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HOW
TEAMS WORK

a playbook
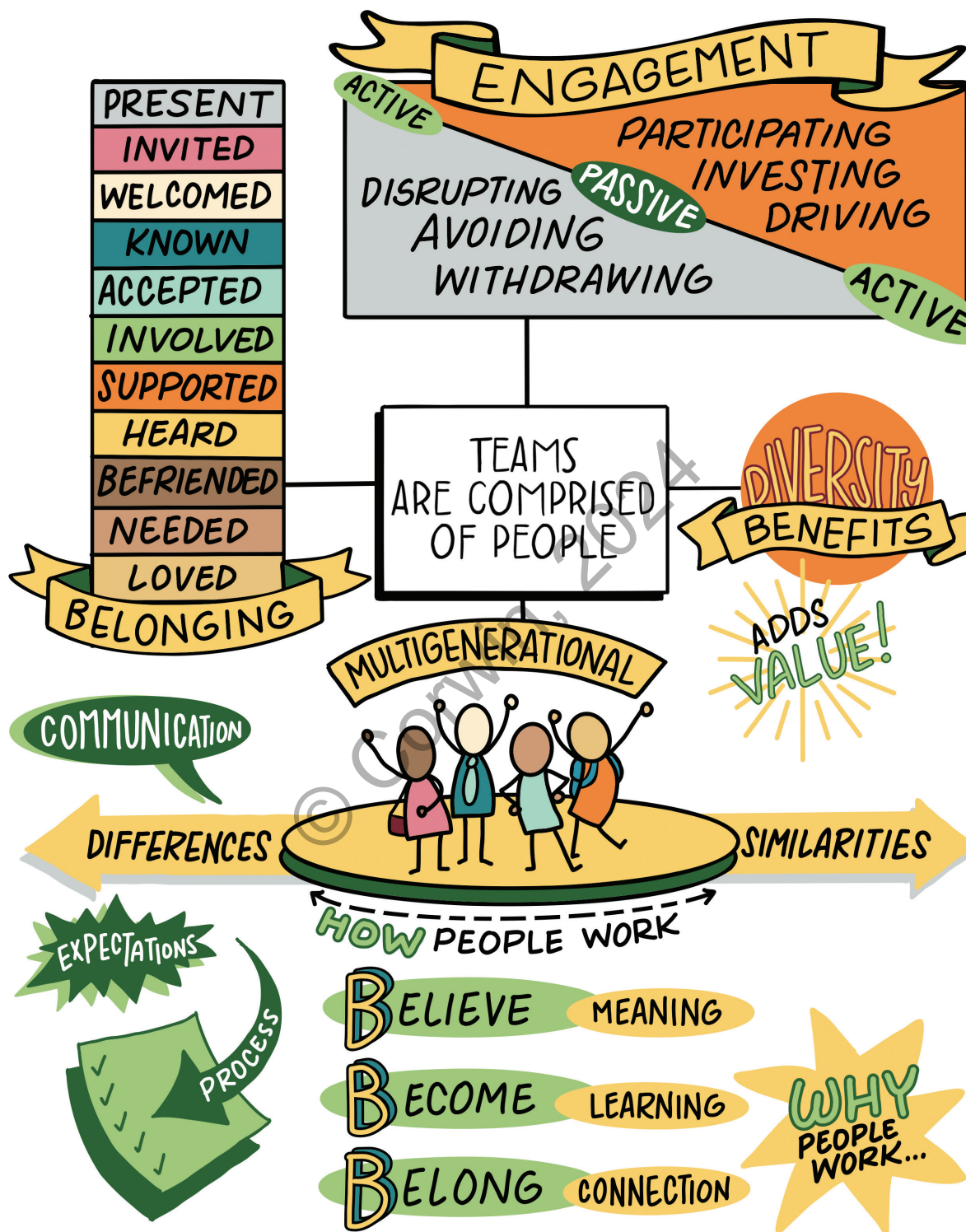for *Distributing Leadership*

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LEADING TEAMS IS THE WORK OF LEADERS

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LEARNING INTENTION

- We are learning about the people who comprise our teams.

SUCCESS CRITERIA

- I can explain the similarities and differences in the multigenerational workplace.

- I can describe the benefits and challenges of the multigenerational workplace.

- I can explain the dimensions of belonging and identify ways to increase the sense of belonging on leadership teams.

- I can explain the continuum of engagement and identify ways to increase and maintain high levels of teacher engagement.

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As you probably guessed from the title of this module, we believe that leading teams is a valuable use of leaders' time. Of course, there are many other aspects of an educator's time, but our focus here is on leadership teams and ensuring that these teams are productive and impactful. To accomplish that, individual members of the teams need to be nurtured and supported, and they need to have some decisional capital, meaning that they need to know which types of decisions they can make and how to make and communicate those decisions. Again, distributed leadership is not about giving away responsibilities or telling people to do things and then micromanaging them in completing those tasks. It is focused on how the people within the school community can work together, using untapped expertise, to improve student outcomes (New Leaders, 2022). And it starts with knowing who works in your organization, their interests and strengths, and their ways of working. We will focus more on this aspect of building teams in Module 2.

The reality is that our schools and school systems are multigenerational workplaces. Understanding the implications of this, addressing the inherent challenges that exist within such a workplace, and building on the various strengths that team members bring to the group can significantly increase the effectiveness of the team. The Pew Research Center (Dimock, 2023) notes that there are some important considerations when talking about generations:

➡ The boundaries are not precise.

➡ Labels can lead to stereotypes and oversimplification.

➡ Discussions tend to focus on differences instead of similarities.

➡ The general views of generations can carry a class bias.

➡ People change over time based on the experiences they have.

PAUSE AND PONDER

To which generation do you belong? How many different generations are in your workplace? What have you noticed, generally, about the similarities and differences in the generations in your workplace?

Having said that, they note that it's still useful to talk about generations and how society shapes our thinking based on the generation in which we were born. The following generations exist in our schools (Abrams & Von Frank, 2013):

➡ **Silent generation (traditionalists)**—born 1928–1945. They are loyal and tend to stay in the same organization throughout their career. They respect authority and expect delayed rewards, but they are uncomfortable with conflict. Overall, they are hardworking and thorough in what they do. And they are all but gone from our workforce.

➡️ **Baby boomers**—born 1946–1964. They are optimistic, team-oriented, and service-oriented. They are all about processes and relationships. This group is aging out of our workforce yet often includes the senior leaders in school systems.

➡️ **Generation X**—born 1965–1980. They tend to be cynical, informal, casual, and very direct in their communication. These individuals are generally self-reliant, have a strong sense of autonomy, and like to work on their own but will get the work done. They expect a healthy life–work balance.

➡️ **Generation Y (millennials)**—born 1981–1996. They are confident and assertive, accustomed to praise, supervision, and structure. They respond well to direction-giving language and schedules. They tend to be more progressive, are open to diverse views, and believe that they can multitask. Unfortunately, they seem less prepared to handle difficult situations.

➡️ **Generation Z**—born 1997–2012. They are the most likely group to embrace diversity and inclusion and prefer social media communications, yet they are fiscally more conservative than prior generations and are more money driven. They tend to live more slowly and, like traditionalists, are fine with delayed gratification. They like to travel and are prone to anxiety. They tend to have shorter attention spans, are nostalgic, and set boundaries with friends, family, and coworkers.

TEAM CHALLENGE

Eight new teachers joined the forty-four existing staff members at Avondale Middle School. The year before, ten new teachers joined the staff. Thus, eighteen of the forty-four teachers (40 percent) are within their first two years of teaching. The teachers with more than two years of experience include a few baby boomers, several members of Gen X, and members of Gen Y. In the past, only a few teachers were hired each year. A combination of retirements, resignations, and promotions had created an unusual number of vacancies at Avondale.

The science lead is a millennial and very much fits the part. Marla Ocampo is very confident and structured. She follows the guidelines established by the school district. She expects meetings to start on time with people prepared for the discussions.

The most senior member of the science department is Hal Patterson, a cynical and very direct communicator born in 1969, Gen X. He's very casual, in both dress and communication. He regularly tells Ms. Ocampo that he could accomplish as much on his own and really doesn't see the point of their time together. However, he complies with the tasks and has his work done for each meeting.

The most junior member of the team is Tiffani Davis, who is regularly late for the team meetings yet is known as a very strong teacher. She is widely acknowledged for her

relationships with, and impact on, students, especially those who have been hard to reach. She is a member of Gen Z, also known as Zoomers. During the meetings, she is often on her phone and computer. When confronted, she shuts down and appears nervous, not talking to the group for several minutes. When she's on, her contributions to the group are strong, and people listen to her ideas.

Addressing the team, Ms. Ocampo says, "I think we need to revisit our purpose as a team. We have different perspectives based on our experiences. But I think we have a lot to learn from each other. I'd like to share what frustrates me about our team, and I would like to offer each of you time to share. This is not a criticism. I just want to be open about how I'm feeling, and I want to learn more about what you're all thinking."

RAFT ACTIVITY

Consider the Team Challenge just presented. Complete the following RAFT activity either individually followed by discussion among your team or as a team. The RAFT writing prompt was developed by Santa and Havens (1995) as a way to foster perspective taking. In each module, we offer a RAFT writing prompt to help you take different perspectives of various team

Role: Science lead
Audience: Gen X and Gen Z
Format: Venn diagram
Topic: Differences and similarities on our team

In the space provided, create a Venn diagram in which you identify the traits you saw in Gen X (on the left) and Gen Z (on the right). In the middle, where the circles overlap, consider the similarities that the team has and how you could foster their sense of cohesion.
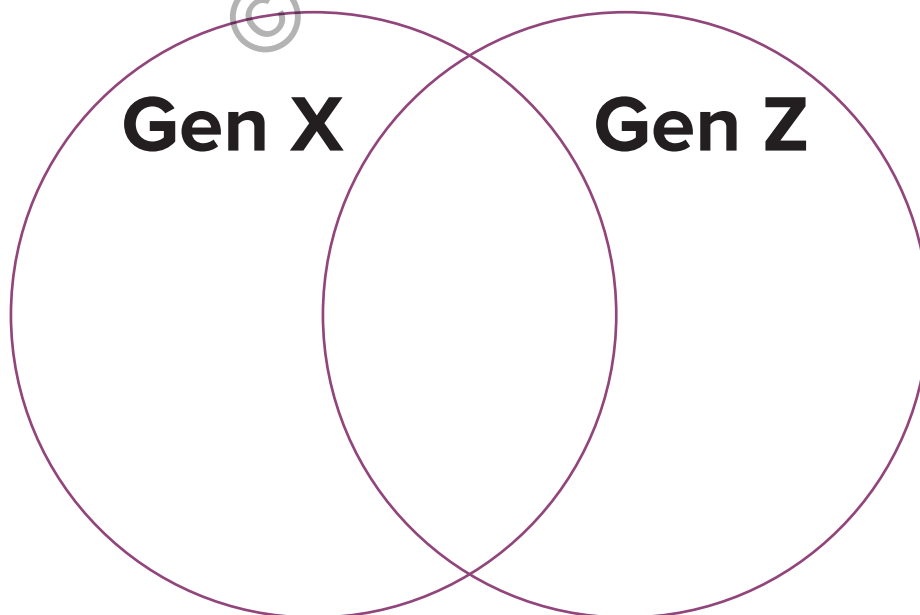
BENEFITS OF A MULTIGENERATIONAL WORKPLACE

Diversity adds value to the organization, and engaging members of different generations is no exception. Younger employees bring strengths to the group, often in the form of technology, but also in how they think about the work and the ways in which it can be accomplished. More veteran employees have experiences that they can draw on when making decisions. And, the fact is, the multigenerational workplace is here to stay, so we need to learn how to capitalize on the strengths of all our team members. Boatman (2023) notes that there are some specific benefits that accrue within a multigenerational workplace:

➡️ *Multiple perspectives.* When teams know how to interact and there is a norm of argumentation, not arguing, the various perspectives of team members can be solicited and used to make better decisions. When perspectives are limited, we tend to make the same decisions over again and not try new ideas.

➡️ *Problem-solving abilities.* As diverse teams interact, their problem-solving skills are fostered. As a result, teams who see the strengths of different generational thinking tend to have stronger problem-solving abilities and make better decisions.

➡️ *Learning and mentoring opportunities.* When peers are seen as a resource and learn how to share their ideas with others, there are countless mentoring opportunities. Naturally, individuals with more experience can offer advice and support to those with less. But more recent evidence indicates that cross-generational mentoring allows more junior staff members to educate their more senior peers (e.g., Jordan & Sorell, 2019).

➡️ *Knowledge transfer and retention*. When organizations value the different perspectives shared by various generations, knowledge remains in the organization. This organizational memory is compromised in many schools, and thus teams are faced with reinventing the wheel. In addition, when team members feel connected with others, they are much more likely to remain and not attempt to transfer elsewhere.

➡️ *Unique relationships*. Meaningful and valued relationships with team members provide much needed emotional support, especially during stressful and difficult times. Having a variety of age groups within the organization mirrors the way families work, which also provides opportunities for connections with others who are not part of your own generation.

PAUSE AND PONDER

Do you see these benefits in your school or school system? How might you structure teams to ensure that you build on the strengths in a multigenerational workplace?

CHALLENGES IN THE MULTIGENERATIONAL WORKPLACE

In addition to the benefits, there are a few challenges that leaders, and leadership teams, need to be aware of when it comes to the multigenerational workplace. As noted in the Team Challenge, there can be communication issues with different people having different communication styles. These communication differences are not just oral. They extend to email, text messages, and other forms of electronic communication.

In addition to the communication issues that can arise in a multigenerational workplace, there are often different expectations when it comes to the ways in which work is done. Further, there are different expectations related to supervision and how direct a boss is in terms of directions and expectations. Different generations also respond differently to processes and procedures, with some generations preferring general guidelines and others preferring explicit rules. When it comes to supervision and the workplace, members of some generations don't expect to stay in the same job, or even career, for very long and will leave suddenly if the workplace does not conform to their expectations.

Again, the fact is that we all operate in multigenerational workplaces, and there are several benefits from that fact. And, we need to ensure that teams have the knowledge and

skills to work together, recognizing the strengths of each member of the team. We have not talked much about the similarities across generations, which are also significant.

As Ulrich (2020) noted, there may be differences in how people work, but there are common factors for why people work including identity, purpose, work environment, work itself, relationships, learning, and delight. Ulrich and his team clustered these seven dimensions into three drivers of the employee experience:

➡ Believe: Finding meaning and purpose from work

➡ Become: Learning and growing from work

➡ Belong: Building relationships and connections at work

Figure 1.1 summarizes the drivers of the employee experience across generations. All generations want to do work that makes a difference in the world and makes the world better. Although this idea comes from business, specifically human resources research, it applies in very significant ways to educators. When educators find meaning in their work, believe that they are continuing to grow, and have a strong sense of belonging to the organization, they are happier and more productive at work.

1.1 DRIVERS OF EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE
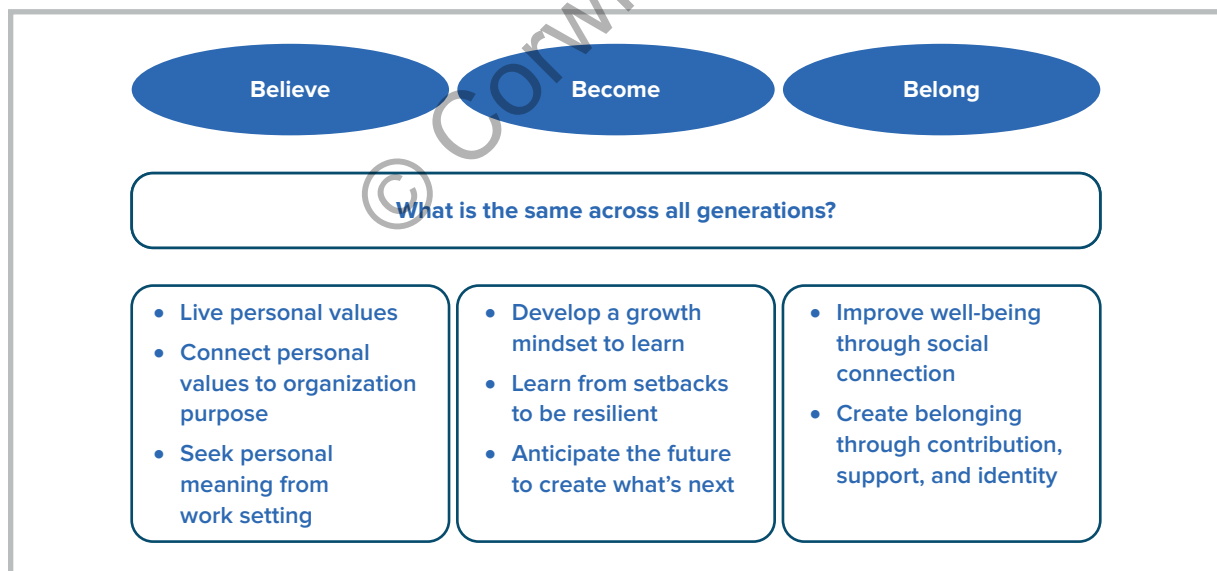
Source: © Dave Ulrich at the RBL Group (www.rbl.net)

Of particular note is the need to belong. Individuals perform better when they have a sense of belonging on a team and within the organization. As Cohen (2022) notes, "Belonging is the feeling that we're part of a larger group that values, respects, and cares for us—and to which we feel we have something to contribute" (p. 5).

PAUSE AND PONDER

How have you attempted to create conditions in which each of the three drivers of the employee experience are present? Which of them are a challenge in your organization?

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BELONGING TO THE TEAM

There are several different frameworks, and hundreds of studies, that we could use to discuss belonging. We've selected a model developed by Carter (2021) due to the fact it comes directly from education. This model was first used to describe the ways in which schools could address the need for students with intellectual disabilities to have a sense of belonging. The eleven factors that comprise this framework are also relevant to think about when it comes to educators and their sense of belonging.

For each of the factors that Carter (2021) identified, we'll provide a definition and a reflection question. Naturally, there are intersections between each of the factors, and some factors may be more influential on some teams than others. But our experience suggests that each of them plays a role in whether or not a team member believes that they belong.

DIMENSIONS OF BELONGING

- *Present.* This factor relates to attendance and who is actually present in the team meetings. Some people miss a lot of meetings, and it may be because they do not feel that they belong. Do we ensure that all members are present for discussions whenever possible?

- *Invited.* The ways in which people are invited signals their value and fosters a sense of belonging. We have all experienced an obligatory invitation, knowing full well that we really didn't belong. Do we actively extend invitations to all appropriate team members?

- *Welcomed.* The way we are greeted each time we meet our team members signals their importance and fosters belonging. Are we extending a warm welcome to our colleagues each time we gather as a team?

- *Known.* Do we know our colleagues, really know them? Or do we only know others on the surface level? When people have a strong sense of belonging, they want to share who they are and what they care about with others. Do we know our colleagues personally and for the strengths they possess?

- *Accepted.* We all have strengths and personalities, but we don't always feel accepted for who we are. Accepted means that we're recognized as a member of the group. Are we receiving our colleagues unconditionally and graciously?

- *Involved.* As we noted in the definition of belonging, members of groups want to know that their contributions are valued, which requires that we are involved in the tasks and workflow of the group. Are team members actively engaged with, and alongside, colleagues in shared learning and common goals?

- *Supported.* We've noted this several times, but each of us has needs, personalities, and differences. When we feel supported, meaning that there is recognition of our uniqueness, we are more likely to contribute and to contribute in ways that support the group. Do we provide the assistance our colleagues need to participate fully and meaningfully?

- *Heard.* Active listening to others telegraphs a message that they are valued and that they have ideas worth considering. When we feel heard, our satisfaction with the experience increases, even if the decision is not consistent with our initial recommendations. Feeling heard tells us that our feelings, beliefs, or thoughts are meaningful. Are we seeking out our colleagues' perspectives on issues that matter?

- *Befriended.* Being friendly with others signals that they belong. We are not suggesting that all team members need to develop strong bonds that extend beyond the school day; rather, we are suggesting that there is a social aspect to the ways in which groups work. Are we creating opportunities for socialization between our colleagues?

- *Needed.* When others rely on us, we know that our contributions are valued, and we deepen our commitment to the team. The opposite is also true. If the team can accomplish the work without some of the members, those who are not needed feel it and recognize that they do not belong. Are we recognizing and receiving our colleagues' talents, gifts, and contributions?

(Continued)

- *Loved.* There are many types of love, and some people are cynical about loving their colleagues. The Greeks noted that there were many different types of love, including romantic love and love for your family. When it comes to belonging on a team, we're talking about agape, or the selfless, unconditional love that conveys compassion and empathy. Do we love our colleagues unconditionally, demonstrating empathy and compassion for them as individuals?

TEAM TIME

Given the definitions for each of the eleven dimensions of belonging, survey your team members to determine which of these are strong and which need attention. You could create a version in which people respond on a Likert-type scale from *not present* to *fully operationalized*. Or, depending on the relational trust on the team, you could talk about each of these as a group.

You can also reflect on the following questions: How have you attempted to create conditions in which team members feel that they belong? Which of the eleven dimensions are fully present? Which of them are a challenge in your organization?

ENGAGEMENT ON THE TEAM

Belonging is a prerequisite for engagement. When people do not believe that they belong on a particular team, their engagement levels will be low. Gallup (www.gallup.com) defines employee engagement as the involvement and enthusiasm of employees in their work and workplace. There is a difference between being actively engaged in the work, including the work of leadership teams, and simply putting in your time. When it comes to engagement in work, we are not talking about the episodic feel-good team-building sessions or, as one person put it, "forced fun with my coworkers." There is nothing wrong with some time devoted to team-building activities, but they do not, in and of themselves, create engagement.
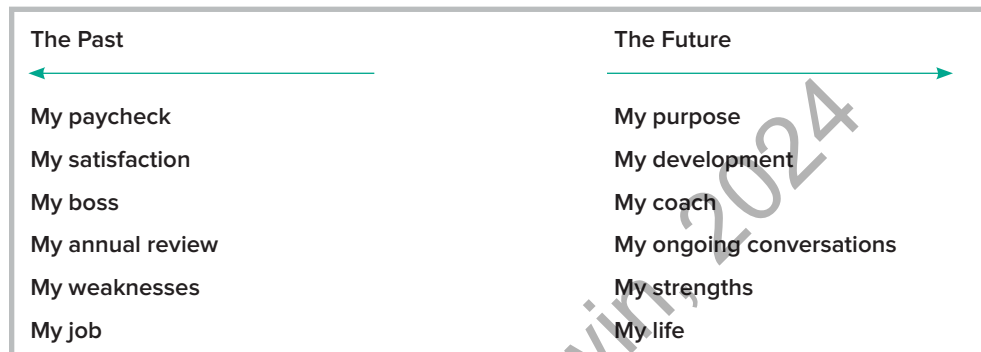
To be engaged, employees expect that there is

➡ A clear purpose to their work, including the work that the leadership teams are assigned

➡ Development, in terms of opportunities to continue to grow and learn

➡ A caring manager who is empathetic and understanding yet clear in the expectations

➡ An ongoing conversation about the work and each person's role in the work and the team

➡ A focus on strengths and the recognition that we all have gifts and talents that can be mobilized for the good of the group

As the people at Gallup (2023) noted, there is a difference between the past and the future, as shown in Figure 1.2. If we want to increase and maintain engagement, leaders must focus on the future and the ways in which employees think about their work.

1.2 THE PAST AND FUTURE OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

| The Past	The Future
←	→
My paycheck	My purpose
My satisfaction	My development
My boss	My coach
My annual review	My ongoing conversations
My weaknesses	My strengths
My job	My life

Source: Gallup (2023).

Like belonging, there are many frameworks and ways to discuss engagement. As we did with belonging, we have selected a model that comes from education and teachers' work with students to apply to teams. In this case, we draw on the work of Amy Berry and her 2020 study of teachers' perceptions about engagement. She argues that engagement is not a dichotomy—meaning that you are, or are not, engaged—but rather exists along a continuum.

We draw on the levels of engagement (Berry, 2020) and consider them in terms of individuals on teams. In this framework, there are six levels of engagement:

➡ *Disrupting* occurs when someone is distracting others from the work or acting out in ways that are not consistent with the environment.

➡ *Avoiding* includes off-task behavior and other distracting actions that prevent the team from accomplishing the work.

➡ *Withdrawing* can be physically removing oneself from the group or daydreaming while others complete tasks.

➡ *Participating* requires paying attention and completing tasks as well as engaging in discussions focused on the topic or task at hand.
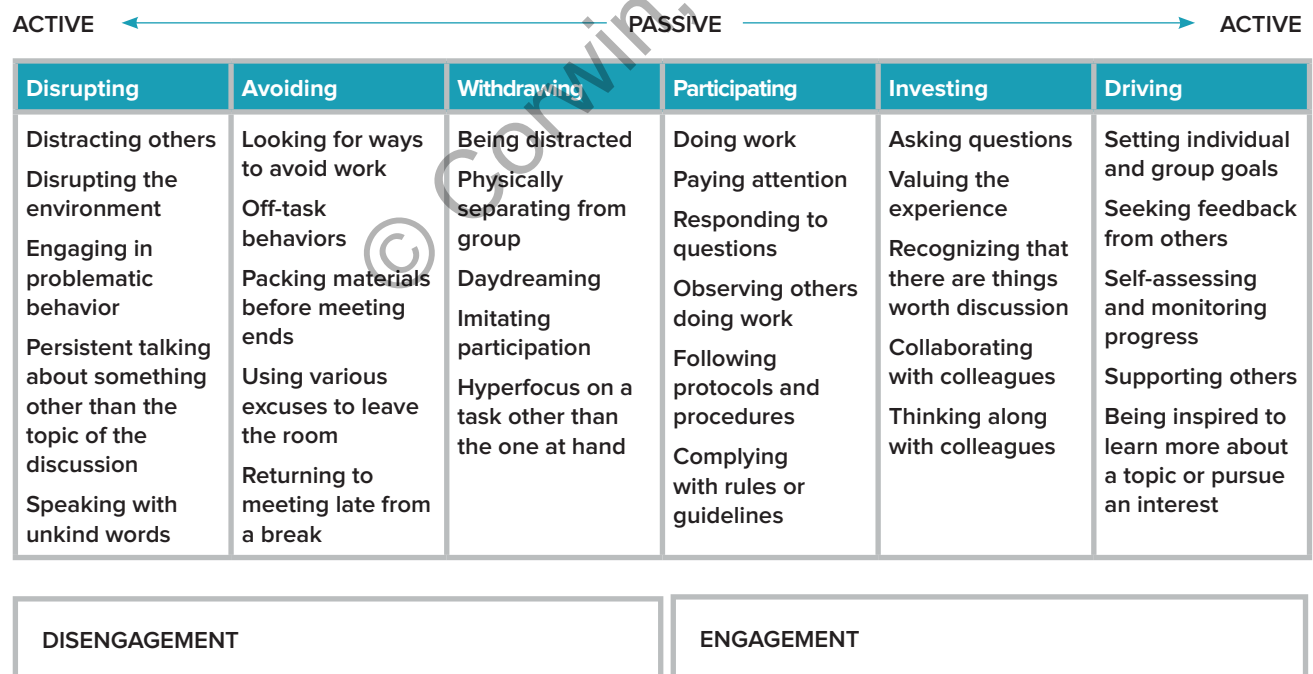
CONCEPT MAP

Using the term *engagement*, complete the concept map. You can add dimensions and sketches, but consider what it is, what it is like, and some examples.

WHAT IS IT?

WHAT IS IT LIKE?

ENGAGEMENT

EXAMPLES
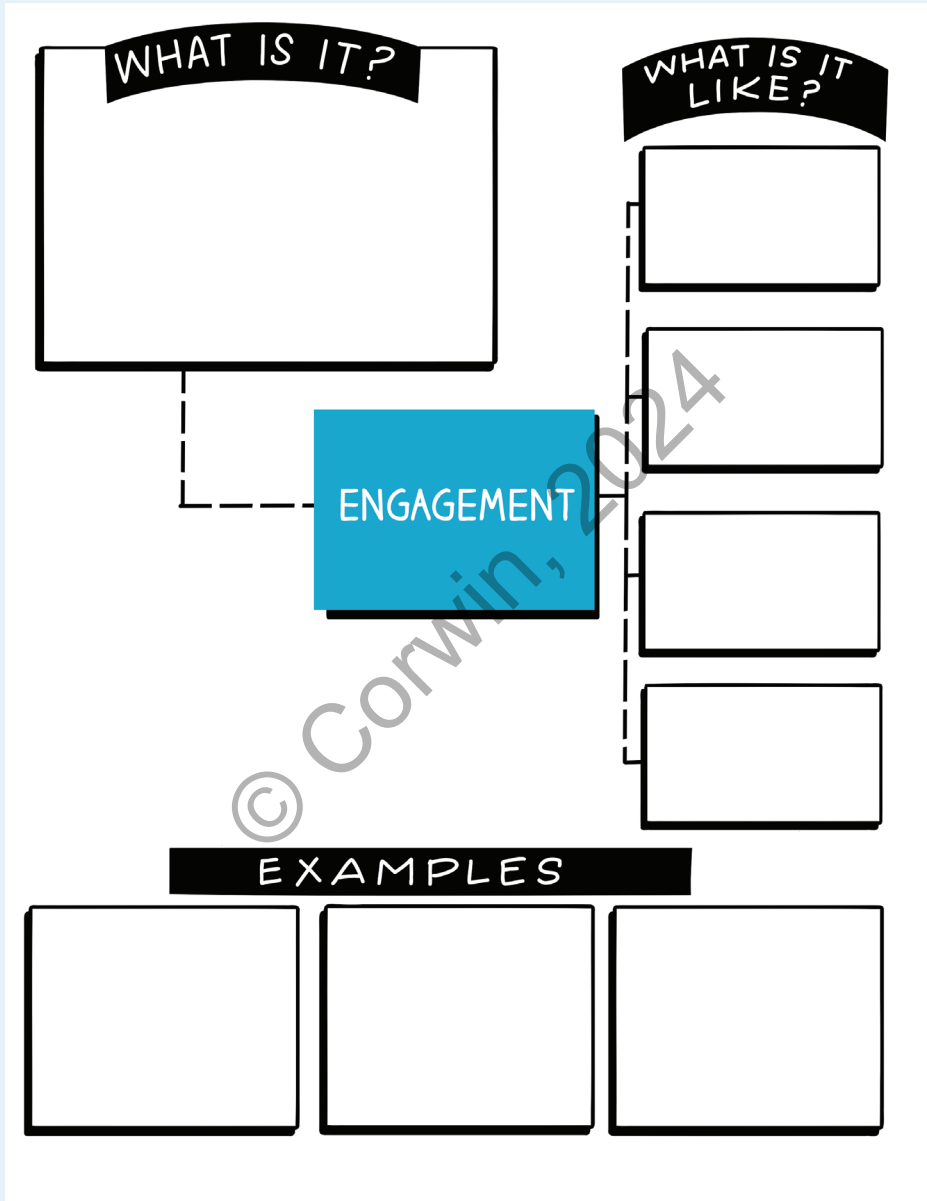
➡️ *Investing* takes engagement to the next level as the focus of the conversation is more of a dialogue with give-and-take, with frequent questions and new information added.

➡️ *Driving* is the highest level of engagement on the continuum developed by Berry (2020) and requires that people have goals for the work, that individuals seek feedback from others, and that they self-assess their performance.

As noted in Figure 1.3, engagement can be passive or active. People can be actively disengaged or actively engaged. One of the things we really appreciate about the continuum is the placement of participating. That can't be the goal for leadership teams. We need more than that, and our colleagues deserve more than that. We want members of leadership teams to feel comfortable with driving, taking ownership of the tasks and performance of the group.

1.3 ENGAGEMENT CONTINUUM

ACTIVE ⟵——————————————→ PASSIVE ——————————————⟶ ACTIVE

Disrupting	Avoiding	Withdrawing	Participating	Investing	Driving
Distracting others	Looking for ways to avoid work	Being distracted	Doing work	Asking questions	Setting individual and group goals
Disrupting the environment	Off-task behaviors	Physically separating from group	Paying attention	Valuing the experience	Seeking feedback from others
Engaging in problematic behavior	Packing materials before meeting ends	Daydreaming	Responding to questions	Recognizing that there are things worth discussion	Self-assessing and monitoring progress
Persistent talking about something other than the topic of the discussion	Using various excuses to leave the room	Imitating participation	Observing others doing work	Collaborating with colleagues	Supporting others
Speaking with unkind words	Returning to meeting late from a break	Hyperfocus on a task other than the one at hand	Following protocols and procedures	Thinking along with colleagues	Being inspired to learn more about a topic or pursue an interest
			Complying with rules or guidelines		

DISENGAGEMENT	ENGAGEMENT

Source: Adapted from Fisher et al. (2023) and Berry (2020).

PAUSE AND PONDER

How does this continuum of engagement resonate with you? Where would you place yourself, on average, during leadership team meetings? Can you use the continuum to help people set their engagement intention and then reflect on their level of engagement?

TAKE ACTION

Your final activity in this module is as follows. The chart provides a description of leadership actions that can support your efforts to create belonging and engagement on teams and actions that could derail your efforts. Review each of the actions and decide what you might start doing, stop doing, or add to your practices to activate effective teams in your school. Record your responses in the space provided. Return to your answers as your work gets underway to remind yourself of what you want to do to be successful.

ACTIONS THAT SUPPORT THE EFFORT	ACTIONS THAT DERAIL THE EFFORT
➡ Noting generational trends in team members and appreciating their contributions	➡ Ignoring generational differences in the workplace
➡ Focusing on the similarities across generations	➡ Having a hyperfocus on the differences between generations
➡ Analyzing the factors of belonging that make people feel valued	➡ Making people feel unwelcome, either verbally or nonverbally
➡ Actively listening to team members	➡ Being too busy to regularly attend leadership team meetings to observe
➡ Expecting that leadership teams learn how to drive their work	➡ Accepting participation as the expected level of engagement

When supporting individuals to function as a team, I want to . . .

START

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STOP

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ADD