TWO VARIATIONS ON THE TUNING PROTOCOL

In this issue, two of our NSRF National Facilitators worked with CFG coaches within their organizations to reimagine and adapt the Tuning Protocol for specific needs. In each case, these professionals found a way to “hybridize” the Tuning with another existing protocol, creating a new way to get the positive effects of the Tuning on multiple projects in one meeting. Although we have included the original Tuning link here, the new hybrids will both only be available to current coach-members of the NSRF, and we encourage CFG coaches to use the new version of the Tuning as well, for best results. (If you are not a certified CFG coach, we encourage you to consider signing up for training). Attempts to use “coach-level” protocols without training may result in a more complicated problem than you started with, so the Connections editors will not describe steps in detail within the newsletter. If you are an NSRF-certified CFG coach and you have a current coach membership to our website, you will be able to access these protocols using the links here. We appreciate your understanding.

Combining Tuning Protocol with Feedback Carousel in a non-profit setting

As a retired educator now in my second career working in a non-profit, Step Up For Students, I’ve been challenged to move from thinking “education-ese” to adapting a more businesslike mindset. My experience as an NSRF national facilitator helped me think about the new environment through the lens of CFG work, and by doing so, I saw that schools and businesses both recognize the value of relationship and respect. There you go: by refocusing my attention and my actions toward those values, I fit into this new organization better. In fact, I learned that our president has stated two core values for Step Up For Students: Each and every person is a valuable asset, and every challenge is an opportunity for improvement. Nice, right?

When I arrived, this organization had no awareness of CFG work or NSRF protocols, but I have had the wonderful opportunity to offer CFG coaches’ training within my Office of Student Learning as well as to executive team members from other departments. While working styles here are different than in my previous school environments, I’m happy to report that setting agreements, selecting and following protocols, and debriefing processes have all become accepted ways of working in many departments. Protocols and CFG work aren’t just for schools!

To reflect upon and review various projects and training curriculum in a framework of safety and synergy, we decided to select and modify the Tuning Protocol. Because we wanted to look at many details within a variety of sub-projects all at once, it made sense to combine the Tuning with a Feedback Carousel. My department and the marketing department are both led by vice presidents who are each certified CFG coaches. Together, we worked to make the new Tuning Carousel Protocol meet the needs of a variety of personnel and projects.

In the Office of Student Learning, the entire team was charged with reviewing and redesigning our Success Partners training modules. These modules are delivered each year to private school administrators and teacher leaders. Our task was to look at what is working well, what is missing, and what should be taken out and (possibly) used elsewhere in future modules.

In preparation for leading the group through the protocol, I made charts with the overview and objectives of each module and hung them around the room. Each team member had their own copies of each module to refer to, as well. We used sticky notes in a silent activity to give ideas and feedback. We also intentionally added a blank piece of chart paper midway through the protocol, marked ‘New Ideas.’ Our vice president and the entire team followed the modified Tuning Protocol and the end result was a subgroup taking all the information and beginning the revisions to the project, which will be formalized dur-
Speed Consultancy + Tuning Protocol = Speed Tuning Protocol

The purpose of the NSRF’s consultancy protocols is “to provide a structured process to help see new possibilities around a concrete problem.” As a principal, I love that our faculty can use not only the Dilemma Consultancy Protocol, but also the Speed Consultancy Triads Protocol to quickly produce countless ideas to solve the many dilemmas we are dealing with at our school. However, we have noticed that our teachers prefer to gather ideas around classroom lessons more often than they desire to work with their dilemmas. The problem is that the Tuning Protocol (which we use most frequently to improve lessons) takes around 45 minutes for one person to present and gather feedback around a lesson. Even if, during a given month, all five of our collaborative teams use a Tuning Protocol on a lesson only one teacher per team will leave with direct feedback on the lesson that is challenging them.

This past fall, a member of our faculty attended a CFG coaches’ training and came back with a great idea: the creation of a new “Speed Tuning Protocol” to parallel the Speed Consultancy Triads. As an NSRF National Facilitator, I worked with our coaches to generate a helpful hybrid of the Speed Consultancy and Tuning Protocols. Like the Speed Consultancy, participants should gather in triads and identify a facilitator and presenter for the first round.

Our success with this hybrid protocol has been powerful. Teachers have let us know that they love getting input on their lessons and lending their expertise to others in the same team meeting. Importantly, we stuck as closely as possible to the decades of expertise that went into developing the Speed Consultancy and Tuning Protocols. For instance, it remains very important for participants to recognize that it is impossible to understand everything about a person’s lesson before providing input (as is the case in the Tuning Protocol). Similarly, and especially in a small group, it is important to allow built-in time for reflection before jumping into conversation (as is the case with the traditional Speed Consultancy Protocol).

As you might expect, we still often choose to conduct a full Tuning Protocol on a specific lesson at our school. It is important for presenters to have times where the group focuses wholeheartedly on a single lesson in team meetings. However, I hope you will try our new Speed Tuning hybrid. If your team is anything like mine, they will be thankful for the great variety of conversations that happen in this change-of-pace!

Tuning Carousel Protocol basic steps:

- Setup
- Present
- Clarify
- Examine
- Clarify again
- Carousel review
- Warm and cool feedback
- Reflect
- Open discussion / action plan
- Debrief

Speed Tuning Protocol basic steps:

- Setup
- Present
- Clarify
- Examine
- Clarify again
- Separate/Reflect
- Warm and cool feedback
- Reflect
- Repeat steps
- Large group debrief

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In another test of this new protocol, the marketing department vice president needed all team members to understand and give feedback to the various initiatives that seem to be mushrooming as our non-profit expands. Since I would not be the coach in this test of what we now call the Tuning Carousel Protocol, I wrote up protocol instructions on a single sheet so that the vice president or one of her assistant directors that had been trained as a CFG coach could lead the protocol. Writing down the steps as clearly as possible gave me time to reflect on the flow of the original experience and we’re now happy to share it. In this second test run, the marketing vice president reported that this protocol gave structure to the process to help see new possibilities. Writing down the steps for the team, while at the same time giving opportunity for clear feedback and action plans.

Having facilitated CFG Coaches’ Trainings and led Critical Friends Group meetings for so long, I was not surprised but still quite grateful that the processes translated so effectively into this non-school setting, and that my colleagues and executives accepted and appreciated the processes. Although the resulting Tuning Carousel Protocol takes considerably more time than the original Tuning Protocol, it’s still a very efficient, effective way to look at a very complex set of issues and give helpful feedback to many people at once working on a complex project. We encourage other CFG coaches to download and try the protocol, and let us know how it worked for you!