# Facilitating Change in Higher Education:

## The Departmental Action Team Model

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# Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1

# Introduction

To promote effective change in higher education, all department members need to work together to make intentional, sustainable change at the local level. In this book, we describe a concrete, tested process for accomplishing this type of change through Departmental Action Teams (DATs). We rely on theory and empirical knowledge to construct a model for how positive, lasting change can occur in a department. Anybody working with university departments and faculty to produce improvements in educational outcomes will find the work described here valuable. Our goal with this book is to support future DAT facilitators in successfully adapting and implementing the model.

This chapter provides the necessary background to contextualize the rest of the guide. We describe the basics of what a DAT is (and isn't) and include a deep discussion of our focus on departments and the importance of developing change agents. We also introduce three components of the DAT model that form its conceptual backbone: the Core Principles, Theory of Change, and Innovation Configuration Maps.

## KEY MESSAGES

- DATs have two main goals: supporting departmental change and supporting DAT members in becoming better change agents. DATs are carefully structured to achieve these goals.
- Anyone can be a change agent and "change agency" is a skill that can be developed.
- The DAT Core Principles describe the values that underpin the DAT model and the culture that we try to foster in departments.
- The DAT Theory of Change describes the step-by-step outcomes that a DAT must achieve on its way to supporting its department in creating sustainable, positive, iterative change.
- The DAT Innovation Configuration Maps describe variations in the implementation of a DAT. Alignment with ideal variations will best prepare a DAT for success.

# What is a Departmental Action Team?

A Departmental Action Team (DAT) is a group of roughly four to eight faculty members, students, and staff within a single department. As facilitators, we have two overarching goals for each DAT: to support DAT members in creating sustainable improvement to education in their department and to support them in becoming more adept at creating change in the future. The decisions that DAT facilitators make in how to structure DATs are aimed at achieving these goals.

**Basic Characteristics:** At its most basic level, a DAT is a group of department members from a diversity of backgrounds (including their roles in the department) that meets regularly over an extended time (typically, for an hour every other week over the course of two to four semesters). It is facilitated by people from outside the department, but it is driven by the needs and interests of its members. These members are volunteers who share a commitment to improve education in their department. While we initially ran DATs in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) departments, we have since branched out to social science and humanities departments with great success. Thus, we see the DAT model as applicable to any academic department, regardless of discipline.

DATs explicitly focus on creating broad-scale, sustainable change in their department, often through the creation of new departmental structures (e.g., activities, policies, courses, assessment tools) and cultural features (e.g., communication norms, sense of belonging, decision-making practices). Each DAT chooses its own education-related focus and goals based on departmental needs and the DAT members' vision for their ideal department. DATs maintain active communication with their department leadership and other department members (faculty, students, and staff). This allows them to respond to the perspectives of colleagues outside of the DAT, to share progress, and to work with key department members to ensure that their work takes hold in the department.

DAT facilitators are typically external to the department[2]. These facilitators provide the DAT with expertise in educational research and institutional change, help coordinate logistics, connect with campus resources and provide an outside perspective to DAT members. The facilitators teach DAT members, both implicitly and explicitly, how to successfully create change in their department so that they can continue to do so once external facilitation of the DAT ends.

They also focus on the process that the DAT uses to carry out its work—for example, how members communicate, make decisions, distribute tasks, and so on—by introducing important " " and modeling productive behaviors. Facilitators incorporate this "change education" during meetings by dedicating a small amount of time to different process skills.

We discuss all these characteristics in more detail throughout this book (and they are summarized in Table 1.1). It's important to note, though, that we intend the DAT model to be

[2] *It may be that departmental insiders can facilitate a DAT just as well as outsiders. However, thus far, all of our DATs have been facilitated by outside facilitators, so we can't say for sure what would change with an insider.*

flexible, so that future DAT facilitators can adapt the DAT model to their local context. While we implement DATs in our preferred manner, new facilitators can experiment with what works best for them. That said, it is possible to deviate so far from the model that a group would not be considered a DAT. Examples of deviations that would compromise the integrity of the DAT model include:

- Having an externally imposed focus that DAT members have no agency to shape
- Meeting too infrequently or for too short a time to create meaningful change
- Lacking a diversity of membership (e.g., not having student members)
- Working in isolation from the rest of the department
- Eliminating a focus on process

We developed the DAT Core Principles, Theory of Change, and Innovation Configuration Maps as tools that facilitators can use to guide local adaptations to the DAT model. Thus, we strongly encourage new facilitators to familiarize themselves with these components of the model

**Table 1.1:** Basic characteristics (and anti-characteristics) of a DAT

| | **DAT Characteristics** | **DAT Anti-characteristics** |
|---|---|---|
| **Membership** | 4–8 members from a single department, acting in a volunteer capacity<br>Diversity in roles (tenure-track and non-tenure-track faculty, undergraduate and graduate students, staff)<br>Diversity in demographics, perspectives, and experience | Members chosen by department leaders, “volun-told” to participate<br>Members represent narrow slice of department (e.g., only tenured faculty) |
| **Timing & Duration** | Meet once every other week for 60–90 minutes<br>2–4 semesters of facilitated work | Meetings too limited in duration and/or too infrequent for meaningful change to happen |
| **Area of Focus** | Broad-scale issue related to education<br>Chosen/refined by participants through visioning process<br>Work results in new, sustainable structures | Externally mandated<br>Work consists of isolated activities with no sustainability plan |
| **Relationship to Department** | Supportive chair<br>Regular communication to cultivate allies and support, gather information, etc | Isolated from/marginalized by the chair and the rest of the department |
| **Explicit focus on Process** | Facilitators explicitly support the development of the DAT into an effective team<br>Time spent in meetings on process skills | No attempt to develop DAT members as change agents<br>Lack of emphasis on process or active opposition to it |

(introduced later in this chapter) to help them make informed choices about implementing their own DATs.

**Life Cycle.** A typical DAT goes through a set of stages as it progresses, as depicted in Figure 1.1. Once the facilitators have helped the department assemble a diverse team of DAT members, the DAT engages in a series of activities that allow it to determine its vision and focus. After they choose the focus, the DAT works collaboratively to address it. They start by coming to consensus on goals to pursue and specific projects to achieve those goals. They then implement the projects, assess the results, and reflect on what they have achieved. Throughout this process, the DAT collects, analyzes, and interprets data relevant to their focal issue. At the outset, the DAT strives to thoroughly understand the state of the department. They use this understanding to set goals and implement projects that are achievable given the different

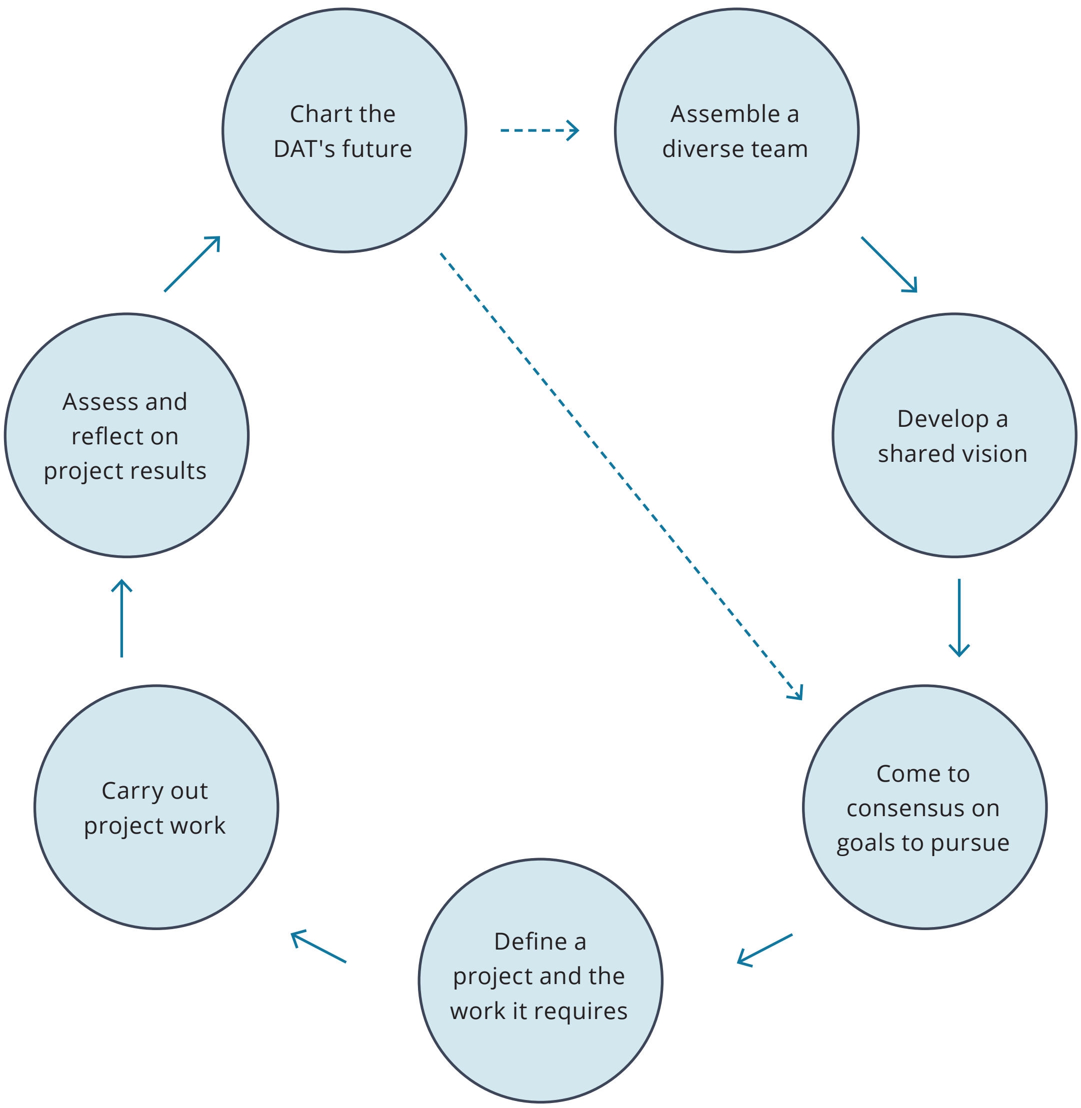



**Figure 1.1.** The life cycle of a typical DAT. Solid arrows indicate the DAT's trajectory, from "Assemble a diverse team" to "Chart the DAT's future." Dotted arrows indicate possible outcomes of charting the DAT's future (assuming that it continues): either modifying the team or reconsidering goals.

people involved and that address needed change. As the DAT progresses in its work, DAT members evaluate whether they have made actual improvements and describe successes to the rest of the department and other external stakeholders (e.g., deans).

After reflecting on its results, the DAT can then plan its future. This may include altering its membership, coming to consensus on a modified vision, or reassessing its goals and projects. Eventually, external facilitation of the DAT will end. At that point, the DAT members must decide whether and how they will continue to work together on their own. DATs often opt to continue working together after external facilitation ends; in so doing, they effectively become a new structure in their department.

**Foci and Outcomes**. DATs focus on addressing issues that cannot be easily solved by a single person and on creating sustainable changes that cut across the department and alter departmental structures and culture. Because of our commitment to education, the DATs

**Table 1.2:** Examples of DAT foci and outcomes

| Focus | Outcomes |
|---|---|
| Underrepresented students in the major | Issued two reports on diversity and inclusion in the department; increased access to honors intro course; set up gender neutral bathrooms; organized monthly seminar on equity and inclusion and welcome event for admitted students from underrepresented groups |
| Curriculum coordination | Received departmental approval to provide course releases and title changes for three instructors, and to support ongoing faculty teaching development and curricular reform across the department |
| Establish a new major | Created foundation and structure for a new major |
| Engage undergraduates in departmental community | Held welcome events for new and prospective majors; established departmental Facebook and LinkedIn presence; created annual Industry Night; improved ways to involve undergraduates in departmental committees |
| Use data to inform teaching | Developed long-term plan to assess disciplinary skills across the major; developed and piloted skills assessment |
| Undergraduate employability | Structured interdisciplinary options to increase participation and employability of majors |
| Departmental communication | Hosted interactive Department Forum and Welcome Events; published report making departmental structure transparent; coordinated major website improvements |
| Develop and implement a peer mentoring program | Designed and implemented a peer mentoring program for freshmen students from underrepresented groups (students of color, first generation, PELL eligible); developed two courses in the department for peer mentors and mentees |
| Develop departmental learning outcomes | Created departmental learning outcomes and began aligning these with course level outcomes for the major |

that we facilitated focused on improving education. That said, we take a broad view of what constitutes education—we include not only curricular issues, but also issues connected to extracurricular activities, departmental climate, and so on. Basically, anything that involves the student experience can be a good focus for a DAT. To illustrate the breadth and scope of DAT work, Table 1.2 lists foci and outcomes from DATs that we have facilitated.

## Focusing on departments

Historically, educational reform initiatives typically attempted to create change either through top-down mandates from administrators or through developing the teaching knowledge and skills of individual instructors. While these approaches are valuable, they are not likely to lead to broad-scale, sustainable improvements in education for the following reasons:

- Top-down mandates, like other one-size-fits-all approaches, typically fail to account for the individual and highly variable cultures of different departments. This leads to resistance and poor implementation of the reform.
- Approaches that focus on individual instructors and one-off course reforms are not appropriate to address cross-cutting issues (e.g., curricular alignment, assessment practices, equity and inclusion) and thus cannot create change on a broad scale.

Therefore, we find ourselves in a situation where our knowledge of how to create ideal learning environments is far ahead of actual practice.

Experts in educational change are increasingly pointing to academic departments as key sites for educational improvement (e.g., American Association for the Advancement of Science, 2011; Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2014). As mentioned earlier, many of the changes that need to be made in academia to better support students are simply beyond the reach of efforts that focus on isolated individuals—those changes must be addressed by efforts that engage entire departments. By working with the department as a whole, those supporting change will likely impact the majority of department members and create a series of sustainable changes that mutually reinforce each other.

Individual departments have relatively coherent cultures that remain stable over time (Lee et al., 2007). While aspects of these cultures—like policies, disciplinary norms, and faculty interactions—may be relatively consistent within a single department, they can vary widely between departments. While one department may have a culture that is amenable to a particular reform, change efforts that mandate the same change across many departments are almost certain to fail. Instead, change efforts that adapt to the unique context of each department are more likely to succeed and to be sustainable over time.

All of this explains why we chose to implement DATs at the department level. We designed the model to target a component of a university that we believe has the greatest potential for change. We also aligned the DAT model with the overarching culture of academia in key ways (e.g., the DAT model's focus on distributed leadership echoes academia's espoused value of shared governance). The DAT model may work well in other campus contexts, such as an interdisciplinary DAT that spans multiple departments, or a DAT in an administrative unit like academic advising. Just because we haven't implemented the model in those contexts doesn't mean that others shouldn't—in fact, we're excited to see the model taken in new directions.

## Developing change agents

Complex departmental change is a process, not an event. Since the world outside of a department is constantly evolving, its student population and its institutional environment will constantly change as well. Because of this, today's solutions will become increasingly ineffective over time due to changing student needs or shifts in institutional structure; in fact, they may become tomorrow's problems. Thus, one of the key goals of the DAT model is not just to create change in a department, but also to develop change agents. These change agents will then be able to design and implement successful change efforts in the future, and ideally, support the development of a culture of change in their department that will transcend them as individuals.

But what is a change agent? Simply put, a change agent is someone who is dissatisfied with the status quo and is therefore seeking to spur change (Dunne & Zandstra, 2011). A change agent may hold a traditional leadership position in their organization, such as that of a president or a CEO, but they may also be someone who holds little institutional authority or status. We refer to authority that someone in an organization wields by virtue of their position in the organization's structure and hierarchy as positional power. Change agents can be effective whether they have high or low positional power; they just have to know how to enact change given their position (Hyde, 2018).

In the context of academia, change agents with high positional power generally include senior administrators, department chairs, and faculty members that are perceived as high status (e.g., because of their research output or experience in the department). These change agents often use a top-down, directive approach to change. They will engage in activities that only those with authority can initiate, that take advantage of the university's hierarchy, and that result in new or altered formal structures to support the change effort. On the other hand, change agents with low positional power include students, staff members, and faculty members who are perceived as low status (e.g., non-tenure track faculty). Because they don't hold much individual authority, these change agents will use grassroots, collaborative approaches to change. They will rely on persuading and mobilizing others in the university and leveraging existing structures and cultural features to enact change. See Table 1.3 for further details.

The DAT model is grounded in the idea that anyone in a department can be a change agent and that change agency is a skill that can be developed. We deliberately bring together people with many different roles within a department so that the group can benefit from the different positions of power held by its varied members. We also encourage the group to adopt behaviors of horizontal leadership, in which traditional leadership roles and responsibilities are distributed among many people rather than placed on a single individual (Binkhorst et al., 2018). This distributed power structure supports DATs in being more inclusive of the multiple perspectives of its members. As DAT members carry out their work, the facilitators continuously support them in building their capacity as change agents through engaging in and reflecting on specific facets of the change effort. Through these features of a DAT, members grow their personal power and their ability to influence people and events to create change regardless of their formal authority. Ideally, they will use this new power to act as change agents beyond the project they are working on as part of the DAT.

Since developing change agents is integral to the DAT model, we will refer to this concept repeatedly throughout the book. While focusing on the desired change is obviously necessary, DAT facilitators should always strive to develop change agents as they make choices about how to work with DATs. DAT facilitators should also remember that they themselves are change agents and must take that responsibility seriously while supporting DAT members.

**Table 1.3.** Characteristics of change agents with different positional power within a university

| | High positional power | Low positional power |
|---|---|---|
| **Roles** | Senior administrators<br>Department chairs<br>Senior or tenured faculty members | Junior or untenured faculty members<br>Non-tenure track faculty members<br>Staff members<br>Undergraduate and graduate students |
| **Approach to change** | Top-down, directive, hierarchical | Grassroots, collaborative, distributed |
| **Activities to enact change** | Creating a vision or mission statement<br>Developing an action plan with assigned responsibilities<br>Changing reward structures to incentivize desired behavior<br>Allocating resources to support the change effort<br>Altering hiring or training processes | Creating opportunities to talk about issues and raise awareness<br>Providing professional development to nurture skills and connect people with similar interests<br>Gathering resources and data that already exist on campus |

# What are the components of the DAT Model?

All departments are different, so a DAT in one department will not necessarily look the same as a DAT in another department. This leaves the potential facilitator with choices about how to adapt the DAT model to fit different contexts. To support that decision-making process, we provide the rationale behind the step-by-step processes involved in running a DAT, so that a facilitator can better understand how to adapt a DAT to different contexts.

This section lays out three components that underpin the DAT model: the Core Principles, the Theory of Change, and the Innovation Configuration Maps. We developed these components to clarify for ourselves what DATs are, how they operate, and what they are trying to achieve—but in an abstract sense, removed from any given department's context. Distilling this "DAT essence" provided us with touchstones that we could return to any time when we had to make tough choices about how to enact a DAT in practice. We include these components in the hope that new DAT facilitators will be able to use them in a similar way. Throughout the book, we return to these components, making connections between the details in each chapter and the "DAT essence" presented here.

## Setting guideposts: The DAT Core Principles

Principles are statements which identify the core values, philosophy, and operating assumptions of a project or intervention. Principles are especially useful in complex systems that have many ways to solve challenging problems. Rather than identifying specific actions, goals, or rules that everybody involved in the project should adhere to, principles allow flexible

CHAPTER 4

# Building a High Functioning Team

This chapter describes how facilitators and DAT members work together to build effective teams that co-create the DAT's culture. The DAT culture supports the behaviors of a high functioning team and supports DATs in making change. As part of the DAT model, DAT members gain skills in communication and collaboration. They learn to contribute to equitable team functioning by paying attention to the strengths in their differences and including everyone's voices in their work. In order to be a highly effective team, members learn skills in regulating their conversations and creating a positive community. The culture that DAT members and facilitators co-create can be applied outside of the DAT context.

## KEY MESSAGES

- The DAT model provides opportunities to intentionally build the culture of a high functioning team.
- It is important for DAT members and facilitators to co-develop norms and practices for equitable intergroup collaboration and engagement.

DATS IN REAL LIFE

### What if the DAT looks to facilitators for leadership?

In one DAT, members expressed a need to be told what to do and looked to the facilitators to provide this kind of leadership. This most likely arose from a departmental culture in which committees were given specific charges and committee chairs were responsible for tending to them. This DAT eventually chose to put one of the members in a leadership role and asked the DAT facilitators to take a lesser role in guiding the group.

For DATs working within top-down leadership cultures, the emphasis on shared governance in the DAT model may be particularly challenging. These DATs benefit from facilitators being explicit about their roles and how shared governance supports the DAT model Core Principles. They also benefit from introducing topics of leadership early and having open discussion about the kind of leadership structures they want to have in place.

# How Do Facilitators Ensure Equitable Participation in a DAT?

DAT facilitators pay close attention to equity in participation and decision-making. When DAT members solicit equitable participation from one another and empower everyone to engage in decision-making, they ensure that they make one another feel heard and valued. Projects arising from teams with equitable participation tend to be stronger and are more likely to succeed because they are developed with a diversity of ideas (Schein, 2010).

Equity is a concept that is often misunderstood. One definition of equity is that it means providing resources and access to those whose position in society is marginalized. On a high functioning team, all members feel equally valued, even though they naturally differ in their abilities, experiences, and contributions to the team. To achieve equity, specific actions can be taken to reduce bias and favoritism, whether unconscious or conscious, implicit or overt. Academia is a hierarchical system which places staff and students below faculty, and non-tenured faculty below tenured faculty. The United States has a hierarchical culture and political system which still places white people above people of color (Dismantling Racism Works, 2016). Individuals carry these biases within themselves and express them in their patterns of speech, attention, and action. Therefore, we can expect these and other biases to be present in every DAT.

DAT facilitators draw on an extensive set of tools to guide a team toward more equitable participation. They observe the personalities of members and levels of participation—and they step in to regulate the flow of conversation or advocate for hearing from quieter voices as necessary. They also raise awareness of the strengths that different personalities and minds bring to the table: internal and external processing; extroversion and introversion; and aptitudes for strategic thinking, influencing, relationship-building, and execution.

Tools available to facilitators for implementing equitable participation represent entire fields of study. Here, we focus on: (1) confronting oppressive and non-equitable situations, (2) valuing strength in difference, (3) being intentional in conversation, and (4) enduring equitable participation of students.

## Confronting oppressive and non-equitable situations

Equitable participation can be encouraged and supported through a concerted effort to confront history and power dynamics that are at odds with equity. Although there can be no “safe spaces”, facilitators can establish “brave spaces” where members intentionally confront challenging perspectives, share their truths, and approach working on a diverse team with openness and honesty.

**Principle 6:**
*Work is grounded in a commitment to equity, inclusion, and social justice.*

A powerful way to teach DAT members about equitable participation is to ask them to consider what it is not. To do so, we have developed process skills from the Dismantling Racism Works Web Workbook, which presents a framework for understanding white supremacy and other oppressive cultures (Dismantling Racism Works, 2016 and June 2020). This framework draws attention to how qualities emphasized in oppressive cultures, such as perfectionism, defensiveness, and power hoarding, inhibit positive and equitable collaboration and maintain oppressive structures. For example, defensiveness causes criticism to be viewed as inappropriate or unwelcome, which makes it challenging to deal with existing concerns or to raise future ones. In DAT meetings, we call these qualities Anti-Norms, as they work to degrade positive group function. Slides we use to illuminate these topics for the DAT members are found in the Digital Toolkit. As an extension activity, DAT members could form a reading group focused on the workbook created by Dismantling Racism Works or similar resources to further the group’s understanding of oppressive cultures.

**Digital Toolkit**
*Slides 4.0–4.16: Common Organizational Pitfalls*

It is important that facilitators address oppressive and non-equitable situations and interactions that may happen in the DAT as soon as they occur or shortly thereafter. Although it is not inevitable that these moments might arise, it is probable, and therefore it would serve the facilitators well to be as prepared as possible. These types of situations allow members to learn from one another. Facilitators should proactively seek opportunities to gain skills in this area before working in a DAT. Studying and training will help develop judgement, as will talking to other facilitators who have experience in navigating these issues.

Micro-aggression is a term for the commonplace interaction in which someone knowingly or unknowingly marginalizes a member of a non-dominant group. Depending on the situation, facilitators can choose to address the situation as it happens or after it happens with one or more of the group members. One framework for confronting microaggressions is called “Open the Front Door” (OTFD), a mnemonic name which stands for Observe, Think, Feel, and Desire. In using OTFD, a facilitator might say, “I noticed that you referred to female students as ‘girls’ (*observe*). I think that such language is infantilizing to women (*think*) and it makes me feel uncomfortable (*feel*). I would like us to use more age-appropriate language when we talk about female students (*desire*).”

Other forms of oppression that facilitators may find useful to explore with DATs are implicit and explicit bias, cultural proficiency, stereotype threat, and privilege. Ideally, DAT members will learn to self-monitor their contributions, make inquiries about one another’s ideas, and take into account variation in individual personalities, experience, and ability, as they strive for more equitable participation.

DATS IN REAL LIFE

## What if power dynamics lead to conflicts between DAT members?

One of our DATs worked together for a semester and a half before a conflict between a faculty member and a graduate student came to light. A graduate student had joined the team about six weeks prior to the conflict. They had jumped right into the project work, taking the lead on developing a tool that could provide useful data for the DAT's project. They had clearly invested some time in their work.

After the graduate student presented their work in a meeting, one tenured faculty member pointedly criticized this work and stated that it wasn't relevant. Another tenured faculty, one of the founders of the DAT, pointedly disagreed with the criticism. Multiple DAT members contributed thoughts to soften the criticism or direct conversation toward a different topic, but the critical faculty member was quite persistent. Facilitators had already been working to manage the dynamics this faculty member introduced to the group, due to their tendency to interrupt and push for decision-making before all ideas were on the table.

To defuse tension in the moment, facilitators used paraphrasing and acknowledged each member's varied contributions to the project. After the meeting, facilitators learned that the faculty member was the graduate student's major advisor. Therefore, the typical faculty-student power dynamics were heightened in this situation. Facilitators feared that the graduate student would be upset, or that the graduate student's DAT activities would affect their relationship or work with their advisor. They also were concerned that one or the other member would drop out of the DAT.

**Digital Toolkit**
*Slides 4.2–4: Either/Or Thinking and Sense of Urgency*

For the following meeting, DAT facilitators prepared process skills that were related to the tone of the criticisms made by the faculty member: either/or thinking and sense of urgency (Dismantling Racism Works, 2016). A facilitator checked in with the graduate student to see if they were comfortable discussing those process skills, and they said that it sounded productive. The facilitators also checked in with the two tenured faculty members who had engaged contentiously in the conversation for their input and shared with them that they were concerned about power dynamics between the DAT members. Specifically, the facilitators sent this email (names have been replaced with letters):

> Hi X and Y,
>
> We noticed that the conversation about Z's work was more combative than most DAT meetings so far, particularly between you two. This concerns us because it puts Z in a difficult position, as a graduate student, to respond to critiques from those who have seniority.
>
> Do you have suggestions for how we can keep the conversation tomorrow constructively critical? While we think that disagreement about ideas/implementation is productive toward making progress, we would like to keep

the conversation less tense.

A draft agenda for tomorrow's meeting is available for you to review. We welcome your ideas.

Best,
DAT Facilitators

The critical faculty member did not attend the next meeting. The facilitators built two opportunities for reflection into the meeting agenda: one to introduce the process skills, and another to reflect on the "fact that there was disagreement on the project". During the DAT meeting, the facilitators emphasized that conflict is a normal part of groups and solicited DAT members' ideas on how to productively deal with conflict using the prompt: What are tools around handling conflict and expressing criticism constructively? Faculty, graduate students, and undergrad students all contributed to this discussion.

The DAT did not see tensions rise to this level during future meetings. The group continued making rapid progress on their projects. The graduate student at the center of the conflict continued to take a leadership role on several aspects of the project, and later presented some of the work they did for the DAT at the university's annual symposium for education research. A couple of months later, the critical faculty member left the DAT amicably at the conclusion of the academic year, citing too many administrative duties.

## Valuing strength in difference

**Principle 6:** *Work is grounded in a commitment to equity, inclusion, and social justice.*

Human variation is endless and wonderful. But when people view difference as a deficiency or barrier rather than a source of strength, they struggle to work effectively. A powerful framing that facilitators apply to these situations is to view differences as a source of strength. The more dimensions of difference a group contains, the more the group benefits from the particular strengths that come along with each dimension. However, these strengths can only be leveraged if the group values the differences which generate them. In this section, we focus on developing the concept of Strength in Difference by examining differences in personality. The Strength in Difference concept includes many other dimensions, including gender, race, ethnicity, and disability.

Here, we want to address some of the personality variations among people that frequently affect group dynamics and can even lead group members to conclude they cannot work together. For example, group members may identify as introverts and extroverts. In U.S. culture, extroversion is valued over introversion, so extroverts and introverts may enter the room expecting to be listened to or to be ignored, respectively (Cain, 2013). These personality traits can carry with them certain patterns of interaction and talk. Extroverts may dominate conversation or distract the group with social talk since they gain energy from social interaction. Introverts may not share their excellent ideas or struggle to enter the conversation and may take some time to integrate into the DAT community. Another way group members differ is in how they think through information and ideas. Some prefer to have time to think on their own before discussing—they are *internal processors*. Others, *external processors*, prefer to think things through in conversation with someone else.

Another dimension of personality are the cognitive strengths members bring to the table (Rath, 2007). Rath describes 34 evidence-based traits that people draw on in navigating the world, which are grouped into four domains: Strategic Thinking, Relationship-Building, Executing, and Influencing. While most people's prevalent traits fall into several domains, they usually have a domain of greatest strength. Group members with different dominant domains may struggle to understand one another. However, strengths in each of the four domains are essential for a group to succeed in a project of the scale that Departmental Action Teams take on. It's a facilitator's job to inform group members about how they are dependent on one another's strengths to accomplish the project, and to generate understanding of the tension that naturally arises.

**Principle 4:** *Collaboration among group members is enjoyable, productive, and rewarding.*

DAT members may engage with the DAT model differently due to their varying strengths. For example, some members will strongly appreciate the time spent on processing and group function. Others who like to think about big picture, lofty outcomes, may resonate with the activities focused on developing a shared vision. Still others who enjoy problem solving might most appreciate the conversations around planning and implementing a project. Asking DAT members to reflect on their own strengths, lived experiences, backgrounds, level of comfort, and how these characteristics will affect their engagement in DAT activities can draw attention to the types of activities DAT members prefer and make them aware of the tension that could emerge when engaging in DAT activities they do not prefer. Recognizing that certain activities may cause feelings of discomfort can help DAT members become aware of these feelings, and either go outside of their comfort zone or mitigate them throughout a meeting.

How do facilitators help a group to view differences as strengths? Typically, short conversations on the topic are woven throughout several meetings. For example, as members settle in for a meeting, small talk naturally arises and people learn a little bit about each other's lives. Facilitators teach members about types of personality and cognitive differences and explore the strengths that each brings to the group. They solicit conversation about group members' personal experiences with these areas of difference, discuss whether the DAT as a group has particular strengths, and invite members to consider how they can use their understanding of these strengths productively. This activity can help to explore and understand how each person is unique and allow people to feel valued and included within a diverse group. A slide that can be used to support these conversations is found in the Digital Toolkit.

**Digital Toolkit**
*Slide 6.2: Strength in Difference*

In their journals or reflections, facilitators think about the strengths that members exhibited during meetings and use this understanding to make guiding suggestions. For example, a facilitator might observe that an individual is comfortable in the influencing domain and might therefore ask if they would be interested in taking a role of being the group's liaison to the department. If members are interested in exploring their individual differences more deeply, a facilitator could refer the group to trainings focused on strengths that are offered by some institutions. To build group identity around strengths, facilitators periodically gather input from members about their accomplishments, tensions, strengths, and areas of need—and summarize it in a way that invites discussion. The *Using DAT Member Input How-To Guide* offers a structure for this activity.

**Digital Toolkit**
*How-To Guide 8: Using DAT Member Input*

Once concepts and vocabulary related to personality differences have been introduced, facilitators can reference them in the flow of a meeting. For example, a facilitator might say: "Let me check in with the internal processors—does anyone have another idea, or need some time to think?" or "There were a lot of ideas in there! You are a great external processor. Can I try to summarize the key idea, and if I didn't get it right, will you let me know?" Or, "We are at the point in this project where we will need to draw on your strengths in execution".

While it is important that groups leverage individuals' strengths, it is also important to encourage individuals' growth in other areas. Qualities of individuals are not innate; they are honed and practiced. Skilled facilitators notice individuals' areas for growth and support their learning in areas that may feel unfamiliar or uncomfortable. If a group member tends to take on roles in one domain, facilitators can invite them to take on a role in another domain as a learning opportunity.

Facilitators need to constantly tie a group's explorations back to the core concept of Strength in Difference by asking members to reflect on why difference feels challenging to navigate for both individuals and groups; how they distinguish between identifying and judging difference; and what goals can be set for exploring differences that they may not understand or feel comfortable with. By emphasizing the notion that drawing on the Strength in Difference concept will make for a more successful endeavor, facilitators channel the group's attention to difference in a productive way. This focus helps the group develop an identity that is more cohesive, yet still honors individual differences, backgrounds, and lived experiences.

## Being intentional in conversations

Euro-American culture tends to value expediency, a quick pace, and fast decision-making. Other cultures value the inclusion of everyone's voices ahead of these values. Facilitators can help DAT members broaden their notions about conversations, recognize that all forms of conversation can advance sharing and understanding, and learn which strategies are more productive at which times.

As a facilitator, you should be careful not to inadvertently privilege one culture's preference for communication over another. Keep in mind that group members may hold different sets of shared assumptions. As facilitators, it is our job to help the work of the DAT to be productive and for interactions to be respectful—while facilitating conversations between potentially different cultures with contrasting communication norms. For example, conflicting communication can arise due to differences between direct and indirect communication styles, informal and formal speaking styles, task-oriented approaches and those that focus on first establishing a relationship, or cultural tendencies to take words at face value and tendencies to infer a deeper meaning.

There are several concepts about conversation that are helpful for facilitators to introduce and later reference in subsequent meetings. High functioning groups talk in ways that are different from the ways we might typically speak. In particular, the discourse of high functioning groups is planned, intentional, and attentive. Facilitators pay special attention to whether discourse is benefitting the group. One technique that facilitators use to help a team practice this kind of monitoring is called W.A.I.T.: Why Am I Talking? W.A.I.T. encourages members to internally reflect on the purpose of a contribution before voicing that contribution, in order to promote more intentional conversation. Facilitators may also "go meta" to ask the group whether a particular conversation is productive, and whether any member might like to take it in a different direction.

**Norms of Collaboration,** Additionally, the Norms of Collaboration are a set of conversation tools and standards that help participants engage in positive and equitable group processes (Garmston & Wellman, 2013). There are eight norms, each starting with a "p" for mnemonic purposes. We find it useful to group them into two categories: those focused on regulating the conversation and those focused on creating a positive community. All these norms serve the goal of making the group inclusive and equitable. Ideally, groups will come to naturally employ all the norms during their meetings. We typically introduce one or two norms per meeting for the first four to eight meetings. After describing the norms using a slide or handout, we invite DAT members' thoughts.

**Digital Toolkit**
*Slides 3.0–3.9: Norms of Collaboration, Handout 4: Norms of Collaboration*

## NORMS OF COLLABORATION FOR REGULATING CONVERSATIONS

***Pausing*** slows down the conversation. It provides for "wait time," which has been shown to dramatically improve thinking. It signals to others that their ideas and comments are worth thinking about, dignifies their contributions, and implicitly encourages future participation. Pausing enhances understanding and questioning, and greatly increases the quality of decision-making. In cultures that don't often promote introspection, pausing inherently changes the rhythm of discourse. Requesting a pace change (e.g., "could we take a minute to think more about this before responding") can be helpful over time in promoting pausing.

***Paraphrasing*** involves recasting another's thoughts into one's own words. Paraphrasing helps to reduce group tension by communicating an attempt to understand another member. Paraphrasing can advance the conversation when it is used to: (1) acknowledge and clarify what has been said; (2) summarize and organize ideas; and (3) shift the focus of the conversation to a higher or lower level of abstraction (e.g., providing examples, making generalizations, or observing crosscutting themes). Using different types of paraphrasing helps members of a team hear and understand each other as they evaluate data and formulate decisions. It is helpful when the speaker signals their intention to paraphrase ("So, you're suggesting…", or "I think I'm hearing . . .") and focuses the paraphrase to a level that helps further the group's thinking.

***Probing for specificity*** seeks to clarify terminology, information, ideas, feelings, or perceptions that are not yet fully understood. Probing can be either specific or open-ended, depending upon the circumstances. One might ask, "Tell me more about. . ." or "What makes you say that?" or "I didn't understand what you meant, could you explain?" Recognize that care is needed in probing, as the tone of voice used could feel supportive, harsh, or intimidating. It is helpful to ask for clarification of vague nouns and pronouns (e.g., "they"), action words (e.g., "improve"), comparators (e.g., "best"), rules (e.g., "should"), and universal quantifiers (e.g., "everyone").

***Pursuing a balance between advocacy and inquiry*** helps balance these two necessary components of collaborative work. The intention of advocacy is to influence the thinking of others by sharing your point of view. The intention of inquiry is to better understand others' thinking by asking questions. Highly effective teams consciously attempt to balance these two components. Inquiry provides for greater understanding. Advocacy leads to decision-making. Maintaining a balance between advocating for a position and inquiring about the positions held by others helps create a genuine learning community and the synergy needed to accomplish great work.

***Putting ideas on the table and pulling them off*** provides grist for collaborative progress. Ideas are the heart of a meaningful conversation. Members need to feel safe to put their ideas on the table for consideration. To have an idea be received in the spirit in which you offer it, label your intentions: "This is one idea…" or "Here's a thought…" In advanced functioning groups, once an idea is "put on the table," it is often owned by the group and examined for utility on its merits, rather than connected to specific individuals and evaluated on that basis. Recognizing when an idea may be blocking dialogue or derailing the process is equally important. In this case, it's helpful to suggest the group "consider taking this off the table". A "parking lot" or holding area in the meeting minutes can be used to document ideas that are temporarily taken off the table for members to return to later. This signals to members that all ideas are valued.

## NORMS OF COLLABORATION FOR COMMUNITY BUILDING

***Presuming positive intentions*** is the assumption that other members of the team are acting from positive and constructive intentions, even if we disagree with their ideas. Presuming positive intentions is not a passive state. Instead, it involves seeking out disagreement in the spirit of greater understanding and it can be expressed through speech patterns like "yes, but." Presuming positive intentions is a foundation of trust: it promotes healthy disagreement and reduces the likelihood of misunderstanding and emotional conflict. A useful way to frame this is to ask, "Why would a reasonable person do this/think this?" (See "Crucial Conversations" in the recommended readings section at the end of this chapter.)

***Paying attention to self and others*** involves bring aware of how information is shared, how it is said, and how others are responding to it. As we pay attention to someone else's way of processing information, we are better able to communicate with them. When we pay attention to self and others, we recognize when we may have been speaking too much or too little. When others may not have had equitable opportunities to share, we invite them to do so. It is helpful to be curious about other people's impressions and understandings, but not to be judgmental. A helpful question to ask is, "What am I pretending not to notice?" (See "Crucial Conversations" recommended reading at the end of this chapter)

***Practicing cultural proficiency*** involves seeking perspectives, knowledge, and skills in order to promote inclusion, equity, and social justice. Individuals and teams developing cultural proficiency recognize that multiple viewpoints enrich group expertise and they seek out viewpoints that are not represented. Cultural proficiency is grounded in the understanding that none of us is ever fully culturally proficient. Those who work toward cultural proficiency recognize their learning is never complete and that their way may not be the best or the only way. They recognize the systemic nature of oppression and the need to take small and large actions that advance an equitable society. Practicing cultural proficiency requires individuals to understand their own cultures and identities, and to recognize they may have societal privileges which disadvantage others. People practicing cultural proficiency seek out and honor the histories, perspectives, and cultural practices of others. They regularly reflect on their own progress toward being more informed, skilled in action, and inclusive. These concepts can be put into action by asking questions and displaying curiosity about people's lived experiences and unique perspectives, practicing self-reflections, and seeking out professional development in inclusive meeting practices.

**Digital Toolkit**
*How-To Guide 8: Using DAT Member Input, How-To Guide 2: How to Conduct a Listening Tour*

DATS IN REAL LIFE

### What if DAT members are not following community norms?

One of our early DATs had a lot of member turnover over a year and a half. Members developed habits of derailing the agenda, pontificating, and interrupting one another. It was clear that they were not listening intently to one another. After completing a Listening Tour with several DAT members, the facilitators decided to present the feedback to the members. They identified two areas of tension in the group: purpose and interactions. During the process skill portion of the meeting, the facilitators summarized what they heard (making sure individuals remained anonymous) and some of what they had observed that members had not mentioned.

The facilitators were concerned that a whole group discussion following these observations might spark blaming or complaining. To foster more productive behavior, facilitators handed out notecards and asked DAT members to respond to the prompt “How would you like us to work together?” They asked members to specifically write down group norms to adopt and how they would like facilitators to support them. The facilitators then synthesized all the input into seven core values, which they wrote on a big post-it note. They reviewed this note at the following meeting and asked for edits. They then displayed this note during every subsequent meeting. This process allowed all members of the group to express themselves more freely than they might if they had to state their responses via a process that attached their name to their comments.

We have collected feedback on notecards in many DATs. At other times, we have asked DAT members for input when we have had a chance to talk with them one-on-one after a DAT meeting, at one of our weekly open coffee hours, or in a short email. All these methods help facilitators know what is important to DAT members about the group’s functioning and inform the process skills that facilitators choose moving forward.

**Digital Toolkit**
*Slides 6.4–6.6: Convergent and Divergent Conversations*

**Function of Conversations.** Another concept that facilitators typically introduce early in a DAT’s formation is whether a conversation is convergent or divergent.

Divergent conversations focus on generating lots of ideas, exploring contingencies, and encouraging different perspectives. Conversations stay positive when group members bring a “yes, and” attitude to such discussions and trust that the strongest ideas will be selected later. Facilitators often use brainstorming activities to guide these conversations in an equitable and efficient way. These and similar techniques are preferred for guiding divergent conversation, especially in large groups, because dominant individuals can tend to crowd out the voices of others and cause fewer ideas to come to light. Repeated experience with a dominated divergent conversation can lead those with quieter voices and personalities, or those with less power in the institution, to self-censor. Nonetheless, despite their shortcomings, there are occasions when short, whole-group divergent conversations are needed.

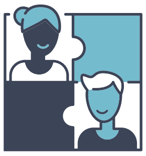
In contrast, the goal in convergent conversations is to narrow down options and make decisions. For such conversations to be equitable, it’s important for facilitators to pay attention to how group members are exercising leadership and to take steps to give all members a chance to be a part of the decision-making. Facilitators often do this by soliciting information about members' opinions or priorities using sticky notes or notecards and compiling that input to display to the group. They might then ask open-ended questions that frame a discussion: "What are decisions we need to make? How might we come to a decision about this?" When it appears that a group has implicitly accepted a decision, facilitators use questions to the entire group to clarify the nature of the decision and determine whether the group is, in fact, in consensus.

Facilitators can bring awareness to which type of conversation is intended for a particular meeting segment by labeling it as convergent or divergent right in the agenda. They can also inquire whether members agree with the types of conversation that are planned and invite changes to the agenda. Conflict can emerge when members disagree about whether they are having a convergent or divergent conversation. In that situation, facilitators can use questions to keep the conversation in bounds. If someone pushes for a decision during a dialogue, facilitators can ask if people are ready for deciding. On the other hand, if someone starts to bring up tangential ideas during a focused discussion, facilitators can ask if that is an area on which the group wants to focus their time. If it is not, facilitators can ask if they would like to put the new ideas in a "parking lot" in the group's meeting minutes document.

**Digital Toolkit**
*How-To Guide 5: Documenting and Reflecting on Meetings*

Both of these conversation types are critical for effective group communication. It can be very productive to alternate between divergent and convergent conversation within one meeting, or across several meetings. It also works well for facilitators to alternate between divergent idea generation with the larger department (perhaps via surveys or focus groups) and convergent processing of those ideas within the DAT.

## Ensuring equitable participation of students



**Principle 1:**
*Students are partners in the educational process*

Empowering undergraduate student voices is important if students are going to be well-served by their undergraduate education. It is important for DATs to elicit student voices by actively asking for their perspectives and avoiding assumptions about how a student will react, what they are feeling, or how they will be impacted by decisions about their program of study. It is also important to recognize that student DAT members may be searching for their place on campus as they are also seeking their sense of belonging within the DAT. Facilitators should be sensitive to this dual struggle while respecting their perspective as valuable. Just as it is important for facilitators to gain legitimacy with a DAT, student DAT members also must gain their legitimacy within the group. Students can provide valuable insight about their own experiences (e.g., with faculty, with advisors, and with classmates). Very often, they can also provide the most accurate information about the impact of a program of study and how it is experienced by its participants.

It is important for DAT members to value contributions from students. While non-students may make assumptions about factors that may influence the student experience, they will have limited knowledge about these factors and how they impact students. The Ideal Student Visioning activity (see Chapter 6) can help highlight what DAT members may be missing in regard to the student experience. This activity can be coupled with self-reflection, with members reflecting upon their involvement in factors tied to the undergraduate experience.

DATS IN REAL LIFE

### What if participation on the team is inequitable?

We had new graduate student members join one of our DATs after about a year. Another graduate student had joined at the beginning and took a very proactive role in the project. One of the strengths of this member was that they could envision the big picture in the future and articulate a detailed path to get there. However, facilitators noticed that this person was unintentionally dominating the conversation and the direction of the group. We were particularly concerned because the new graduate student members were not contributing as many ideas as they potentially could and one of them showed signs of disengagement.

The facilitators decided to apply two interventions to the situation. During process skill time, the facilitators collected feedback on notecards. DAT members were given the following prompt to respond to: “I feel motivated to collaborate on a project when…” They were also asked to include any other comments they had. Notecards were digitized and anonymized. The following meeting, facilitators displayed the list of comments, which included the statements “…I feel my opinion is valid”, “I can contribute”, “People rely on me”, “Working with rather than for someone”, and “Whole team is bought in”. The group was invited to discuss their reflections on the feedback. Then, facilitators introduced the process skill Step Up / Step Back, which guides members to consider how much they are contributing and takes steps to correct any imbalance on their own. Alternatively, they could have engaged the group in looking at the collaborative norm “Paying attention to self and others”.

It is important to recognize that when some members dominate and others are reticent, these behavioral patterns feed into each other and can create a negative spiral (Tannen, 1987). It’s valuable to introduce corrective process skills for inequitable participation as soon as they appear and be prepared to re-introduce them when new members join the group.

**Digital Toolkit**
*How-To Guide 8: Using DAT Member Input*

**Digital Toolkit**
*Slide 6.7: Step Up / Step Back*

# How Do Facilitators Teach Process Skills to DAT Members?

Devoting meeting time to process skills is valuable for many reasons. Facilitators can make connections between team skills and the outcomes that the DAT is trying to produce. Facilitators often explain that process skills help the team to “Go Slow to Go Fast.” Taking the time to learn to work together effectively and equitably allows for much more efficient teamwork later. The facilitators can deepen the team’s expertise by selecting some skills to practice more intentionally, and by being more explicit in explaining how process skills work and how they are chosen to fit a particular situation. Over time, DAT members become equipped to enact these skills in other settings and grow as effective change agents.

DAT facilitators spend less than ten minutes of each meeting discussing process skills. They

CHAPTER 6

# Guiding a DAT through a Project

In this chapter, we describe how facilitators work with DAT members on projects, which progress in conjunction with the development of the DAT's group functioning (Chapter 4), and support the DAT in engaging the wider department in their work (Chapter 7). A major goal of a DAT is to achieve sustainable change on a broad-scale issue related to undergraduate education in their department. We conceptualize "issue related to undergraduate education" broadly: it might be related to curricular change (e.g., alignment of learning goals between courses, assessing disciplinary skills across the major) or cultural change (e.g., building a sense of undergraduate community, improving equity and inclusion of marginalized groups). Successful DATs choose a scope of work that can have a broad impact (i.e., beyond a single course or instructor), but is manageable given the scale of available or cultivated resources.

Much of this chapter covers the logistics of DAT meetings and moving the DAT work forward. Initially, we look at preparations for the first meeting, the activities around the development of a shared vision of undergraduate education, and the visioning associated with the DAT and its emerging culture. Several activities around visioning are presented and explained in depth.

The remainder of the chapter provides an in-depth examination of the processes involved in linking the vision with the goals, outcomes, DAT projects, and assessment of projects. In addition, we discuss the variety of data types a DAT might generate or examine in its work and how facilitators can guide the DAT in using data to inform and move the work forward.

## KEY MESSAGES

- Facilitators have many logistical tasks to attend to before the DAT meets for the first time and many ongoing activities as the DAT meets and engages in its work.
- DATs initially develop a shared vision around who they are as a group and a vision of what undergraduate education should look like in the department.
- Linking the vision with the goals, outcomes, projects, and assessments is crucial in accomplishing the DAT's work and implementing sustainable change in the department.

# Theory of Change Context

This chapter revisits and elaborates on the roles that facilitators play for a DAT, as articulated in Outcome 5. These roles set the foundation for a facilitator's work in guiding and supporting the DAT's project work.

**OUTCOME 5**

**Facilitators support DAT members in creating change and developing as change agents**

- Help manage DAT logistics
- Supports the development of a high functioning team
- Provide support that is customized to the DAT's goals and needs
- Cultivate an environment external to the DAT that is conducive to the DAT's success

The remainder of this chapter focuses on the DAT engaging in a change effort, Outcome 6C. A precondition for successfully engaging in a change effort is for the DAT members to create a shared vision for undergraduate education and the undergraduate experience in their department. Not only must DAT members share in the understanding of the vision, they also must share in its creation. DAT facilitators help the DAT construct a shared vision through various prompts and activities, like the "ideal student exercise" described later in the chapter.

Once the DAT has a shared vision, it engages in the actual change process. The process that the DAT engages in to create change is cyclic (see the Change Cycle for the expanded version). Finally, the DAT will achieve outcomes as a result of the change process.

**OUTCOME 6C**

The DAT has a shared vision for undergraduate education

↓

The DAT engages in change cycles for outcomes at multiple scales

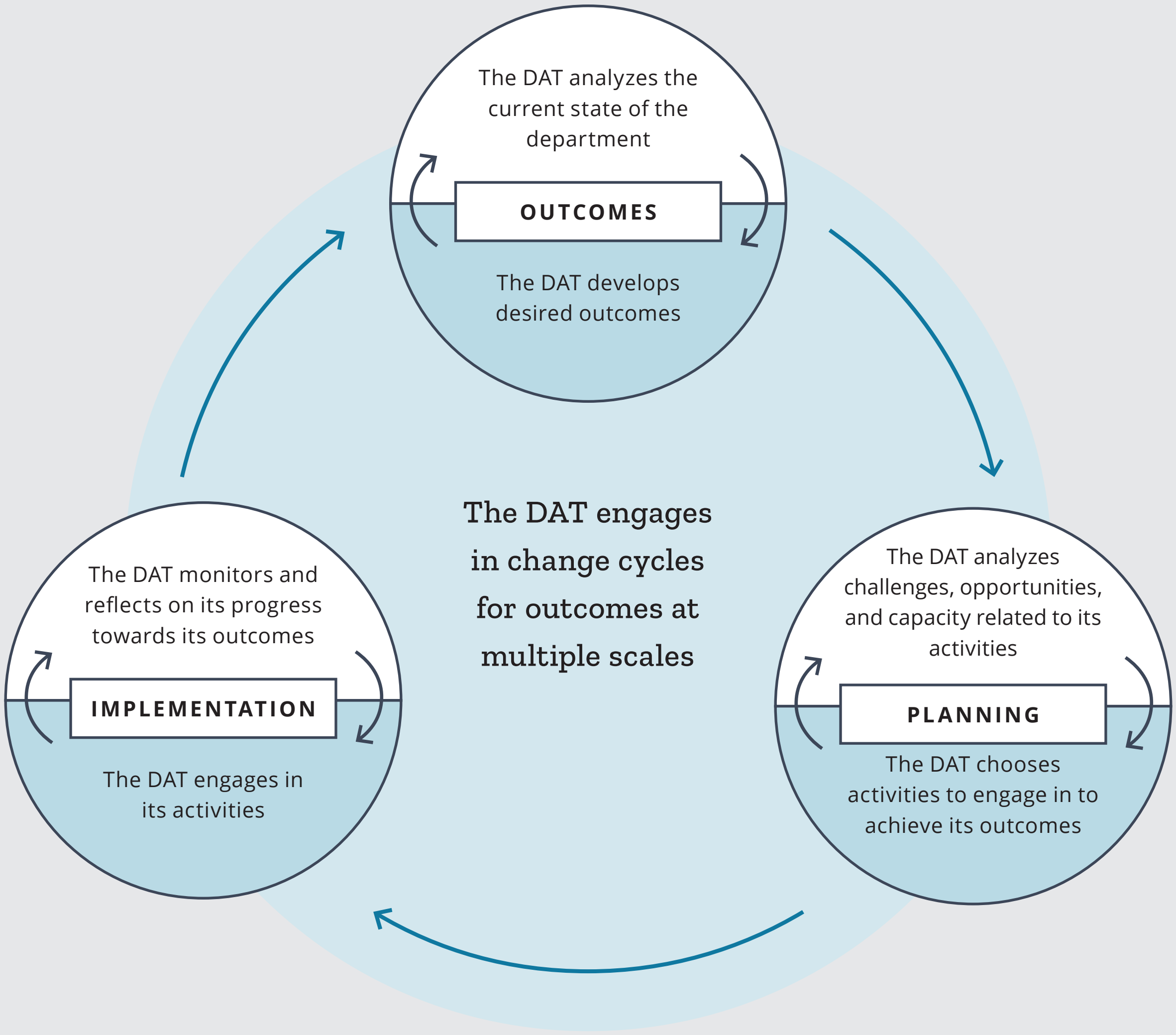
↓

The DAT achieves outcome(s) of appropriate scale

# The Change Cycle

The Change Cycle has three phases, each of which has an action/outcome-focused component and a data/analysis-focused component that are mutually reinforcing. It involves: (1) developing desired outcomes while analyzing the state of the department, (2) planning activities to engage in while analyzing challenges, opportunities, and departmental capacity, and (3) implementing activities while monitoring and reflecting on its progress. A DAT can spend a while "swirling" between the components in one phase before moving on to the next phase. That's expected and fine, as long as they are being productive.

At any given time, a DAT may engage in more than one of these change cycles. For example, the DAT might split into subgroups with "parallel cycles," each of which is focused on a subset of the DAT's overall vision. Or, the DAT may have a "cycle-within-a-cycle": a short-timescale cycle focused on a more immediate outcome that is a component of a long-timescale cycle with longer-term outcomes. What matters is that the DAT engages in its work through cyclic processes that incorporate the steps in the change cycle and that the outcomes that are driving the cycle are appropriately scaled. Typically, this means that the DAT will have some long-term outcomes driving it in a big-picture sense, and some related short-term outcomes that are guiding its immediate work.



# How Do Facilitators Prepare for DAT Meetings?

Alongside the group development work described in previous chapters, facilitators direct a variety of logistical and organizational activities that guide the DAT project. Even before a DAT has its first meeting, facilitators direct a number of activities which set the stage for the project, including:

**Meeting Scheduling.** During the first DAT meeting, or early on in communication with DAT members, prioritize scheduling regular meetings out as far as is reasonable (typically one semester or quarter in advance). If possible, attempt to build a schedule of next semester's meetings before the end of the current semester. Faculty and student course schedules get locked in early and will usually determine meeting times and days.

DATs usually meet once every two weeks for about one hour. Less frequent meetings can harm the continuity of the DAT work and development of the DAT culture. However, high functioning subgroups that are doing small group work between meetings may be able to meet less frequently than the whole group. The one-hour length is variable as well. Shorter meeting times are not workable, but longer times of up to two hours have been adopted when member schedules allowed.

**Creation of a Shared Online Working Environment.** During regular meetings, the facilitators keep detailed minutes while the team examines and discusses data, creates documents, and assembles pertinent literature. The creation of a cloud-based drive is essential for organizing and sharing information and documents. All DAT members have "read and write" access to this drive and are encouraged to use it during their work. We have used Google Drive, but there is a myriad of other options. It is a good idea for the facilitators to preload commonly used documents and folders before the first DAT meeting. This will help keep the drive organized and make resources easy to find. For example, a running meeting minutes document should be created and placed at the top level of the drive (see the "Anatomy of an Agenda" on page 101 for a more detailed look at meeting minutes). Sub-folders which may be needed include: Data, Literature, Founding Documents (such as a Request for Proposal) or Directives from Upper Administration. Other folders will be required given the specific work of the DAT. Strive to keep the content that doesn't fit well into any category at the top level of the drive to a minimum.

While facilitators set up this collaborative workspace, it's expected that DAT members will make active use of it. During the first DAT meeting, present this shared space as a resource you recommend they use—but do not assume all members will be familiar with working in a cloud-based environment. Ask members if the format will work for them and be open to switching to another cloud-based solution if any member is uncomfortable with your choice. Most of our DAT members have been open to learning how to use the shared drive functions. Facilitators can assist members or, often, DAT members will have the necessary skills and be happy to help other members navigate and use the shared drive.

**Room Reservations, Requirements and Accessories.** Reserving a consistent meeting room will help the meetings to be efficient, reliable and predictable. Ideally, meetings will be held in a departmental space. Check to see that the room is big enough, has appropriate furniture, whiteboards or tables, appropriate technology, and is accessible. In short, you are looking to reserve a room fitted and arranged to promote collaboration. Strive to make room adjustments that facilitate the work, but remember that typically you won't have much control over the room layout or furniture. For each meeting, bring the "go bag" of dry erase markers, sticky notes, large permanent markers, giant sticky notes, notepads, "consensus cards" (see Prioritizing Goals and Projects later in this chapter), appropriate cables and adapters, and any other supplies to support the agenda and planned activities for the day.

### CONTENTS OF A DAT "GO BAG"

There are several items that DAT facilitators should bring to all meetings—some of them will be used at every meeting and some will be used as needed. We always suggest maintaining a packed bag of these materials, so that it is easy to grab it on the way to your next DAT meeting:

- Writing tools: pens, sharpies (for sticky-note activities), dry erase markers and erasers (for whiteboards)
- Stickies: Standard-sized post-its, 4"x6" size, flip-chart-sized
- Index cards
- Consensus Cards
- Cables/adaptors for connecting your laptop to projectors
- Non-perishable snacks, serving utensils, small plates and/or napkins

**Technology.** It is preferable to project meeting minutes and other relevant documents on a screen or TV for all to see, so that people engage in the shared space rather than being immersed in their individual computer screens. Arrive early to ensure the technology works. Often, you will have to switch connections or string your own cables to make things work. Encourage DAT members to bring their own laptops or devices, so they may access working documents on the shared drive. This practice will vary by group. In some instances, DATs may determine through their community standards that devices should not be used in order to encourage member engagement. However, it should be kept in mind that some members may need devices or other accommodations to access the work. As in all things regarding DAT facilitation, be prepared, yet be flexible and adaptable.

**Food and Meetings.** Typically, DAT facilitators supply snacks for meetings. The addition of snack food helps create an environment which encourages collaboration and builds community. Bring a wide variety of items that can be easily distributed with cups, small plates, or napkins. At the first meeting, inquire about member allergies, food sensitivities, and preferences. This attention to their wants and requirements builds member trust and a sense of facilitator legitimacy. In interviews with past DAT participants, they consistently mentioned how much they appreciated snacks at meetings.

**DAT Journals.** Facilitators keep an online journal for each DAT that is not shared with the DAT's members. This document is used to plan future meetings, to record reflections immediately after meetings, and to store copies of important emails. It also contains a parking lot of ideas that facilitators are interested in exploring with the DAT. Within the journal, an agenda planning template includes spaces for necessary materials, meeting goals, process skills, and project work. A reflection template contains spaces for a general reflection on the meeting, meeting goals and focus, distinctive moments, and evidence of the Core Principles. As described in Chapter 4, reflections are an invaluable tool for facilitators to map the direction and progress of both the DAT's project and their own facilitation.

**Meeting Agendas.** Thoughtful agendas are crucial to DAT success. Facilitators typically prepare a draft agenda in the DAT's journal prior to each meeting (see Figure 6.1 for example). To promote DAT member ownership of the project, it helps to explain agenda development in one of the first meetings and to point out that the group will increasingly structure their own agendas as the project matures. We think of facilitators as assembling agendas based on ideas expressed by the group, rather than creating agendas.

**Digital Toolkit**
*How-To Guide 5: Documenting and Reflecting on Meetings*

The culture which develops within the DAT will determine how agenda writing is approached. Typically, the DAT should spend several minutes at the end of the meeting deciding on topics for the next meeting. Sometimes, facilitators write the agenda with input from the lead members between DAT meetings, or solicit input from the DAT generally. Agendas are always reviewed with the group at the opening of the next meeting, so any items that were overlooked may be added and modifications may be suggested.

Facilitators play an important role in tracking meeting time and making sure progress continues according to the agenda. It is not uncommon for agenda items to take longer than anticipated and encroach on other agenda items' time. Facilitators generally handle these situations on a case-by-case basis. If it comes up, remind DAT members about the time allocation on the agenda and ask how members would like to proceed; otherwise, seek to conclude the conversation on that item to mutual satisfaction. In other situations, the facilitator may feel it appropriate to remind the group of the time and suggest tabling the current conversation to be revisited in a future meeting. It is the facilitators' role to put tabled conversations on the agenda for an upcoming meeting.

**Figure 6.1:** An example meeting agenda

**4.30.19**

METADATA

**Attendees:** Alanna, Chris, Clara, Courtney, Dan, Gina, Joel, Karen, Mary, Sarah

**Norm of Collaboration:** Presuming positive intentions

**Norm Checker:** Sarah

**Meeting goal(s):** 1. Review feedback about facilitation from DAT members 2. Outline how this feedback will influence the DAT model

| Topic and Purpose | Conversation Type and Notes | Decision/Action |
|---|---|---|
| Welcome and announcements 12:00-12:10 | We have two DAT team meetings left this semester<br>Icebreaker: What is one activity you love to do during the summer?<br>Courtney and Dan presented about DATs at a conference, Joel was invited to speak about DATs at a departmental seminar<br>Go over meeting goals: is this what we want to accomplish today? | |
| Norm of collaboration 12:10-12:15 | **Presuming positive intentions**<br>This is the assumption that other members of the team are acting from positive and constructive intentions, even if we disagree with their ideas. Presuming positive intentions is not a passive state. Disagreement, in the spirit of greater understanding, is sought out and often shows up in a "yes, but" or "yes, and" format. Presuming positive intentions is a foundation of trust. It promotes healthy disagreement, and reduces the likelihood of misunderstanding and emotional conflict. | |
| DAT member feedback 12:15-12:30 | Read through the feedback silently. Write down what themes are most salient to you and write them on sticky notes (one theme per note)<br>Categorize the themes that the group recognized in the feedback. What are some ways we can prioritize these themes? | |
| Feedback plan 12:30-12:50 | What changes are possible to make to the DAT model in response to the feedback?<br>How and when will we implement these changes? | |
| Next steps 12:50-12:55 | What needs to be accomplished by our next meeting? | |
| Norm check 12:55-1:00 | How did we do with today's norm? | |

OPENING

PROCESS SKILL

BODY

CLOSING

## ANATOMY OF AN AGENDA

Typical DAT agendas have a number of components, as described here. We like to use a three-column format for keeping agendas, with the first column for the agenda item topic/purpose and timing, the second column for detailed information and notes, and the third column to call out action items or specific decisions.

**Metadata:** The information that teams want to consistently collect will vary. We have found it useful to track attendance, the norms that are used for the meeting, and the goals for the meeting. Other items you might want to track include: who is taking notes for the meeting, the date of the next meeting, and future work for the team. Talk with your DAT about the value in tracking these different pieces of information (e.g., keeping track of attendance allows you to look back at meetings where decisions were made and to know who contributed to the decision-making process).

**Digital Toolkit**
*How-To Guide 7: Building Community*

**Opening:** Create space at the beginning of the meeting for team members to make announcements, share exciting news, and participate in a community building activity – but try to limit this activity to no more than a few minutes. Preserving this time at the beginning of the meeting for the team to interact with each other sets the stage for the rest of the meeting.

A typical agenda begins with a "check-in" or a community builder. If community builders are used, facilitators should select them carefully and be sensitive to everyone's individual situations. Keep in mind that these are meant to build community, so if someone feels marginalized or uncomfortable by an activity, then it is not meeting its goal. Some members might feel that these activities impede progress on the "actual work" of the DAT. We feel that for a DAT to be a high functioning team, group connections and personalization are important and community builders are a quick, simple way for the DAT to make progress in this area. Facilitators use community builders selectively and mindfully.

**Process skill:** By consistently spending a few minutes on a process skill or activity, the team develops the habit of thinking about team functioning. Putting the process skill early in the agenda gives the team the opportunity to practice the selected process skill for the rest of the meeting. A table of process skills can be found in Chapter 4. Have a conversation about the value that process skills can provide for a team and consider strategies for supporting teams in engaging in process skills during a meeting.

Next, the facilitators can introduce a process skill which acts as a lens for the day's work. Process skills are described in detail in Chapter 4. An example is the selection of a Norm of Collaboration for the meeting. At times, a facilitator or a volunteer acts as "norm checker." The norm checker monitors the group's use of the norm during the meeting and reports out at the end of the meeting. Sometimes, in addition to a norm, facilitators may present a process skill that fits the meeting focus. In most meetings, time spent on group process is no more than 10 minutes and often less. Reporting out on a norm allows a DAT to analyze its conversational skills and recognizes that a major way to improve a skill is to get feedback. Where possible, the norm checker should provide explicit examples of how the productive use of the norm added to the discourse and offer other examples where the use of the norm was missed.

**Body:** The bulk of the meeting is spent on DAT project work, and the content in this section will vary between meetings. Facilitators should provide structure to the content they plan to cover each meeting, and to look to different activities to engage teams in processes such as brainstorming or decision-making. Facilitators should also practice transitioning between topics and learn how to determine the amount of time to allot to each activity.

**Closing:** It is critical to allot a few minutes at the end of the meeting for the group to generate a list of action items, find volunteers for each item, and talk about what to accomplish at the next meeting. This will also provide an opportunity to discuss any work that needs to happen between meetings. The end of the meeting is also a good time to ask the team to reflect on the process skill that was chosen for the meeting, or to think about how they are functioning as a team when examined through a lens chosen by the facilitator.

The last few minutes of the meeting are spent with the norm checker reporting out and on "Next Steps" to be added as topics to the next meeting agenda. It is good practice to establish the norm of consistently starting and ending meetings on time.

**Meeting Minutes.** Accurate and detailed meeting minutes help a DAT achieve its goals. They are especially valuable to help a participant catch up after missing a meeting. A running meeting minutes document is kept at the top level of the DAT's shared drive and is accessible to all DAT members. Facilitators commonly take turns adding notes to the running minutes document during a meeting. Care should be taken to make notes as accurate as possible so they can be understandable to those who were not present at the meeting. A benefit of co-facilitation is in the ability to take nearly verbatim meeting notes. In circumstances where there is only one facilitator taking notes, it might be necessary to ask one of the members to assist in note-taking. If a facilitator is not able to attend a meeting, ensure DAT members are aware of this absence and recommend that a DAT member take notes in their place. During the meeting, the minutes are commonly projected for all to see and DAT members may contribute to them in "real time" as the meeting progresses. This helps the group track main themes, action items, or disagreements which may arise during a meeting. Facilitators can create a new minutes document when the initial one becomes too large, or at regular intervals (e.g., every academic year).

It is a good idea for facilitators to explain their note-taking routine during the first DAT meeting, as some members may have questions or concerns about this practice. Facilitators should make it clear from the outset that the minutes are taken this way to help with reflections, to plan more efficiently, and to inform members who miss a meeting. Facilitators should use professional judgement if a member starts to talk about issues that are sensitive or mentions the names of students or staff in the department. In these cases, it is important to not take verbatim notes. When appropriate, facilitators can ask how much of the discussion is acceptable to capture in the notes. Facilitators may later make note of these interactions in the confidential meeting reflection journal. That set of notes is accessible to facilitators only and is described in the following section.

**Between-Meeting Work for Facilitators.** One of the most surprising aspects of facilitation for new facilitators is the amount of preparation that is involved between meetings—although this can vary depending on the DAT, where they are in the DAT life cycle, and the facilitators' experience. If you are an experienced facilitator, it is helpful to explain to new facilitators how much time you spend on different activities between meetings; how you prepare for a meeting; and the value of debriefing and writing reflections after a meeting.

The amount of effort in planning conversational structures or activities for a meeting should not be underestimated. Specific structures and activities that can be included in a meeting are described in the DAT Digital Toolkit resources that accompany Chapters 4, 5, and 6. In preparation for the upcoming meeting, facilitators should copy the newly prepared agenda from the journal to the running meeting minutes document, and then email a link to the agenda, along with reminders to participants about any action items they agreed to do before the meeting.

### BETWEEN-MEETING FACILITATOR TASK LIST

These are the typical tasks that DAT facilitators engage in before each meeting, with estimated lengths of time they should budget for each:

- Previous meeting debrief and reflection: **10–30 minutes**
- Email of previous meeting summary and action item list: **10–30 minutes**
- Meeting agenda planning: **30–60 minutes**
- Email communication with DAT members: **As needed**
- Collect resources for DAT: **As needed**
- Individual or small group meetings with DAT members: **As needed**
- Email of meeting reminder: **5–10 minutes**

**Between-Meeting Work for DAT members.** As the DAT project work commences, it will usually be necessary for members to carry out tasks between meetings. It can also be very effective for subgroups to meet (either face-to-face or virtually) between meetings to work on specific activities. Ideally, DAT members will propose specific tasks to complete between meetings, but even then facilitators will often need to put out a call for volunteers to take on tasks. This can occur either when an idea seems to have reached a consensus in a meeting, or during the time reserved for sorting out action items, in the last 5 to 10 minutes of a meeting.

DATS IN REAL LIFE

### What if DATs are unable to meet in person?

In the spring of 2020, universities worldwide suspended in-person meetings to slow the spread of the novel SARS-CoV-2 virus. DAT facilitators responded to the situation by polling DAT members about their preferences on meetings going forward. Most DAT members chose to continue meeting via teleconference software. Because the situation had disrupted almost all routines, DAT facilitators adjusted their first online DAT meetings to emphasize reconnecting and to allow members to restate or revise their commitments to ongoing projects. At that point in time, many DATs had working subgroups. Facilitators found that subgroups which had a strong DAT member leader tended to be able to continue their work with minimal disruption. For other subgroups, facilitators helped identify new DAT member leaders, or assumed responsibility for the subgroup.

During this time, technology was the unsung hero, enabling everyone to work despite their drastically different circumstances. While previously facilitators had aided individual DAT members in teleconferencing into meetings, now everyone relied on teleconferencing to do their work. Facilitators found that certain teleconference features were particularly helpful: software that gave facilitators the ability to mute and unmute participants (to control background noise); the ability to set up breakout rooms in advance, and communicate to groups in breakout rooms; and the ability for facilitators and participants to share their screens with the group. Facilitators were also able to use features that allowed participants to virtually "raise hands" and make other nonverbal signals, which provided a good alternative for the consensus cards they previously used for decision-making. While the remote format was not a perfect or preferable replacement for in-person meetings, it worked well enough for DATs to continue to make progress and for DAT members to stay connected.

# How Do Facilitators Help the DAT Create a Shared Vision?

Once the logistics have been arranged and meetings are on the calendar, you are ready to begin the work of guiding the DAT. The DAT process is built around a shared vision. This helps the DAT create goals, determine actions, and devise plans to assess progress. In subsequent sections, we examine the processes required for the DAT to move from developing a vision to implementing a project.

The DAT develops a shared vision for their work soon after its initial meeting. A shared vision is necessary to develop shared goals, which are the concrete objectives that will build toward enacting the shared vision. A shared vision, a shared dissatisfaction with the current state, and knowledge of resources are necessary for change (Garmston & Wellman, 2016).

**Digital Toolkit**
*Slides 10.0–10.9: Visioning and Implementing Projects*

A shared vision for undergraduate education is the long-term sense of what undergraduate education should be in the department. Focusing the work around a shared vision can lead to creative and flexible ideas. This contrasts with a focus on immediate problems, which tend to lead to narrower solutions. While it may be easier and more expedient to focus on individual departmental issues, a broader vision can help address the sources and causes of these problems or issues.

Facilitators help the DAT construct a shared vision through activities such as the "Ideal Student" exercise described in the following section. Questions that help a group develop a shared vision are: "What are we working toward in the long-term?" and "What justifies our continued existence?" We present several tools and strategies we have used to guide DATs toward a shared vision.