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Stimulating Innovation (or Making Innovation Meaningful Again)

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Action Principles

- a. Consider context and culture. When planning for a successful, strategic innovation, think carefully about the context and culture in which it will be implemented and how each may influence the other. Identify ways to leverage the interplay between them.
- b. Build an understanding. Communicate the specific role of innovation in your organization (its purpose, what it should achieve, how people will be supported in stimulating it) and connect innovation to very specific goals and priorities.
- c. Build a culture of innovation. Simultaneous to building an understanding of what innovation is and what it should achieve, build a culture to support it. Create structures, opportunities, and common practices for people across and within teams or divisions to interact, create, develop new ideas, communicate them to all levels of the system, and scale them. A culture of innovation should be demonstrated at all levels of the system.
- d. Make innovation concrete and recognizable. Specify the categories and types of innovation for staff so they begin to see it in tangible form and even start to recognize it in practices they currently employ (and maybe just haven't formalized or shared). Use the definitions and examples provided in this chapter and elsewhere in this *Handbook* to get started.
- e. Point out past and ongoing successes. Demonstrate that past innovations have staying power by acknowledging what still works well and continuing it.
- f. Differentiate the two types of innovation. Create distinct processes, timelines, and incentives for the two types of innovations—sustaining innovations (more effective and efficient ways of doing what is already being done) and disruptive innovations (creating something new and different, a game-changer for the future).
- g. Look, identify, disseminate, and incentivize. Using established criteria for innovation, seek out where it is happening (in classrooms, offices, divisions), identify the specific practices being innovated upon, and establish pathways to transfer that knowledge and those skills to others. Identify the incentives for knowledge transfer.
- h. Envision the potential and anticipate the problems. Be up front about the costs and benefits of innovation, identifying as many activity-specific consequences as possible. To start, ask, "If things were working as we would want them to, what would it look like to us? What would be happening that each of us (administrator, principal, teacher, student, parent) would be thrilled to see?"