

Work Collaborative Forum 1: Our Emerging Vision

19th August 2025

Executive Summary

This document captures the insights, ideas, and emerging direction from Work Collaborative's inaugural forum meeting. Our diverse group of international educators, researchers, and change practitioners came together around a shared commitment: empowering schools to lead sustainable organisational change from within their communities.

Key themes that emerged include addressing the confidence crisis in schools, rebalancing internal and external expertise, and developing practical approaches to resonant change. The forum identified potential collaborative projects including research synthesis, coaching training, and pilot programmes whilst emphasising the importance of community-driven development.

This summary reflects our open source ethos - all ideas, frameworks, and resources developed by Work Collaborative are freely available for adaptation and use by the education community.

What Brought Us Together

Our first forum brought together a remarkable group of educators, coaches, researchers, and change-makers from across the globe. What struck us most was how our individual journeys had led us to the same fundamental realisation: **change in education needs to come from within our school communities.**

From the Head: The Evidence is Clear

We're driven by compelling evidence that school culture profoundly impacts teacher learning capacity. There's growing recognition that when adults aren't primed to learn, even the best professional development falls flat. We're seeing the damaging effects of change for change's sake, and we know there's a better way.

The moral dimension is unavoidable too. Public money spent on professional development that doesn't create lasting improvement isn't just ineffective - it's problematic. We're witnessing a confidence crisis where schools feel less able to make decisions for themselves, increasingly looking outward for solutions rather than trusting their internal wisdom.

From the Heart: The Human Cost

What pulls us forward emotionally is witnessing how empowering good change can be for school staff when approached thoughtfully. We're seeing dedicated educators feeling disconnected from decisions that affect their daily work. There's a lack of pride in being involved in schools that we're desperate to address.

We want to create safe learning spaces where school communities feel confident about their role in change. We're driven by the desire to see teachers, leaders, parents, and students genuinely heard and valued in the change process.

Our Emerging "Why"

Through our conversations, we're discovering that Work Collaborative exists to **restore organisational confidence in schools** by empowering them to lead sustainable change from within their communities.

We believe schools already possess the wisdom, skills, and capacity they need to create meaningful change. Our role isn't to provide another external solution, but to help schools recognise and amplify their internal expertise whilst engaging with external voices at the right time, in the right way.

The Confidence Crisis

We're responding to what we see as a gradual outsourcing of decision-making in schools. Whether it's the influence of edu-companies, policy mandates, or consultant-driven solutions, we're concerned about schools losing trust in their ability to understand their own communities and create contextual solutions.

This isn't about rejecting external expertise - it's about rebalancing the relationship so that external voices complement and strengthen internal capacity rather than replacing it.

The Interaction Challenge

We're particularly interested in how schools interact both externally (with providers, policymakers, consultants) and internally (with their own communities). Too often, these interactions happen in ways that diminish rather than build organisational confidence.

Our Emerging "What"

Our forum discussions revealed several potential directions for Work Collaborative:

Research & Advocacy (Our Core)

- **White Paper Development:** Synthesising existing research on organisational change in education, particularly focusing on the gap between espoused ideas and practical implementation
- **Values Framework:** Articulating the principles that underpin effective school-community collaboration
- **Evidence Gathering:** Understanding change fatigue in the system and documenting what resonant change actually looks like

Education & Development

- **Organisational Coaching Training:** Developing systemic team coaching approaches specifically for educators
- **Implementation Guides:** Creating practical, step-by-step resources with templates and reflection questions
- **Double Diamond Exploration:** Further developing and testing our adapted model for organisational change

Systems & Support

- **Accreditation Models:** Potentially developing frameworks that recognise and support effective school-provider partnerships
- **Pilot Programmes:** Working with schools to test and refine collaborative approaches to change
- **Community Platforms:** Creating spaces where schools can share implementation experiences and learn from each other

The Questions That Drive Us Forward

Crucial questions we need to keep at the heart of our work:

About Our Mission:

- How will we manage and support teachers and leaders experiencing change fatigue?
- What do we actually mean by "sustainable"? Improved recruitment? Retention? Job satisfaction? Educational standards?
- How will we ensure collective sensemaking about problems, change, and improvement remains central to our community?

About Implementation:

- How do we move beyond espousing good ideas to actually achieving them?
- How do we lead improvement in complex settings where there's often a gap between what we say and what we do?
- How might we ensure that individual and collective agency remains at the heart of any community we build?

About Impact:

- How will we ensure our work cuts through the noise at both system and school level?
- How could we help well-intentioned policymakers understand the mission, language, and impact of our work?

What We Want to Learn Together

Our forum members expressed appetite for:

- **Real-world perspectives** that keep our work grounded and practical
- **Cultural dimensions** of change implementation across different contexts
- **Theory-practice connections** that help bridge the research-implementation gap
- **Diverse international perspectives** on similar challenges
- **Double diamond methodology** and its application in different settings

What We Can Share

Our community brings remarkable expertise:

- **Academic grounding** in research methodologies and theoretical frameworks
- **Rich experiences** and practical approaches to sustainable school improvement
- **Systemic change approaches** from multiple cultural contexts
- **Implementation tools** and templates for practical application
- **Coaching methodologies** adapted for educational settings

Our Collaborative Spirit

We're committed to working together rather than in silos. The richness of our first forum came from the overlap between different perspectives - those focused on research, those driven by advocacy, and those passionate about practical implementation.

We're exploring the possibility of subgroups that work on different initiatives whilst maintaining alignment under our common goal. This allows us to leverage diverse strengths whilst ensuring our efforts remain connected and mutually reinforcing.

Next Steps

1. **Feedback and Refinement:** We invite all forum members to respond to this synthesis. Does it resonate? What would you add or change?
2. **Forum Expansion:** We're looking to grow our community thoughtfully. Please consider who else might contribute valuable perspectives to our collaborative.
3. **Subgroup Formation:** Based on the interests expressed, we'll explore forming working groups around specific initiatives like the white paper, coaching training, or pilot programmes.
4. **September Forum:** Our next gathering will build on these foundations, potentially focusing on the "how" questions raised.

An Invitation

This document represents the beginning of our conversation, not the end. We're intentionally staying tentative because we believe the collaborative process itself is as important as any outputs we create.

We're inviting you to help shape what Work Collaborative becomes. Your questions, challenges, and contributions are essential to ensuring we create something that genuinely serves schools and their communities.

The evidence is clear that change is most effective when it comes from within. The same principle applies to Work Collaborative itself - our direction will emerge from our community's collective wisdom, not from any predetermined plan.

Forum Participants

Online Meeting Details:

- Date: Tuesday, 19th August 2025
- Time: 10:00-11:30 BST

Attendees:

- **Shane Leaning**
- **Efraim Lerner**
- **Simon Probert**
- **Tamara Zaple Rolfs**
- **Kathryn Taylor**
- **Sandy Lennox**
- **Valentina Devid**
- **Kathryn Morgan**
- **Catherine Cooke**

Open Source Commitment

This document is published in the spirit of Work Collaborative's commitment to open source collaboration. All content, ideas, frameworks, and resources developed through our forums are made freely available to the global education community.

We encourage adaptation, modification, and sharing of these materials to support schools and education organisations worldwide. This document will be housed in the Work Collaborative open source library at workcollaborative.com/library, alongside other resources developed by our community.

Our open source approach reflects our core belief that sustainable change in education emerges through community collaboration rather than proprietary solutions.

This summary utilises AI to synthesise contributions from our forum discussion, chat messages, and Miro board reflections. It represents the collective thinking of our community and is intended as a working document for feedback and refinement.

Next forum meeting: Tuesday, 16th September 2025

For more information about Work Collaborative or to access our open source library, visit: workcollaborative.com