

Mobilizing Your A-Team

Within teams and organizations, coaches and leaders have often emphasized the role their most committed players and/or employees play as ambassadors or icons of the group culture and values. These “A-team” members motivate and inspire their teammates and colleagues. When used strategically, an effective A-team can create an environment where most of your team or organization will develop a sense of ownership and drive to fulfill your school’s vision. Some of the important considerations when assembling your A-team:

- Make sure your core leadership team is made up of influencers well-connected throughout your school, not simply leaders who rely on where they are in the hierarchy of the staff or even on their experience level. A single leader cannot have meaningful relationships with everyone in your community, but a strong leadership team can ensure that everyone in your community feels like they are listened to and can influence decisions and strategies.
- Set up structures and systems to make sure that your A-team communicates regularly with your school community, especially in the spheres they have influence. Does your A-team have common language for the big goals you are working towards as a community? Do they understand the why and how it is aligned with your community’s values and vision for your students? Do they encourage the kind of culture that you are looking to reinforce throughout your school community?
- Whenever possible, empower your A-team with the autonomy and decision-making power to engage with the community, transparently, around your school’s shared purpose (vision for student readiness).



Read the following excerpt from the book **Brave New Work** by Aaron Dignan and reflect on who are the leaders in your school who can continually encourage and empower others in your community towards fulfilling your shared purpose:

If you’ve ever seen a murmuration-thousands of starlings engaged in aerial ballet-you know how incredible emergence can be. They fly as one superorganism, turning and diving, fanning out and changing shape, from an oval to an hourglass and back again. This phenomenon has been the subject of speculation for centuries. The ancient Romans believed the gods were communicating with them through the movement of the birds. In the early twentieth century, it was believed that the birds were telepathic. It wasn’t until the age of computer science that simulations started to unlock their secrets. When one starling senses danger from an encroaching predator, its

movement sets off a chain reaction within the flock. But how? Just three simple rules: avoidance, alignment, and attraction. Avoid crowding the birds around you, steer toward their average heading, and try to stay equidistant from your neighbors.

Our organizations are vastly more complex, and yet in order to succeed, we have to recognize that human nature and complexity call for a similar approach. In order to maximize our chances of success, the people in power have to commit to a few basic principles-simple rules for the elaborate ballet of continuous participatory change. I recognize that the principles below might seem radical or even impossible now. Use them as beacons if you're not ready or able to use them as bedrock. But if you want humanity, vitality, and adaptivity more than you want control, and you have the power this is how you start strong.

Autonomy. *All members and teams should be self-managing and self-organizing. Members have the freedom and responsibility to use their skills, judgement, and feedback loops to steer and serve the organization's purpose.*

Consent. *All policy decisions-agreements, rules, roles, structures, and resources-should be made through the informed consent of those impacted by that decision. In the spirit of agility, members may consent to using other forms of decision making, including distributing authority to specific roles, teams, or elected representatives.*

Transparency. *All information should be made available and accessible to all members. Individuals and teams should "default to open" when it comes to sharing data, information, knowledge, and insights.*

Once you have the commitment of the people who hold power, you need to find other catalysts-to challenge you, encourage you, and learn alongside you...If you're an established organization, that means finding the rebels in the system who are already hacking the bureaucracy.

The team you're forming is the seed of a community of practice that will eventually include everyone. They are the wayfinders who will be the first to try new things and the first to share what works. They will manage the present and nudge the system in the direction of more People Positive and Complexity Conscious practice.



Even though school leaders continually have to adapt their strategies based on decisions already made at the district level, or by organizations representing various stakeholders such as unions, you can still center the needs of your school as the primary filter for all decision-making and communication processes. By connecting all efforts to your community's shared vision and purpose, your leadership team can ensure that all decisions are known and understood by your whole community, especially your students. This way of thinking about your leadership team and involving everyone within your community is an essential part of developing a student-centered culture that prepares your students for their futures.

¹ Dignan, Aaron. (2019) Brave New Work. Portfolio/Penguin