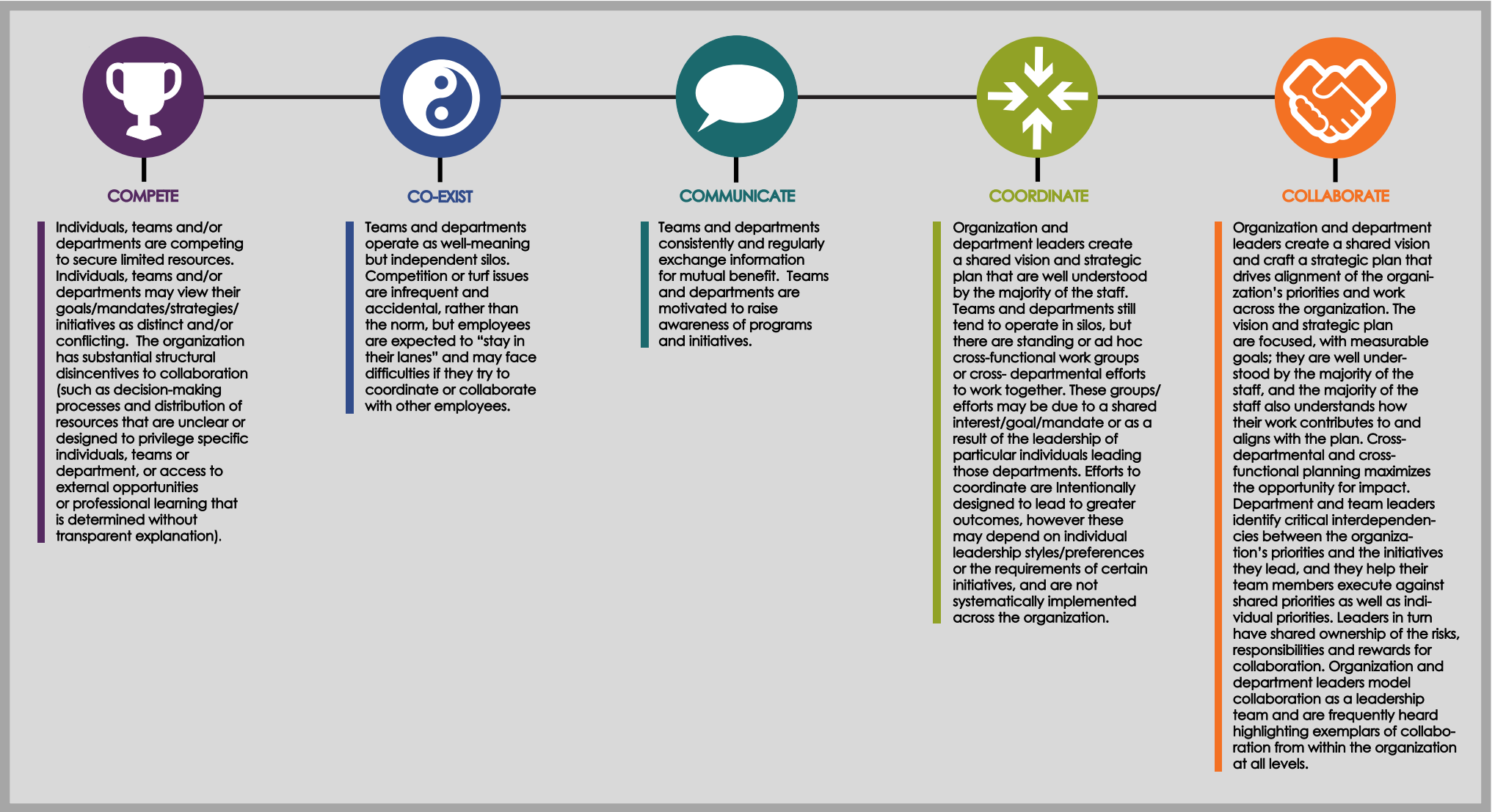# COLLABORATION CONTINUUM

The collaboration continuum is intended to help you make intentional choices about working relationships within your team and across your organization. The goal is to build relationships that are modeled around the characteristics of coordination and collaboration.

COMPETE

Individuals, teams and/or departments are competing to secure limited resources. Individuals, teams and/or departments may view their goals/mandates/strategies/ initiatives as distinct and/or conflicting. The organization has substantial structural disincentives to collaboration (such as decision-making processes and distribution of resources that are unclear or designed to privilege specific individuals, teams or department, or access to external opportunities or professional learning that is determined without transparent explanation).

CO-EXIST

Teams and departments operate as well-meaning but independent silos. Competition or turf issues are infrequent and accidental, rather than the norm, but employees are expected to "stay in their lanes" and may face difficulties if they try to coordinate or collaborate with other employees.

COMMUNICATE

Teams and departments consistently and regularly exchange information for mutual benefit. Teams and departments are motivated to raise awareness of programs and initiatives.

COORDINATE

Organization and department leaders create a shared vision and strategic plan that are well understood by the majority of the staff. Teams and departments still tend to operate in silos, but there are standing or ad hoc cross-functional work groups or cross-departmental efforts to work together. These groups/efforts may be due to a shared interest/goal/mandate or as a result of the leadership of particular individuals leading those departments. Efforts to coordinate are intentionally designed to lead to greater outcomes, however these may depend on individual leadership styles/preferences or the requirements of certain initiatives, and are not systematically implemented across the organization.

COLLABORATE

Organization and department leaders create a shared vision and craft a strategic plan that drives alignment of the organization's priorities and work across the organization. The vision and strategic plan are focused, with measurable goals; they are well understood by the majority of the staff, and the majority of the staff also understands how their work contributes to and aligns with the plan. Cross-departmental and cross-functional planning maximizes the opportunity for impact. Department and team leaders identify critical interdependencies between the organization's priorities and the initiatives they lead, and they help their team members execute against shared priorities as well as individual priorities. Leaders in turn have shared ownership of the risks, responsibilities and rewards for collaboration. Organization and department leaders model collaboration as a leadership team and are frequently heard highlighting exemplars of collaboration from within the organization at all levels.

Peltzman, Alissa and Jennifer Vranek.2019. "Collaboration Continuum"

CAPACITIES

COMPETE: Low levels of trust exist. Communication and coordination skills and time to work together is neither needed nor valued. Colleagues may have an instinct to guard information and resources, rather than develop productive relationships. Successful individuals become adept at micro-politics and workarounds. The organization may have a strategic plan and vision, but it is not well understood, shared or owned by departments.

CO-EXIST: There is little need, incentive or cultural expectation to build trust and partnership across the organization. Trust and time to work together may exist within a team and department only. Team members and leaders do not recognize nor seize opportunities to build mutually-beneficial relationships across departments. The organization may have a strategic plan and vision, but goals/mandates/strategies/ initiatives are developed and delivered independently. Once developed and underway, team and department members and leaders do not identify or develop interdependent connections among the goals/mandates/strategies/ initiatives. Communication is an independent function that varies in terms of quality and skill across teams and departments.

COMMUNICATE: This mode requires good communication skills and routines; it requires a low initial level of trust and a relatively low investment of time. It is possible that there is a high level of motivation to work together, though teams and departments operating in this mode do not regularly share resources or work together. Information is widely shared by organization and department leadership. The organizational norm is to transparently provide information, but there are not clear expectations on how the information is used. Teams are likely to "CC" colleagues to keep them informed of progress, though teams and departments likely do not review or analyze the information to identify connection points or to integrate it into their own plans. At times, this may lead to an overwhelming amount of information and a challenge with distilling or prioritizing information.

COORDINATE: Trust and the instinct to coordinate exists. Leaders signal that working together is important, even when doing so requires more time or lengthier processes. Coordination requires some access to shared resources along with structural incentives to work together. Organization culture supports and spotlights examples of coordination, such as through performance reviews, internal communication updates or staff meetings. Individuals are willing to learn from each other and make mid-course corrections to spur continuous improvement. Decisions made by leaders are transparently shared with staff. External communication messages are proactively crafted to resonate with target audiences and the information can spur intended action.

COLLABORATE: Leaders and staff invest sometimes substantial time commitment to champion and participate in collaborative work. A high level of trust and many productive relationships are required. Organization leaders are champions and committed to creating the enabling conditions, including transparency and cultural expectations, to support collaboration, vertically and horizontally, within and across teams and departments. There is a high level of trust within teams and between departments, a desire to align strategies around priorities, and intentional delegation. Capacity is utilized in relation to priorities and resource deployment is aligned to needs and impact. Support for collaboration is evident from the top down and the bottom up. Organization leadership and staff use shared language. Communication and implementation strategies are designed from the outset, consistently reviewed against impact goals, and well-integrated throughout planning and implementation.

ROUTINES, PROCESSES & STRUCTURES

COMPETE: Individuals, teams and departments are siloed and do not have regular ways to exchange information or work together across teams and departments. Information is shared only when requested and may be inaccurate or easy to misinterpret. Information moves only vertically (up and down) in the organization through traditional, hierarchical routines and relationships (such as manager/employee meetings, staff meetings and cabinet meetings). Internal and external communication and messages are likely to be disjointed, redundant or even conflicting, because they are the result of the competitive internal environment. Performance review processes may not exist or have consequence, or they may reward individual performance without taking account of team or department goals or impact.

CO-EXIST: Each department likely sets its own performance target or sets targets in isolation with organization leadership without awareness of the targets of other departments. Lines of responsibility may not be clear. Decision making routines likely vary based on individual leadership styles. Each department likely has its own unique routines to exchange information and work together to create and approve work products. Information is easily shared throughout the department, but not across departments. The ease of finding information across departments may vary as a reflection of the different communication and knowledge management and planning routines. Communication materials and messages are likely to be developed, approved and shared directly by departments to external audiences, often resulting in conflicting or contradictory directives and confusion among recipients.

COMMUNICATE: Shared information is accessible and frequently accessed at least by internal stakeholders who oversee functions or implement initiatives, but there are not routines established to incorporate the information into internal management processes, such as strategic planning, budgeting or performance reviews. Strategic planning and budgeting processes may not fully explore the capacity needed to implement and execute work, including the capacity needed for coordination or collaboration. Many external communication venues may continue to be led by different departments and reach mulitple stakeholders with overlapping information or conflicting messages.

COORDINATE: Teams and departments proactively and regularly share information, and use this to inform engagement with the field, including program activities and implementation supports. Shared information is processed during major interdepartmental/cross-agency events, including strategic planning and budgeting, and used to make modifications to these if necessary. Routines for ongoing, systematic coordination across departments may only exist at the cabinet/senior executive levels. In partnership with organization leadership, departments regularly evaluate impact toward the organization's strategic plan and goals. External communication strategies, venues and information are synchronized to coordinate both timing and message, or at least they are centrally coordinated to indentify and remove conflicting timing and information before sharing externally.

COLLABORATE: Organization and department leaders have created clear decision-making processes and routines for collaboration and to consider requests to revise/create changes to policy and practice. Departments have a consistent process for managing budgets and/or staff time. There is a deep commitment to continuous improvement and the organization creates shared moments of learning and reflection. Knowledge is transferred within teams and between departments. Professional learning is provided to build the capacity of staff to work collaboratively, including training related to budget development and management, guidance on intra-agency planning and decision-making from the administrative to executive levels. Onboarding new staff includes attention to the routines and processes for collaboration. Performance review processes reward collaboration and team contributions towards impact. Communication strategies and messages are carefully crafted and the organization uses a small number of communication vehicles to reinforce priorities internally and externally. Leaders in schools and school systems understand the organization's priorities and how to align their work to the organization's work.