement.

Why it is important:

- Increases the impact of the team through shared learning experiences
- Drives improvement efforts by working collectively as a high functioning team
- Supports the development of a shared leadership mindset
- Develops a culture of learning and leadership
- Identifies and develops practices that support a positive impact on teaching and learning

NIET believes instructional leadership teams can effectively accomplish their goals by:

- Setting directions
- Charting a clear course that everyone understands
- Establishing high expectations and using data to track progress and performance
- Developing people through providing teachers and others in the system with the necessary support and training to succeed
- Making the organization work, ensuring that the entire range of conditions and incentives in the school fully supports teaching and learning

Key Tasks of Effective Leaders

Reflect on the items listed below. As a leader, circle the task you most often engage in to build capacity of your team members.

Establishing goals

Strategic resourcing

Establishing an orderly and supportive environment

Planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and the curriculum

Promoting and participating in teacher learning and development

Conditions of High-functioning Teams

Consider these characteristics and conditions of high-functioning teams. Put a star by the condition that is a current strength of your team. Circle the condition that is a current need.

Real team: Everyone knows who is on the team. The team has consistency and works together toward a common purpose.

Compelling purpose: The team's purpose and instructional vision is clear, challenging, and consequential.

Right people: Team members have good teamwork skills and bring a diversity of perspectives and abilities.

Sound structure: The team effectively uses norms, and engages in well-designed interdependent tasks.

Supportive context: The team has the structures, systems, and materials they need to do effective work.

Team coaching: Coaching is readily provided by the team leaders, team members, and/or external consultants.

From Peter Dewitt, "Collective Leader Efficacy"

Practices that Dismantle the Culture of Nice

A team affected by the "culture of nice" can look high-functioning on the surface. For example, that could look like:

- Deferring to others' ideas seemingly out of respect or politeness
- Rarely questioning each other's and their own practice, assumptions, and beliefs
- Only sharing successful student/teacher work to avoid judgment from peers
- If/when examining less than desirable student/teacher work, making excuses for that work
- Recommending strategies for others to apply without critically reflecting and applying them to their own instruction/practices
- Not using norms regularly; norms exist on paper only

Dismantling the culture of nice is critical to accelerating the impact of the team and building collective leader efficacy. Here you see some specific actions leaders can take:

- Clarify expectations, processes, and performance goals
- Challenge the status quo by asking questions and expressing dissenting views
- Model best practices to establish expectations by engaging in the high-quality work you ask others to do
- Hold your team accountable for following up or taking specific actions
- Focus on students
- Model curiosity, observation, and honesty

As a leader, consider which of these practices you could prioritize based on your team's highest need.

Cultivating Team Mindsets Builds Collective Leader Efficacy

Understand the complexities of working as a group.

- Engage in collective responsibility.
- Utilize the collective thoughts of the team to expand learning opportunities.
- Use challenges and robust conversations as opportunities for growth and learning.

Focus on improvement.

- Have confidence in each other's ability to improve learning conditions for students and develop each other's competency to do so.
- Collect and analyze evidence to determine impact.

Consider asking your team to complete the following self-assessment on the following page to better understand the strengths each member brings to the team. By doing so, leaders can support the team in strengthening their collective efficacy. A self-assessment that is aligned to the roles/responsibilities of the team members, the goals of the team, and allows for authentic reflection can support leaders in elevating the voice and contributions of their individual team members. This practice among the team develops a learning and leading mindset.

After your team completes the self-assessment, develop a plan for accelerated learning and impact. You can use the template found on page 5 to plan for next steps.

Sample team member self-assessment

Name:

Put an X in the box for where you would rate your skills and abilities for each characteristic on a scale from 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest, and provide a short reflection.

Characteristics of effective leaders	5 (high)	4	3	2	1 (low)	Notes
Provides coaching support and collaborative opportunities						
Assumes additional responsibilities						
Provides/supports opportunities for new learning						
Uses data (teacher & student) to adjust support						
Leads/supports ongoing collaborative opportunities/structures						
Provides contributions to inform decisions, and build teacher capacity						
Monitors/supports the quality of content within collaborative opportunities/structures						

Plan for Accelerated Learning and Impact

Team Member	
Self-identified Strengths	Observed Strengths
Accelerating Team Member Learning	
What key task of effective leaders can I engage in to accelerate this team member's strengths?	
What condition of high-functioning teams can I create to accelerate this team member's strengths?	
Accelerating Team Impact	
How can I leverage this team member's strengths in the practices that dismantle the culture of nice among our team?	
How can I leverage this team member's strengths to cultivate the mindsets needed to build collective leader efficacy in the team?	