



WHAT IS A SUCCESSFUL PLC?

#SECOND EDITION



The MOFET Institute
Research, Curriculum and Program Development for
Teacher Educators



Professional Learning Communities



משרד החינוך
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INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS SUCCESS FOR US, FOR OUR COMMUNITY, AND FOR THE ORGANIZATION, AND HOW CAN WE MEASURE IT?

who should measure the success of a PLC? These questions and others engross PLC* leaders in Israel and around the world, as well as PLC facilitators and participants. The answers to these questions are not simple because PLCs have diverse goals, and sometimes, it is difficult to measure them. In addition, PLCs are safe spaces with norms of trust, so it is important for members to avoid excessively revealing their activities and accomplishments to people who are not part of their PLC.

While success measurement is quite individual to each community and its goals, it is possible to identify various situations that reflect PLC activity levels and their degrees of communality.

In order to measure PLC success, a think tank was established whose members analyzed the topic in depth and prepared a first draft outline for evaluating success.

The draft was presented to participants during a daylong event dedicated to learning what constitutes community success, which was held at the MOFET Institute in Israel in July 2022. This guide is a product of the event, in which feedback was provided on the first draft outline for evaluating PLCs.

IN THIS GUIDE, WE WILL ADDRESS THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

WHY

EVALUATE
COMMUNITY
SUCCESS

WHO

EVALUATES
COMMUNITY
SUCCESS?

WHEN

IS COMMUNITY
SUCCESS EVALUATED?

WHAT

IS EVALUATED?

HOW

ARE THE EVALUATIONS
PERFORMED?

* PLC = professional learning community

WHY EVALUATE PLCS?

There are several answers to the question, "Why evaluate PLCs?" The primary reason is to understand PLC members' perceptions of and attitudes toward their communities and how they are conducting themselves. The goal is to establish community goals that may boost programs and progress. In order to understand what needs to be improved upon, what should be preserved, and what to work on, we need to bring to light the current situation using PLC evaluation processes.

WHO SHOULD EVALUATE PLCS?

It is preferable that all PLC members and facilitators participate in the evaluation process. The evaluation is internal, not external; it is intended to offer members an understanding of the PLC's strengths and weaknesses and the areas in which they would like to improve.

WHEN SHOULD THE EVALUATION BE PERFORMED?

The evaluation process can be conducted at any stage of the community's activity. It is advisable to decide in advance the points in time during which the community will perform the evaluation of the various dimensions and not wait until the end of the year. It is also important to remember that the evaluation process is designed to shape the community's ongoing activities and not to summarize them. Therefore, it is better to carry out the evaluation during the year and not at the conclusion of the community's activities.

WHAT SHOULD BE EVALUATED?

In this guide, a six-dimension evaluation is proposed. Five dimensions are detailed below, and an additional sixth dimension – the content knowledge dimension – is specific to each PLC; therefore, this sixth dimension should be defined by the community. In this context, we recommend defining the goals of the PLC content at the beginning of the program year. For this purpose, the SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, timely) model can be used to define content-area goals.

Each PLC can decide which dimensions and indicators to evaluate, and PLCs have no obligation to evaluate all six dimensions during each evaluation cycle.

THE SIX EVALUATION DIMENSIONS:

- >> The relationships among the PLC members;
- >> Meeting setting and systematic conditions to optimize PLC work;
- >> Professional collaborative learning;
- >> Learning from practice and data-driven learning;
- >> The effect of participation in the PLC on its members;
- >> Pedagogic content knowledge,;

HOW ARE THE EVALUATIONS PERFORMED?

In this guide, we present a general explanation of each dimension followed by detailed dimension indicators, i.e., how the dimension may be manifested in PLC activity. The questions accompanying each indicator enable a better understanding of it.

Below are two possible ways to perform the evaluations:

1. Evaluate the entire dimension

Each PLC member rates the dimension chosen for evaluation on a scale of 1 to 5, (1 = low, 5 = high) according to the various indicators. The ratings are marked on the reference worksheet attached to this guide. (All reference worksheets can be downloaded from the Professional Learning Communities R&D website.)

1. Evaluate each indicator

Each PLC member rates the state of the community according to the indicators of the chosen dimension. In all evaluation opportunities, it is important to conduct a discussion about the ratings given by PLC members. It is important to keep in mind that the ratings themselves are not the goal, but a basis for dialog. The discussion makes it possible to surface a range of different perspectives and disagreements among PLC participants (manifested in the rating gaps), giving participants opportunities to share their feelings and perceptions while striving to find solutions and strategies for PLC development. At the end of the discussion, it is advisable to focus on the conclusions; for example, highlighting community strengths, pinpointing community improvements, outlining future improvement goals, and determining possible paths towards these goals.



RELATIONSHIPS AMONG COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Relationships of trust, cooperation, and mutual support among PLC members enable collaborative learning and investigation. Trust is the willingness of one party to be vulnerable to another based on the assumption that the other party is compassionate, reliable, competent, honest, and open.

Below are the seven indicators that measure the relationships among community members:

DIMENSION INDICATORS

1 CONNECTIONS AMONG PEOPLE

- # How much time is devoted to activities that promote member acquaintance and closeness?
- # To what extent do community members share personal experiences?
- # To what extent do community members share their feelings?

2 NORMS AND VALUES

- # Have norms and values been defined for the community?
- # To what extent do community members adhere to the norms?

3 A SAFE SPACE FOR SHARING

- # To what extent do community members feel that the community is a safe and open space for them to share their professional dilemmas?
- # To what extent do community members feel comfortable sharing their difficulties and failures?
- # To what extent are minority views expressed in the community?

4 COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

- # To what extent are community members open to receiving and giving feedback?
- # Do community members accept multiple perspectives and do not avoid disagreements?
- # How willing are community members to conduct sensitive, complex discussions?

5 AUTONOMY AND CHOICE

- # To what extent are the processes and discussed topics selected by all community members?

6 COMMITMENT AND RESPONSIBILITY

- # Do members update the community when they are absent or late?
- # Do community members contact members who were absent to check on their status?
- # To what extent do the community members feel they are missed when they are absent from a meeting?

7 TEAM SPIRIT

- # How proud are members to participate in the community and to identify with its values?



THE SETTINGS AND SYSTEMATIC CONDITIONS TO OPTIMIZE PLC WORK

ESTABLISHING A SUPPORTIVE ATMOSPHERE AND PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Supportive conditions enable PLCs to come together and create cultures and climates for learning. There are supportive settings that relate to the framework and systematic conditions; for instance, time and financial resources. There are cultural conditions for mutual interaction in the PLC setting, such as a collaborative culture built on trust that promotes meaningful exploratory dialogue and progress among participants.

Below are the three indicators to measure settings and systematic conditions to optimize community work:

DIMENSION INDICATORS

1 PHYSICAL SPACE AND DIGITAL PLATFORM

- # Do all community participants know the location of the meeting in advance?
- # To what extent does the balance between face-to-face and online meetings meet the needs of the community?
- # To what extent does the physical space invite collaborative discourse (in terms of the setting, seating layout, etc.)?
- # To what extent is the digital platform (if it exists) user-friendly?
- # To what extent does the digital platform enable different aspects of the PLC: collaborative dialogue, maintaining confidentiality, exploratory discourse, file saving, and more?

2 MEETING STRUCTURE

- # To what extent is the structure of the meetings known and clear to all members of the community?

3 REGULARITY OF THE MEETINGS

- # Are there regular fixed times for community meetings?
- # Do the community members arrive on time for the meetings?
- # Have norms been defined for the synchronous and asynchronous sessions, such as keeping video cameras on, muting microphones, posting questions in the chat area, etc.?
- # Is there a division of duties among community members (participants responsible for refreshments, meeting check-in, digital support, etc.)

4 COMMUNITY CUSTOMS

- # Are there traditions that are unique to the community, such as: celebrating birthdays or marking special events?
- # To what extent do all community members share in the customs?
- # Is there a procedure for joining or leaving the community?



PROFESSIONAL COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

PLC learning focuses on pedagogical content knowledge (PCK). The objectives are to influence the member teachers' levels of pedagogical professionalism and expertise, impact student learning, and develop teachers' solutions to address students' needs.

Learning in the PLC takes place on three levels:

Sharing

A one-way process in which a person shares an idea or finished product so that others can learn from it and make use of it themselves.

Cooperation

A joint process in which there is clear division of labor among some team members – aimed at creating an end product.

Collaboration

Features joint work for the duration of the creative process; and throughout the activity, all group members are committed to conducting the entire assignment.

Below are the four indicators for measuring the settings and systematic conditions to optimize community work:

DIMENSION INDICATORS

1 SHARING FINISHED PRODUCTS

- # Do community members share products from their classroom?
- # Do community members share their successes?
- # Do community members share failures and challenges?

2 DISCOURSE IN THE COMMUNITY

- # To what extent do participants actively participate in the discourse?
- # Is the discourse respectful and sharing, promoting progress?
- # Do reflective discussions take place in the community and to what extent?
- # To what extent does discourse take place that allows for a range of different perspectives and disagreements to surface, enabling participants to cope with challenges and differences of opinion?

3 OUTCOME DEVELOPMENT

- # To what extent is the community developing collaborative outcomes?
- # What is the level of community member involvement in developing the collaborative outcomes?
- # To what extent are the collaborative outcomes documented and available to community members?

4 COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

- # Are assignments and roles distributed in the community for all elements related to community learning?
- # To what extent is there long-term collaborative learning (collaboration) in the community?
- # To what extent is collaborative learning relevant, promoting the teacher's work?
- # To what extent does peer learning take place in community meetings?



LEARNING FROM PRACTICE AND DATA-DRIVEN LEARNING

PLC is characterized by collaborative learning that aims to improve teachers' professional practice and student learning. To this end, teachers carry out classroom observations, prepare shared lesson plans, engage in peer mentoring, and conduct mutual feedback processes. The information and data from the observations and the collaborative work form the basis for meaningful discussions and exploratory discourse, which enable processes of continuous improvement.

In educator PLCs, learning from practice often deals with topics related to classroom teaching. Discussions of this type are based on data (or on representations of practice), reflecting exploratory positions (identifying and assessing explanations, alternatives, and solutions). The discussions use the educators' knowledge and experience and can lead to practical conclusions and potential applications in the classroom.

Below are the four indicators for measuring the settings and systematic conditions to optimize community work:

DIMENSION INDICATORS

1 LEARNING FROM PRACTICE

- # To what extent does learning from practice take place in the community?
- # To what extent are representations of practice used in learning processes

2 ORGANIZED METHODS

- # To what extent does the community use a variety of methods of learning from practice?
- # To what extent is the connection between improving teaching and improving learning quality emphasized in processes of learning from practice?

3 DRAWING CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIVE PROCESSES

- # To what extent are the conclusions from processes of learning from practice tested in the field and brought back to the community for renewed discussion?
- # To what extent does the community both evaluate the way learning from practice is conducted and perform change and improvement processes based on the conclusions?



THE EFFECTS OF PARTICIPATION IN THE COMMUNITY

For active participation in the PLC, there are several circles of influence:

The teachers participating in the community

PLCs contribute to teachers' continuous improvement in knowledge and professional skills, to feelings of efficacy, and to social-emotional elements.

The students

A PLC in which teachers are actively involved in the day-to-day teaching process influences student learning. Research found that the improvements that took place in the knowledge and professional skills of teachers who participated in PLCs and their sense of efficacy directly influenced students' achievements.

School and factors outside the community

Teachers' professional development improves the professional level of their work, which strengthens school capabilities. In addition, teachers who apply their PLC-acquired tools, concepts, knowledge, and skills promote a collaborative learning culture and improvements in the professional skills of the teaching staff around them. In addition, research found that participation in PLCs contributes to preventing teacher dropout, which promotes school stability.

DIMENSION INDICATORS

1 PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE PARTICIPANTS

- # Does participation in the community contribute to the empowerment of teachers in their roles (teaching skills, personal efficacy in teaching, teaching method improvement, etc.)?
- # Do new community facilitators grow from within the community?

2 THE COMMUNITY'S EXTERNAL INFLUENCE

- # What is the effect of the community's actions on surrounding environments (the school, the city...)?
- # To what extent has the community learned and gained new ideas and new joint initiatives?
- # To what extent does participation in the community enable and encourage collaboration among different schools and districts?
- # Do collaborations (learning sessions, development of joint initiatives, etc.) take place among participants and/or facilitators of different multidisciplinary communities or within the same discipline?

3 IMPACT ON STUDENTS

- # Does the teachers' participation in the community affect the students' learning in the classroom?
- # Does teacher participation in the community influence the classroom climate?
- # Does the teachers' participation in the community affect discourse in the classroom?
- # Does the participation of teachers in the community affect student evaluation methods?



DISCIPLINARY CONTENT OF THE COMMUNITY

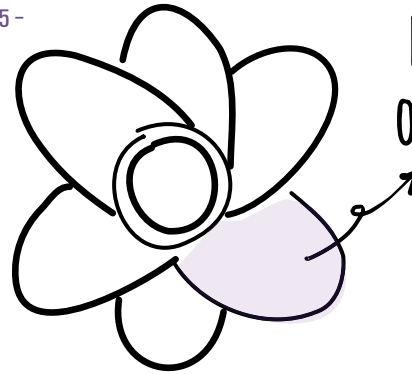
Professional learning communities are organized groups of educators who gather in order to learn together. The collaborative learning of the participants is based on data from research and the field; its goal is to improve performance and learning among students. Therefore, the content that the community addresses has a central and important place in the functioning and conduct of the community.

The learning method, facilitator selection, meeting location, and other factors – all of these elements are influenced by the discipline content that the community members share.

Hence, it is very important to set common goals in disciplinary content and monitor dimension progress throughout the year.

Since the dimensions are unique for each and every community, we saw fit to leave the determination of the goals and indicators to you – the leaders, facilitators, and participants of the communities.

It is advisable for you to jointly decide on the goals and indicators that will demonstrate that you are indeed succeeding in your mission.



EVALUATION OF ONE DIMENSION

WHAT IS PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY SUCCESS? INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY EVALUATION OF ONE DIMENSION

In this exercise, we will evaluate community-building progress related to our specific dimension in two phases:

INDIVIDUAL PHASE

Each participant assesses the extent of the community's progress in the chosen dimension.

COMMUNITY PHASE

Participants post their assessments on a physical or collaborative digital board, and the community conducts a discussion on the subject.

ADVANCE PREPARATION

PREPARE FOR EACH PARTICIPANT:

- The guide: What is professional learning community success?
- The individual instructions and the axis system worksheet.
- Writing instruments.

In addition, prepare a physical or digital board for posting the individual evaluation worksheets from all the participants.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- It is important to allow participants to share their individual evaluations anonymously.
 - There are no right or wrong answers. It is important to address the differences in evaluations and reflect on why there are gaps in community member perceptions.
-

INDIVIDUAL EVALUATION PHASE FOR EACH COMMUNITY PARTICIPANT

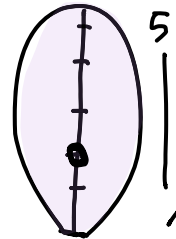
Evaluate the dimension indicators on the appropriate axes.

From 1 (We are at the start of the journey)

to 5 (We have achieved our goals in this dimension)

FOR EXAMPLE:

INDIVIDUAL PHASE

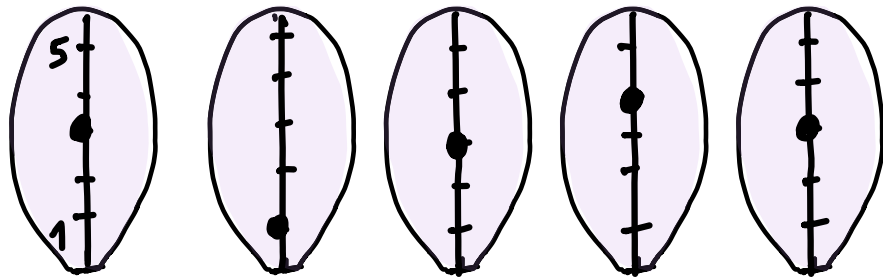


ASSESS THE
INDICATOR:



RELATIONSHIPS AMONG
COMMUNITY MEMBERS

COMMUNITY PHASE



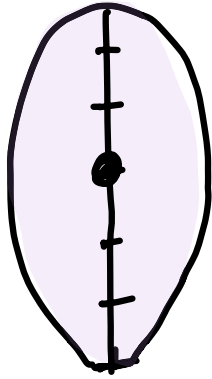
PARTICIPANT 1

PARTICIPANT 2

PARTICIPANT 3

PARTICIPANT 4

PARTICIPANT 5



COMMUNITY AVERAGE DATA ANALYSIS

GROUP PHASE

ALL PARTICIPANTS ARE ASKED TO POST THEIR STRUCTURES ON THE BOARD.

As mentioned, anonymity can be maintained. Ask the participants to review the various structures.

Potential discussion questions:

- What can be learned from the various structures that have been drawn regarding the _____ dimension in our community?
- Are there significant differences in community member evaluations? What can be learned from this?
- What must we do to move forward in this dimension?

Potential activity:

- Ask two people who gave differing dimension evaluations to share their evaluation considerations. Ask them to discuss and try to explain their positions to each other.

Please note: The goal is not for them to agree, but to discuss their differences and reveal differing perceptions.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY SUCCESS?

INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY EVALUATION OF ALL DIMENSIONS OF SUCCESS

Like any structure, the community-building process also features several phases: Preparing the foundation, laying the stones, strengthening the structure, and more.

In this exercise, we will evaluate community-building progress in two phases:

INDIVIDUAL PHASE

Each participant assesses the extent of the community's progress in the chosen dimension.

COMMUNITY PHASE

Participants post their assessments on a physical or a collaborative digital board, and the community conducts a discussion on the subject.

ADVANCE PREPARATION

PREPARE FOR EACH PARTICIPANT:

- The guide: What is professional learning community success?
- The individual instructions and the axis system worksheet.
- Writing instruments.

In addition, prepare a physical or digital board for posting the individual evaluation worksheets from all the participants.

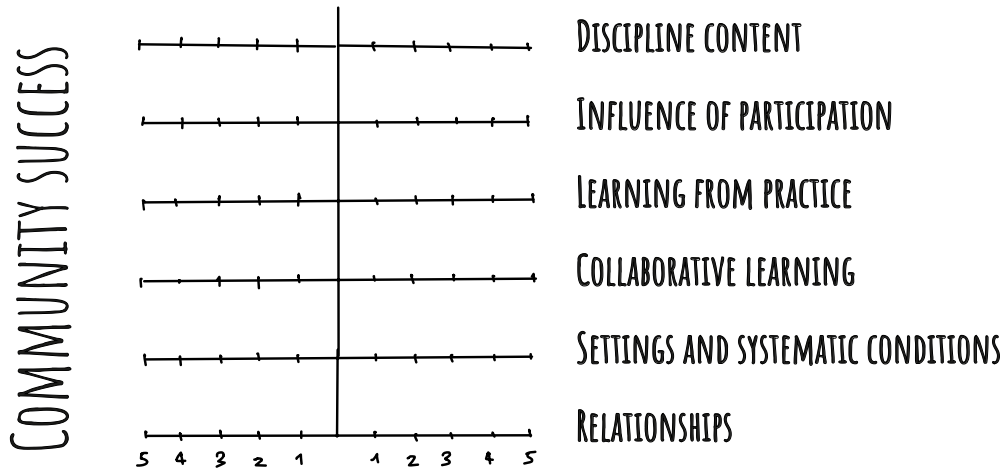
HIGHLIGHTS:

- It is important to allow participants to share their individual evaluations anonymously.
 - There are no right or wrong answers. It is important to address the differences in evaluations and reflect on why there are gaps in community member perceptions.
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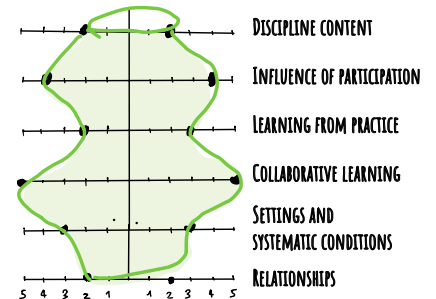
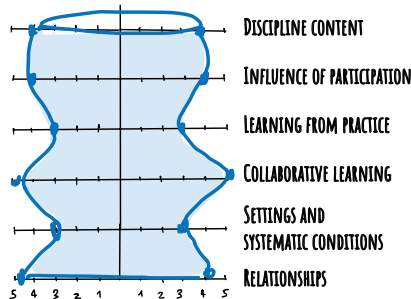
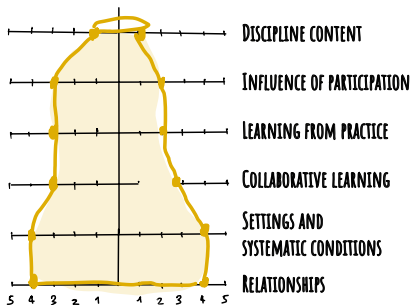
INDIVIDUAL EVALUATION PHASE FOR EACH COMMUNITY PARTICIPANT

Evaluate the dimension indicators on the appropriate axis.

From 1 (We are at the start of the journey) **to 5** (We have achieved our goals in this dimension)



Place dots on both sides of the axis to mark your evaluations of each dimension. Then, on each side of the axis, connect the dots marked by drawing a line from top to bottom; fill in the resulting structure. See the examples below:



GROUP PHASE

ALL PARTICIPANTS ARE ASKED TO POST THEIR STRUCTURES ON THE BOARD.

As mentioned, anonymity can be maintained. Ask the participants to review the various structures.

Potential discussion questions:

- What can be learned from the various structures that have been drawn about our community in general?
- Why is the bottom-most axis the "community relationship" axis?
- Are the foundations of the buildings solid? Rickety and unstable? Are there significant differences among how community members drew the base? What can we learn from this?

Questions referring to the various axes:

- In which axes/dimensions is our community still at the start of the journey? What can we do to move forward on these axes/dimensions?
- On which axes is our community progressing?
- In which axes/dimensions are there large gaps among community member evaluations? What do these gaps indicate?

Potential activity:

- Ask two people who gave differing dimension evaluations to share their evaluation considerations. Ask them to discuss and try to explain their position to each other.

Please note:

The goal is not for them to agree, but to discuss their differences and reveal differing perceptions.

- Choose one dimension in which you have not yet achieved your goals, and ask community members (individually and/or in groups) to plan an action or make suggestions for ways to improve and progress in this dimension.
- Each group can be assigned a different dimension, which would help develop an action plan for progress in all axes.



Special thanks to the members of the think tank on, "What is professional learning community success?":

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