Choreographing Partnerships within an Organizational Structure of Accountability: Maryland State Department of Education's Shift from Compliance Monitor to Breakthrough Partner

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Abstract

Drawing upon data from twenty-five interviews, this paper examines how the Maryland State Department of Education's Cross-functional Team navigates its changing role from compliance monitor to breakthrough partner in terms of discourse, time, and flexibility, as it carries out the work of the Breakthrough Center. It also examines how the role of accountability has shaped the emerging partnership between the cross-functional team and the researchers at CAIRE (Center for Application and Innovation Research in Education).

This paper employs a discourse analysis approach to examining how the Maryland State Department of Education's Breakthrough Center navigates the Department's changing role from grant compliance monitor to breakthrough partner. The Breakthrough Center and its work carried out by a cross-functional team were actualized by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) in order to build partnerships with districts and help them navigate the logistical complexities of school improvement. The cross-functional team, however, has faced significant hurdles in its efforts to forge partnerships with districts and schools, not only because they are part of MSDE—a hierarchically structured state organization—but also because of the necessity to continue monitoring districts' and schools' adherence to grant requirements. With Race to the Top, Title I, school improvement grants, and other federal funds, Maryland's educational system is subject to multifaceted compliance measures. Against this backdrop of accountability, this analysis will first examine how the Breakthrough Center's cross-functional team navigates its emerging partnership role with schools and districts in terms of discourse, time, and flexibility, and second examine how the role of accountability has shaped the partnership between the cross-functional team and the researchers at CAIRE (Center for Application and Innovation Research in Education).

The conception of a breakthrough center began in 2004 with discussions among MSDE leaders regarding the need to better leverage resources and focus efforts on the

needs of districts and schools in a more cohesive and cross-divisional manner. In 2007, a white paper titled, "The Breakthrough Center: Advancing Maryland Education to a New Level" was developed that served as the foundation for a new organizational and functional vision of MSDE department-wide support for schools throughout the state (Brown University 2010, 1). By 2009, an executive director had been hired, and a cross-functional team had convened to begin the process of identifying, brokering, and leveraging MSDE resources and other external supports. The goal of this initiative was to provide "effective and successful support to low achieving schools and serve as the interface among MSDE, Local Educational Agencies, and chronically underperforming schools." More specifically, it was to ensure that "the right services were delivered to the right districts and schools at the right time [in order to] accelerate school performance" (MSDE website, 2013, "Breakthrough Center"). The role of the Breakthrough Center, however, extends beyond that of broker and timely service provider as stated on MSDE's website, "The Breakthrough Center is both a process and a product through which MSDE will shift from strictly a compliance monitor to a performance breakthrough partner."

Missing from this description is mention of the cross-functional team members who will *enact* breakthrough processes, *actualize* breakthrough products, and *are the entity* through which MSDE will shift from monitor to partner. At present, the work of the Breakthrough Center is carried out by a core of twenty-five cross-functional team members whose areas of expertise include leadership, instruction, student services, special education, extended learning, school culture, grant writing, and early childhood education. The team meets monthly to (1) assess and formalize criteria for district participation, (2) discuss how to coordinate services from various MSDE divisions, (3) examine how to integrate public and private resources in order to create a cohesive approach to support, and (4) determine criteria for measuring the impact of Breakthrough Center work (Brown University 2010, 1). While these activities enact breakthrough processes and actualize breakthrough products, they do not necessarily indicate that partnerships, united in vision and purpose, have been created. Cross-functional team members are faced with the complex task of reversing an institutional memory of top-down compliance that has spawned a lack of trust between MSDE and school districts. The challenging nature of forging non-hierarchical relationships under an umbrella of compliance is what cross-functional team members call "an ongoing communication piece" that needs to underpin discussions at cross-functional team meetings. The entire team must send the same message that their intentions are to build partnerships aimed at improving student achievement.

This analysis examines these cross-functional team discussions, as well as individual interview responses in order to determine how cross-functional team members navigate these compliance/partner tensions in their breakthrough endeavors. By conducting an analysis of discourse, the nuanced process of maneuvering these tensions is brought to light—a process that has not yet been examined in depth. To date, there have been two other studies that have investigated the work of the Breakthrough Center, both conducted by The Education Alliance, Brown University. The aim of the first study, *The*

Kent County Case Study: Perceived Impact of Breakthrough Center and MSDE Assistance, (2009) was to capture Kent County district leaders' perceptions of breakthrough center services. The study lists examples of MSDE services as reported by Kent County district leaders, provides examples of assistance received from "multiple divisions at MSDE," and documents district leaders' perceptions of breakthrough center work as, "the creation of a distinctly new partnership relationship with MSDE . . . commit[ed] to serve Maryland's schools beyond simply ensuring compliance." This Kent County study, however, does not explain how these new partner relationships were developed or how the shift from compliance to commitment took place. Aiming for a broader scope, the second study, *Supporting School and District Improvement in Maryland: The Breakthrough Center* (2010), investigates the overall development of the Breakthrough Center in terms of organization and services. The researchers sought to ascertain how various stakeholders understood the role and purpose of the Breakthrough Center and how the Breakthrough Center had impacted district capacity, as well as the organization of MSDE.

This analysis builds upon the investigative trajectory of The Education Alliance case studies by taking into account the development and perception of the Breakthrough Center within the educational system, as well as the services the center provides to schools and districts. However, these areas of inquiry are viewed principally as a means of contextualizing the discursive processes that underpin the complex nature of how partnerships are negotiated and how accountability shapes this negotiation.

Methodology

This research employs a discourse analysis approach. Discourse analysis is defined here as a close, systematic, study of the relationships between language and the contexts in which language is used (Gee 2011). The analysis is based upon the theoretical foundation that language is a social practice, and that it is through social practice that language becomes meaningful (Fairclough and Wodak 1997). Employing this theoretical framework helps to situate cross-functional team discourse within an educational domain and a community of practice with its particular ways of learning and communicative exchange. Understanding how the educational domain relates to cross-functional team members' discourse yields a more relevant interpretation.

This analysis is guided by the question: How do cross-functional team members navigate their dual role of compliance monitor and breakthrough partner? With this question in mind, discourse analysis is located within the following three analytical frames:

1. *Creating partnership.* This analytical frame will consider the discursive events aimed at developing a non-hierarchical relationship and promoting commitment.

2. *Role of monitor.* This analytical frame takes into account the discursive events aimed at enforcement. A demonstration of hierarchical authority is present, whether explicit or implicit.

3. *Accountability.* This analytical frame takes into account external forces at play that require accomplishing certain events within a designated timeframe.

Data for this analysis were collected from a mixed methods approach comprised of audio and textual data from twenty-five semi-structured interviews with cross-functional team members, twelve months of observation notes from attendance at cross-functional team meetings, and twelve months of observation notes of the cross-functional team conducting professional development sessions in districts and schools. The interview transcripts used for analysis were drawn from a larger case study of the cross-functional team prepared by CAIRE analysts for MSDE. The organization CAIRE, of which we are members, is the Center for Application and Innovation Research in Education. It is an organization of faculty and staff from the University System of Maryland and the Regional Economic Studies Institute that was created in 2011 to assist MSDE with the evaluation of projects associated with Race to the Top. The cross-functional team case study was one such evaluation. This analysis differs from the CAIRE case study in purpose and scope. The cross-functional team case study began with the emergence of broad themes and resulted in an analysis that yielded a thorough, formative account of the Breakthrough Center's work and impact. The primary source of data for the case study was cross-functional team interviews. This work, on the other hand, is a close analysis of discursive texts, focused on a single research question. The data for this analysis include a reexamination of interview transcripts but draws heavily upon the researchers' involvement as both a participant and observer in the monthly cross-functional team meetings.

The data for this study underwent three analytical phases. The first phase was a reexamination of cross-functional team responses to four cross-functional team interview questions from the CAIRE case study:

1. How would you describe your role as a cross-functional team member?

2. Has your role changed during the time you've been part of the cross-functional team?

3. What are some of the changes you have seen take place in districts and schools?

4. What are some of the biggest challenges that you face?

Coding and preliminary analysis of these questions were aided by NVivo-10 qualitative software. Coding agreement was determined by first cross-coding individually and then meeting with other analysts to examine the internal consistency of the codes. During this meeting, the analysts either kept or collapsed initial codes if they overlapped. The coding resulted in sixteen broad categories and forty-six subcategories. A reoccurring theme among these categories was compliance and commitment. The second phase was a round of coding that targeted the compliance and commitment themes and how these themes relate to the cross-functional team members' role. During this second phase, the cross-functional team's role as monitor and partner were identified and then coded for

themes relating to monitor and partner roles as they correlated with accountability. The third phase included a more detailed interpretation of the organized data by means of discourse analysis as explained previously.

Three prominent themes emerged from the analysis that relate to the challenge of shifting from monitor to partner within a structure of accountability: vertical and horizontal discourse, negotiating divergent views of time, and the flexibility to alternate between monitoring and partnership roles. The following sections discuss the results in turn.

A Dance between Vertical and Horizontal Discourse

The tension between enacting the role of compliance monitor and that of partner is manifest in alternating vertical and horizontal discourse among cross-functional team members. Vertical discourse refers to discursive contexts that establish hierarchy and differentiated roles and obligations. Horizontal discourse refers to discursive contexts that reinforce a single identity and similar roles and obligations. To illustrate, in this excerpt of a professional development session, the cross-functional team member is in a school facilitating a professional development session with eight teachers and two school leaders on how to formulate text-based questions in preparation for the Common Core. By employing the person deixis "we," the facilitator positions herself as an entity separate from MSDE. She asks a teacher:

1. Facilitator: What is a central idea?

2. Teacher speaking to the group: Help me out team. I thought the central idea might be a point of view.

3. (No response from the group.)

4. Facilitator: MSA thinks we can only have one [central idea], but we can have more than one.

MSA refers to the Maryland State Assessment and is associated with MSDE. The use of the pronouns, "we" in sentence four presupposes that the facilitator and the rest of the participants have the same aim, which is to have more than one central idea. The illocutionary force here is to "otherize" the state, and align with the school group. Within the same conversation, however, the facilitator also employs the person deixis "we" to establish authority and separate herself from the school group. She asks:

1. Facilitator: What would be the general understandings that you'd want the kids to know?

2. (No response from the group.)

3. Facilitator: We know that text dependent is not a list of questions that students go off and answer on their own. The purpose is to promote discussion. Unfortunately, we are starting to see this take place [in the classroom].

Here, the pronoun "we" in the last sentence refers to state-level people who have been observing "incorrect" teaching practices. In this instance the facilitator aligns herself with the state and reinforces her role as monitor.

This discursive phenomenon, characterized as a dance between horizontal and vertical discourse, suggests first, the difficulty of carrying out both a monitoring as well as a partnership role—especially when the role is not clear. For example, acting as a Title I monitor during a school visit is a definitive role. Facilitating a professional development session is less so because there is a range of teaching approaches from which to draw. Second, these discourses might also suggest that the reconceptualization of one's role from monitor to partner is a contextualized process. In other words, cross-functional team members must grapple with specific discourses and approaches that include presentation of content, response to resistance, the prioritizing of breakthrough activities, and responsibility for external deadlines each time they engage with people in districts and schools. To illustrate, a cross-functional team member whose expertise lies in leadership development explains that collaboration was more effective after he modified his approach to work side-by-side in the schools with a turnaround director instead of scheduling work sessions:

I began to go there two to three days a week, and just work by his side. Some days we were doing . . . strategic plans, other days we might be just walking around visiting classrooms, visiting schools, doing what a director does. [I] realized very quickly that scheduling appointments to sit down and do that work wasn't the way to do it.

Negotiating Divergent Views of Time

In their Breakthrough Center work, members of the cross-functional team are also navigating varying modalities of time within layers of organizational structures. In the following example, a cross-functional team member explains the ripple effect that took place when the Race to the Top grant contravened her previously established work and introduced new timeframes. She states:

We were doing the best we could . . . with [Race to the Top] changing the curriculum and assessment [requirements]—all of those pieces made it difficult. Districts did not want to release their people for professional development even though we offered grants to pay for substitutes—there was just too much going on [in the schools]. There were a lot of interfering factors in terms of what we all wanted to accomplish.

This excerpt illustrates how federal, state, and local forces intertwine to impose dissimilar approaches relating to the sequence and duration of school improvement and

turnaround activities that, in this case, were perceived as "interfering factors." An analysis of the cross-functional team interviews shows that within this complex terrain of diverging timeframes, cross-functional team members' orientation to time impacted their communicative approach to accomplishing tasks, developing relationships, and anxiety levels as they carried out monitoring and partnership roles. These results were determined by a study of the metaphors and divergent views of time employed by the cross-functional team as they described their Breakthrough Center work.

In their seminal work, *Metaphors We Live By*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980, 3) argue that conceptual systems, in terms of how people think and act, are fundamentally metaphorical in nature. "[Conceptual systems] structure how we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people . . . Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in defining our everyday realities." Employing the theoretical frame of conceptual systems as metaphors, an analysis was conducted of metaphors contextually embedded in the discourse of the cross-functional team. The aim was to gain insight into how the team might conceptualize their breakthrough work. The analysis revealed that time was a salient topic and was mentioned more than two hundred times in the interviews. All twenty-five participants employed metaphors for time, which were coded into twelve categories. Eight of these categories were further coded into two groups that appeared to embody contrary characteristics. The first was a perspective of time objectified and viewed as a limited commodity. This orientation generated discourse referring to the lack of time, running out of time, or not having enough time. The second group of metaphors characterized a perspective where time was viewed as a long-term phenomenon and the discursive focus was on duration. Further analysis revealed corresponding behaviors among cross-functional team members within these two contrary conceptual groupings that suggested concrete ways in which they made sense of, responded to, or resolved tensions relating to divergent time orientations. (See Table 1.)

Table 1. Negotiating Divergent Views of Time

#1-When divergent views of time are encountered	and	when time is conceptualized as a limited commodity and the focus is on not having enough	– approach aimed at convincing – quantity of time is emphasized – anxiety present
#2-When divergent views of time are encountered	and	when time is conceptualized as a long-term phenomenon and the focus is on duration	– relationships are emphasized – a sense of trial and error accompanied by reflectivity

When cross-functional team members objectified time and viewed it as a limited commodity, activities and encounters with people were expressed in terms of "limited time" or "a waste time," as well as an entity that could be "spent" or "bought." They more often employed a communicative approach aimed at convincing others, as in this

example from a cross-functional instructional specialist who remarked, "My biggest challenge is convincing [principals] that the time in the classroom is well spent." Quantity of time was also emphasized and was tied to efficacy. For example, a curriculum specialist states, "I think the message is getting out there that if you do a half hour after school, you're not going to get any results; the amount of time really has to do with results." An orientation toward limited time also correlated with feelings of anxiety, as in this example from a leadership specialist who remarked, "Some days I worry that [the resources] won't be there. I hope we have enough time to make it deep enough before we lose the resources."

On the other hand, when time was viewed from the perspective of a long-term phenomenon, the focus was on the process of building relationships and employing methods that were conceptualized along a continuum. When cross-functional team members encountered divergent views of time with this orientation, the communicative approach was aimed less at convincing and more toward reciprocal action, employing such discourse as "follow up" and "feedback." In addition, cross-functional team members more often emphasized relational aspects and expressed their work in terms of "becoming familiar with," "working together," and "building trust," as in this example:

> We go in and we listen; we explore and we start to identify it with them, not for them. We have to build relationships and trust and that takes time — because we walk in there with a strange face.

A long-term orientation toward time also correlated with cross-functional team members discussing trial and error and reflection as part of what was necessary for breakthrough center work. For example, a cross-functional team curriculum specialist reflected on how to pare down time spent on professional development in order to align more realistically to the needs of the teachers:

> One thing I've learned is that the attention span of adults who are working is not any good after an hour. It's difficult to train and talk about new concepts when people are fatigued.

Another team member reflects upon lessons learned after unfruitful attempts at conducting classroom "walkthroughs," a process where cross-functional team members observe teachers implementing targeted teaching practices:

> The first year we learned not to go in there with all the players at once. We learned what to do differently next time.

In addition to an analysis of metaphors employed by the cross-functional team members, a comparative word frequency query of the interviews revealed that the most frequent word employed by members who encountered divergent views of time and who conceptualized time as a long-term phenomenon, was *team*. In contrast, the most frequent word employed by those who encountered divergent views of time and who conceptualized time as something scarce was the word, *time*, itself. While these

contrary time orientations among individual cross-functional team members were not fixed, the results suggest a conceptual trajectory that harbors the potential to impact how the cross-functional team carries out Breakthrough Center activities and shape the meaning of partnership. For example, in the following excerpt, the cross-functional team member is concerned with efficiency—a time orientation that aligns with the limited commodity metaphor. Yet, the focus of his efforts is grounded in the view that time is long-term:

> It was much more efficient for me to be there from start to finish in his day. So I was [his] shadow. If he went to a budget meeting, I went to a budget meeting. Then on the way out . . . we would talk about how does that budget impact what we talked about this morning with our strategic plan? So we became true partners. It was his openness to having that partnership and my ability to be that flexible to make it so.

Flexibility to Alternate between Monitoring and Partnership Roles

In conjunction with negotiating differing views of time, cross-functional team members emphasized the need for flexibility, especially in terms of the ability to alternate between monitoring and partnership roles. From the perspective of the cross-functional team, the tension between these two roles is mitigated by engaging in side-by-side, on-going planning sessions with teachers, and school leaders as illustrated in this example:

> We've partnered with them now for over two years so sometimes [we] are there as delivery [person], sometimes we're there as strategic partners, sometimes we're there as process observers, but we're always at the planning table, strategizing on what the next step is.

In terms of hierarchical position and relationships, the role of "deliverer" is a vertical conceptual construction that implies expertise and the passing of information, counsel, or goods down to the receiver. "Process observer" is an evaluative role and also requires expertise in making and passing on judgments. "Strategic partner" implies a more horizontal role on the continuum between monitor and partner, and is emphasized in the excerpt as the most constant aspect of the relationship, "we're always at the planning table."

In a similar example, a cross-functional team member states that flexibility between compliance and partnership roles is not out of "partnership character" and is possible to accomplish with the right mindset:

> I think the idea that we're true partners—we don't then turn around and be out of character, because I think you can do monitoring and compliance and support at the same time with the right mindset.

While it is not clear what the right mindset might entail, the cross-functional team member acknowledges that monitoring is, nevertheless, compatible with developing partnerships. This dual responsibility is the topic of discussion in a cross-functional team meeting where the members acknowledge that it takes both "compliance and commitment" to turn around schools and that relationships alone will not produce sustainability:

> It takes relationships to get the structure to work, but I've been involved in work over the years that is relationship-bound, and it goes away when you walk away.

To further illustrate the multifaceted nature of the dual role of monitor and partner, cross-functional team members acknowledge that, while accountability after receiving federal funds define their duties and positions them firmly in a monitoring role, they also recognize that top-down enforcement has not been effective in breakthrough and school turnaround work. They have modified their approach to become increasingly fluid in order to address the exigencies of individual districts and schools, while at the same time working toward becoming compliance partners. Collaborative compliance is described in the following quote as an alignment of purpose among schools, districts, and the state:

> The lesson [is] you can't sit and tell people what to do to turn their schools around. You have to go and hear it; you have to go and feel it; and you have to go and walk in their shoes . . . huge commitment to time, huge dividends. Because what we ended up with was, in fact, a collaborative partnership with the city, and the county and state aligned to the work that was going on in turnaround Schools.

Cross-functional team members also expressed the need for the compliance-partnership perspective to be "taught up." Acknowledging that a hierarchical structure is necessary in terms of sustainable partnerships aimed at turning around low-achieving schools, this member suggests that the cross-functional team's experience and position within the state facilitates its instructing others about effective partnership practices:

> The way we exist right now—we're very hierarchal. We have our assistant state superintendents, we have our levels . . . and there's a core team. [They] are part of the Breakthrough Center and part of Race to the Top. That's where resources get deployed; that's the level [where it] happens. That requires us to teach up.

This study has shown the difficulty that the cross-functional team faces enacting the dual role of monitor and partner while positioned within the hierarchy of MSDE *and* while carrying out their Breakthrough Center work under an umbrella of compliance required by the federal government. Cross-functional team members are navigating this complex institutional architecture with yet another organizational layer to consider—CAIRE's responsibility to evaluate the work of the Breakthrough Center.

The next section will shift perspective and examine the cross-functional team through the lens of their emerging partnership with CAIRE and how accountability has shaped this partnership.

Accountability Shaping a Partnership with CAIRE

As previously mentioned, in 2011, MSDE contracted with CAIRE to evaluate the processes and impact of the Breakthrough Center. CAIRE's contract included the production of thirteen case studies which are to be completed by September 2014. The Breakthrough Center requested that CAIRE's work not only be summative, but also formative, and that CAIRE provide interim reports aimed at promoting discussions among the cross-functional team members. It was hoped that the partnership that was expected to develop between CAIRE, and the cross-functional team would continue after Race to the Top funding stopped.

Notwithstanding this aim toward reciprocity and partnership, CAIRE analysts' observations were that the cross-functional team members tended to be protective of what they believed to be carefully choreographed actions that had paved the way for partnerships with districts and schools. Some were hesitant for CAIRE to conduct interviews with district people or observe in schools, expressing concern that the analysts might "undo" the work of the cross-functional team. For example, one cross-functional team member was reluctant for CAIRE to visits schools without one specific analyst, who had previously been a school teacher, to also be present—"we need someone there who knows what is going on."

After some initial setbacks in terms of gaining access to schools as well as potential interviewees, CAIRE analysts learned to take steps to build trust in the following ways: First, the analysts included the cross-functional team as they shaped their research design. They explained case study methodology, answered questions—especially about anonymity, shared their codebook, and negotiated how to go about collecting data. CAIRE then provided monthly interim reports on preliminary research findings, engaged in face-to-face reporting sessions, participated at cross-functional team meetings, and corresponded extensively by e-mail and phone. In addition, analysts responded to the cross-functional team's requests to further modify reports to mask identities, judiciously followed their protocol for interviewing school personnel, and participated in question/answer sessions that related to CAIRE's findings.

These actions resulted in three developments. First, an increased acceptance that CAIRE's data and analysis could be used for change "instead of using data to create anxiety," as one team member commented. This prospect was encouraged by the executive director who, in a cross-functional team meeting, emphasized to the group that "candid conversations [about data] reflect a level of trust."

Second, reflective discussions based on topics from CAIRE's research started to take place among cross-functional team members during their monthly meetings. For example, in an e-mail to the cross-functional team, the executive director asked

members to read CAIRE's interim report and be prepared to address questions of sustainability. The cross-functional team was to discuss how the Breakthrough Center, an internally shifting and malleable organization, could manage external changes, and if the team's engagement with districts and schools had facilitated sustainable leadership and teaching approaches. The meeting resulted in an active discussion on the purpose and future of the cross-functional team. The team members saw their "shifting and malleable" cross-divisional organization not as a hindrance, but as an asset. "Because of the fluidity within the department—if people change among MSDE divisions, others can support them. We are creating an institutional memory; we've evolved into [a] structure that can support change."

In terms of assessing the sustainability of their work in the schools, the cross-functional team's perspective was that their work was "still in progress" and that it was unrealistic, if not counterproductive, to draw conclusions too early. "We are seeing changes in principals, we are seeing changes in teachers' performance, but we have not had enough time. It has taken years for these schools to be where they are now, and it will take years [for sustainable practices] to take place."

During the discussion, some cross-functional team members expressed their frustration at the high rate of teacher attrition, making it difficult to build upon previous efforts, "Turnaround work is hard because [often] you have to start all over again the next year." At the end of the session, the cross-functional team concluded that their meetings provided a forum that facilitated sustainability because of solidarity of purpose and mutual support. One member stated that cross-functional team meetings are "a space where [the team] is providing information about their [work] struggles. The structure's in place that allows that."

The third development from CAIRE's interchange with the cross-functional team was reflective discussions among analysts about how to rework the original research design to align with the concerns of the cross-functional team, maintain good scholarship, and remain faithful to CAIRE's Race to the Top contract. For example, during the course of the year-long investigation, the cross-functional team would send analysts suggestions that pointed out gaps in their research. After one interim report, it was suggested that CAIRE more carefully highlight the cross-functional team's role in shaping relationships within the hierarchical structure at MSDE:

> CAIRE addressed the horizontal relationships but should also address vertical relationships. Collaboration among cross-functional team members helps build relationships within MSDE. It is not stated enough what the cross-functional team does to build MSDE as a whole.

This feedback became a topic of discussion during CAIRE meetings where the analysts considered the implications of this turn in data collection as well as the ability to accomplish this new avenue of research within existing deadlines.

In another example, at the request of the cross-functional team, CAIRE modified case studies to include an investigation on leadership which shifted the research focus and resulted in new data collection. Analysts decided that the modification would not compromise the case study contract, and after deliberation came to the conclusion that the change might even strengthen the scope of work. It became increasingly clear that, while CAIRE was contracted to evaluate the cross-functional team, the team was also evaluating CAIRE by providing feedback about the nature and efficacy of analysts' input. CAIRE found that throughout this process, continuous dialogue, transparency about accountability to contracts, and clarifying their purpose resulted in increased trust.

Conclusion

This research focuses on state and local educational agencies, but also speaks to other agencies and organizations within the educational system that grapple with compliance and partnership roles. While a group's specific aims may vary, their approach to negotiating compliance and partnership tensions impacts sustainable leadership and effective practices. Similarly, evaluators of educational agencies responsible for producing formative evaluations over time are involved in a dynamic and reciprocal process that shapes the relationship between evaluators and those being evaluated. This process is illustrated at one of the first cross-functional team meetings where the executive director asks the team to not only accommodate CAIRE analysts in evaluating the Breakthrough Center, but also to partner with analysts in their efforts:

> What we are doing is complex. I'm encouraging you to call the CAIRE researcher and invite them to come on board—not just to tell the good stories but the difficult [ones] too. We need to have documentation of what we're doing. CAIRE documents will help the Breakthrough Center do a better job.

By encouraging the documentation of "not just the good stories but the difficult ones," the director is emphasizing that accountability is the key to the Breakthrough Center's sustainability. Developing partnerships in low-achieving schools is uncharted terrain and it is the cross-functional team's responsibility to attest to, not only the successes, but also to the failures. The director stressed that CAIRE's evaluation will aid in cross-functional team efforts by providing a snapshot in the narrative of the breakthrough process and a rationale for a breakthrough center model that can be replicated not only among districts and schools, but other organizations as well.

In a more recent conversation, the executive director told CAIRE that his vision for the next year was for district and school leaders to pair with the cross-functional team on monitoring visits. He hoped for a distributive leadership environment where the lingering view of MSDE as compliance monitor would no longer prevail. When asked what the future held beyond Race to the Top, he responded that the aim of the cross-functional team was to work themselves out of a job. In other words, when districts take over and become their own breakthrough centers, then cross-functional team partnerships will have been a success. Breakthrough activity would then generate from the districts and house a new configuration of cross-functional team members

comprised of school leaders, district personnel and MSDE people. The aim would be shared responsibility for compliance monitoring in the schools, and a shared vision based on trust. The measure of an effective breakthrough center model would be that it inspires its replication.

Acknowledgments

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