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ABSTRACT

The School Effectiveness Training Program (SET) and the Secondary School Development Program (SSDP) were school-improvement programs developed by the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA), a state teachers' organization, and Research for Better Schools (RBS), a regional educational laboratory. Coordinating councils played pivotal roles in both the SET Program and the SSDP. The councils, cooperating with the principal, were responsible for setting the program goals and objectives and establishing operational and procedural guidelines. Among the activities council members undertake are: collect data about conditions of the school; interpret and analyze data; set school improvement priorities; etc. In addition to performing a variety of functions, council members must work cooperatively and effectively in a variety of group settings. This handbook was developed to identify selected skills that would strengthen council members' interactional skills and problem-solving abilities. Sections focus on the following interrelated processes for educational change: team building, prioritizing, problem solving, planning, and analyzing implementation. Sample worksheets are included. (LMI)

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What's A Plan Without a Process?

A Training Handbook for Staff Work Groups

by

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The School Effectiveness Training Program (SET) and the Secondary School Development Program (SSDP) are school improvement programs developed by the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA), a state teachers' organization and Research for Better Schools (RBS), a regional educational laboratory.

The programs are ones in which management and labor collaborate as partners to enhance the quality of work life for staff and students and improve the overall effectiveness of the school.

Both programs operate under the assumptions that schools can become more effective when they make use of the resources that exist within them and open up the decision-making process. A process of participation and collaborative problem solving and decision making will revitalize staff creativity and unleash new energies that enable groups to work together to solve the problems confronting America's schools.

This handbook was originally developed to be utilized by school work groups participating in such programs.

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WHAT'S A PLAN WITHOUT A PROCESS?

Coordinating Councils play pivotal roles in both the School Effectiveness Training Program (SET) and the Secondary School Development Program (SSDP). The councils, cooperating with the principal, are responsible for setting the goals and objectives for the program and establishing operational and procedural guidelines. Look at the tasks councils undertake. Council members:

- collect data about conditions of the school
- interpret and analyze data
- set school improvement priorities
- set up task groups to address schoolwide issues
- develop a schoolwide improvement plan
- review task group reports
- make program and/or policy recommendations to the principal
- monitor the implementation of planned activities
- report to staff, education association, central office, and school board members
- evaluate achievements

Council members need to be problem solvers, idea people, planners, motivators, and program developers. At the same time, they need to be cooperative team members who work effectively in a variety of group settings. This handbook has been developed in an effort to identify selected skills that would be helpful to Coordinating Council members and present processes and activities that strengthen the team approach. While the handbook has been developed for SET and SSDP participants, it can be used successfully with any group involved in problem-solving activities.

The concept of team permeates the entire school improvement program. Participatory teams diagnose school needs, establish priorities, form new task related teams, and make recommendations for improvement activities. Effective team functioning contributes to the overall school improvement effort, therefore, team building, is included in this handbook.

Prioritizing, problem solving, planning, and implementation analysis are included because these processes are the crux of what the Coordinating Councils do. In ongoing ways, councils identify issues, seek creative solutions, and plan for implementation.

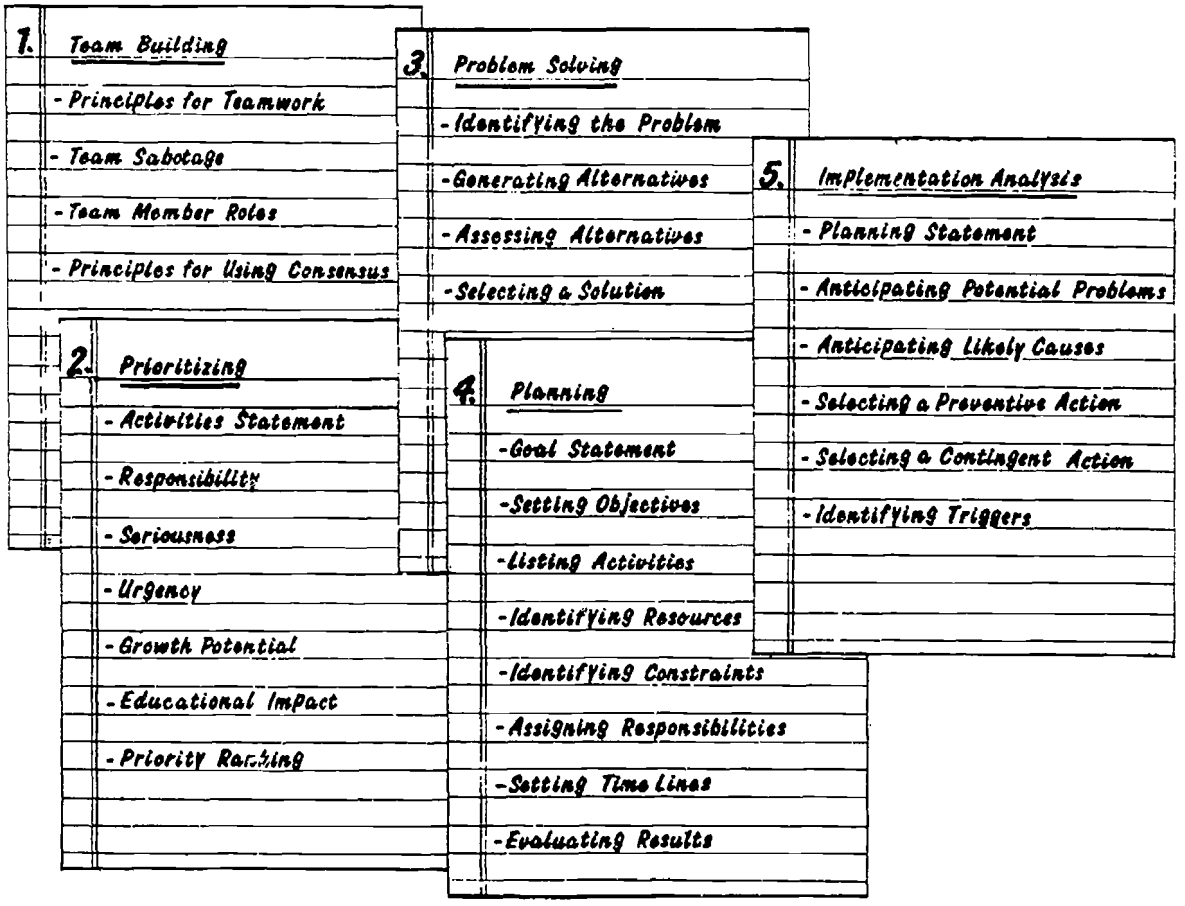
All of these processes -- team building, prioritizing, problem solving, planning, and implementation analysis -- are free standing. They can be utilized in a variety of settings approaching diverse problems. They can be used for planning a council social event or for planning a new curriculum. These processes can be employed during a staff institute, a Coordinating Council retreat, or a task/factor group meeting.

These processes also can be used in the classroom. Robert Slavin and his colleagues at Johns Hopkins University have found that cooperative learning -- the use of student teams in the classroom -- has proved to be an effective approach to motivating students and raising overall achievement levels.

The best way to use a handbook such as this one is to use it like a cookbook. There is no one best way to approach problem solving, but this handbook offers some well-tested approaches. While the processes can stand independently and do not necessarily have to be implemented in any special order, there is a logic to their presentation in this handbook. Each process builds on the one which preceeds it. Team building provides the

overall framework. Prioritizing helps organize the team for problem solving. Planning results from problem solving. Implementation analysis supports planning.

Handbook Overview



Each process is laid out so you can practice the steps of the process as you go along. Each section is introduced with an explanation of the process and the hows and whens of its possible uses. An activity follows which is designed to teach you the steps of the process. And you can practice in the space that has been provided. When you finish each section, not only will you have learned about how you can use the process, you will have had experience with all aspects of it.

The overall goal is to make council membership more effective by providing useful information that will facilitate the council's ability to do its jobs.

Process for Educational Change

1- Team Building

2- Prioritizing

3- Problem Solving

4- Planning

5- Implementation Analysis

notes:

Team Building

Groups and teams play a very important role in our lives. They can influence the way we think, what we believe and value, how we feel, and how we behave. Being a member of a team can satisfy a variety of personal needs such as appreciation and recognition. Being a member of a team can affirm personal characteristics such as trust and responsibility. When approaching team problem solving, a broad range of resources and ideas become available. In general, teamwork can produce cooperative efforts which can reach goals not often attainable through individual effort.

Alvin Zander, a leading expert in this area, says that a team is made up of a group of individuals who depend on each other and interact with each other. A group of people who are doing something together -- teachers working in the same department, for example -- are not necessarily a team. A team exists when the people in the group talk freely, are concerned about the achievement of their group goals, feel that their colleagues are helpful, and refer to their collectivity as "we."

In an ideal world teams would be comprised of members whose skills and knowledge complement each other, whose personalities mesh, and whose levels of motivation and enthusiasm are always at full tilt. In the real world this rarely happens. Teams are typically a potpourri of personalities, talents, and skills. Team members each have different levels of information, motivation, and enthusiasm. And each team member usually has a different agenda for himself or herself and for the team. Team leaders need to organize this diversity and develop a smoothly operating, productive team without alienating any individual member and without causing

any undue frustration among team members. Effective teams work well and efficiently and share a sense of purpose and accomplishment.

Both in School Effectiveness Training (SET) and the Secondary School Development Program (SSDP) the ability of the Coordinating Council to function effectively can make or break the program. Not only does the council play a vital role in diagnosing the school and selecting priority areas in which to work, council members also form the hub of the task and/or factor groups. The concept of working in teams permeates the programs, and their success depends upon the ability of these various groups to learn to work together and create opportunities for school improvement collaboratively.

Working as a member of a team is not always easy. Most of us value our independence and take pride in being responsible for our own destinies. When you join a team, however, you must give up a certain amount of your independence and become a "team player" -- a person who cooperates, shares, and works for team (rather than individual) success.

Some regard being a "team player" negatively. They associate it with a loss of individuality. In an effective team, this is not so. An effective team is one where team members are encouraged to assert their individuality and use their unique skills and talents to help the team. In an effective team the individuality and diversity of team members are assets. A team, like an orchestra, needs as much diversity as possible to provide richness, depth, and clarity. And like the musicians in an exceptional orchestra, the members of an effective team try very hard to complement each other and work in unison to accomplish their tasks.

Principles for Teamwork

Although there are no recipes for being an effective team, there are some basic principles that can help team members work together efficiently and productively. Use the following principles as guidelines for your team efforts, and while doing so feel free to adapt, add, delete, modify, or make up new ones to suit your team and situation.

Principles for Teamwork

- Responsibility for the team is shared by all team members. Identify with the team and its goals -- if the team fails it's your fault and the team's fault.
- Decisions should always be agreed upon by the team. They are not made by the leader, any individual, or any clique. All important policies should be decided by the team. The team should have a voice in its own goals and the techniques that should be used to accomplish them.
- Use methods that allow as many team members as possible to participate. Let the team work frequently in subgroups -- bring out minority and individual opinions by asking frequent questions of team members.
- Be flexible. Be flexible in rules, agendas, and in all procedures. You should establish a plan for your activities, but you should always modify it when the need arises. Tasks and how they are done should change as the skills, needs, and interests of the team change.
- The team should cut down the threat to individual members. Get the team acquainted with each other as persons -- use informal procedures, minimize rules, separate the members of cliques or friendship circles, discuss the problem of status, use subgroupings to get members used to working as a team.
- The team should continually evaluate its progress. This may be done by evaluation sheets, progress reports, subgroup discussions, suggestion boxes, and so forth. The important point is that it should be done often, briefly, and well.
- Team members should be conscious of the importance of the roles they play. Study the different roles that people can play, analyze the roles you play, consciously play roles that are helpful to team progress.
- Let the team be active. Let team members try a variety of tasks, encourage a risk-free atmosphere where no one fails, consciously provide for the skill development and appropriate participation of all members.

It is generally agreed by those who study team efforts that there are four major reasons that teams fail:

- Members do not understand the function, purpose, or goals of the team's effort.
- Members do not know what roles to play or what tasks are their responsibility.
- Members do not understand how to do their tasks or how to work as part of a team.
- Members do not "buy into" the function, purpose, or goals of the team's effort or they reject their roles or responsibilities.

To help ensure that the team's function, purpose, and goals are understood by all, team members, leaders, and members have a responsibility to be explicit about the team effort. State the function, purpose, and goals as often as it is necessary. If they change, restate them and keep reiterating them at every opportunity to remind team members where they are going. Also, use the goals, function, and purpose as touchstones for all team activities, continually asking, "How is that activity related to our goals (or purpose, or function)?" Being explicit is an effective way to prevent confusion over roles and responsibilities. Team members should be told their role options and what responsibilities go with each role. They should be told how each role contributes to the goals, purpose, and function of the group, too. Beyond simply helping them understand their roles and responsibilities, leaders have an obligation to help team members know what tasks go with what roles.

Coordinating Council and task group members may need to be reminded of how their activity fits into the overall plan. A task group addressing the issue of keeping halls cleared of students between classes needs to see how its planning is a part of the overall improvement plan.

Team members have to understand how best to do the tasks and how to get the most from team membership. Analysis of individual skills and talents is a good place to begin. Effective teams try to match task assignments to individual skills and talents while encouraging team members to help one another develop new skills and talents. If done in a nonthreatening way, this kind of intra-team skill development will not only result in a widely skilled team, it also will demonstrate to team members that teamwork pays off in their own personal development. This point is very important when considering Coordinating Council and task/factor group membership. When recruiting group members, remember to try to match desire with expertise. The desire to be a part of a team working on a specific task is important, but having some skills and expertise in that area is also important. Using personal expertise is a great way to recruit the teacher who generally doesn't like to participate. Imagine that a group of teachers are working to solve a problem that deals with classroom management. John Jones has just returned from a workshop on that very subject. Get him on that team. Also, a team that is well informed about its roles and responsibilities and has skills and expertise that are matched to the tasks undertaken will be well on its way to avoiding apathetic members -- ones who don't buy in.

An additional strategy for encouraging team members to actively support and work to accomplish the team's goals is to involve them in selecting their goals -- and in planning how to meet them. Team members who are part of the decision-making, planning process will feel they "own" the results of that process and be more eager to carry out their tasks than ones who are not involved in this way.

Team Sabotage*

When team members fail to understand the purpose of the team's efforts, their roles and responsibilities in that effort, or how to fill their roles and meet their responsibilities, they often sabotage the team effort. Team members also may sabotage the effort if they feel that their skills and talents are not being used well or if they see the team effort as irrelevant to their interests and needs. There are seven common ways members sabotage team efforts:

- o Blocking. Being negative and stubbornly resistant; disagreeing and opposing without or beyond "reasons"; attempting to maintain or bring back an issue, direction, or task after it has been rejected or bypassed.

- o Attacking. Deflating the status of others; expressing disapproval of the values, acts, or feelings of others; attacking the team, the leader, or the problem being worked on; joking aggressively; showing envy toward another's contribution by trying to take credit for it.

- o Being Playful. Displaying lack of involvement in the team's efforts through cynicism, nonchalance, or horseplay.

- o Recognition Seeking. Boasting, reporting on personal achievements, acting in unusual ways, or struggling to prevent being placed in an "inferior" position.

- o Deserting. Withdrawing in some way; being indifferent, silent, aloof, excessively formal; day dreaming; deliberately doing tasks that are unrelated to the team's function and goals.

- o Pleading Special Interest. Speaking for the "grass roots," the "community," the "poor children," and so forth; usually cloaking one's own prejudices or biases in the stereotype which best fits selfish, individual needs.

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* Adapted from NJEA, School Effectiveness Training, 1981.

- Dominating. Asserting power or superiority to manipulate the team or certain members of the team by flattery, asserting a superior status or right to attention, giving directions autocratically, interrupting the contributions of others.

The effective team is able to recognize these sabotage techniques. Moreover, the team members can avoid sabotage by helping each other avoid using these techniques and enlisting aid in preventing others from using them.

Team Member Roles

When working in a team, it is important to recognize that each team member has strengths and weaknesses, and that team members should try to adopt roles and tasks that capitalize on their strengths while minimizing their weaknesses. In addition to specific tasks and roles, team members can assume management roles -- roles that will keep the team working smoothly. These roles can be divided into task behaviors and maintenance behaviors:*

- Task Behaviors. Those behaviors that are necessary for getting the job done.
  - -- Initiating. Helping the team get started by proposing tasks or goals, defining a problem, suggesting a procedure or idea for solving a problem.
  - -- Information/Opinion Seeking. Requesting facts, asking for clarification of statements that have been made, trying to help the team find out what persons think or feel about what is being done, seeking suggestions or ideas.
  - -- Information/Opinion Giving. Offering facts or additional useful information, expressing what one thinks or feels, giving suggestions or ideas.

* Adapted from Benne and Sheats, 1948.

-- Clarifying/Elaborating. Interpreting or reflecting ideas and suggestions, clearing up points of confusion, offering examples to help the team imagine how a strategy proposal would work, distinguishing alternatives of issues before the group.

-- Checking. Sending up "trial balloons" to see if the team is nearing completion of a task, checking to see how much more has to be done.

-- Summarizing. Pulling together related ideas or tasks, restating suggestions after a group has discussed them, organizing activities so that the group will know what it has done.

o Maintenance Behaviors. Behaviors directed toward maintaining the energy and functioning of the group.

-- Gate-Keeping. Attempting to keep communication channels open, making it possible for others to make their contributions, suggesting procedures for a more productive use of resources.

-- Harmonizing. Attempting to reconcile disagreements, trying to provide common-ground compromises for opposing points of view so the team can continue to work, getting people to explore their similarities as well as their differences.

-- Relieving Tensions. Draining off negative feelings by jesting or pouring oil on troubled waters, putting tense situations in a wider context.

-- Encouraging. Being friendly, warm, responsive to others and their contributions; helping others to contribute; listening with interest and concern; reinforcing others to participant.

-- Diagnosing. Determining sources of difficulty, seeking appropriate steps to take next.

Team members should be aware that there are different roles they can play to help work go smoothly. They should try to match their skills and talents to these roles, encourage other team members to play these roles, and in so doing, help themselves and other members develop the team's productivity and effectiveness. Remember that these roles are flexible. A

person can act as an initiator while working on one specific topic during one meeting and, at that same meeting, behave as a tension reliever during a subsequent discussion.

Principles for Using Consensus in Teamwork

Coordinating Councils have to make decisions that satisfy their memberships. Making decisions by consensus is an effective way of seeking agreement. There are no set procedures or steps for helping your team reach consensus. It will be helpful, however, if all team members understand what consensus is:

> When your group reaches the point where each person can say, "Well even though it may not be exactly what I want, at least I can live with the decision and support it," then the group has reached consensus. This doesn't mean that all of the group must completely agree, but rather that everyone is in fundamental agreement.

Here are some suggestions to help your team members reach consensus:

- Do not vote. Voting will split the team into "winners" and "losers" and will encourage "either-or" thinking when there may be other ways. Voting will foster argument rather than rational discussion and consequently harm the group processes that underlie effective teamwork.

- Do not make early, quick, easy agreements and compromises. They are often based on erroneous assumptions that need to be challenged.

- Do not compete internally. In this situation either the team wins or no one wins.

- Listen and pay attention to what others have to say. This is one of the most important aspects of reaching consensus.

- Try to get underlying assumptions out into the open where they can be discussed.

- Encourage everyone, particularly the quieter ones, to offer their ideas. Remember, they are part of the team, too.

On the following pages there is an activity for you to begin to practice your skills as a team. This activity could be tried during a training session, a council retreat, or during a meeting. Council members could also use this activity with their task groups.

The activity has two parts. In the first part you are asked to work together to complete an actual task. During the second part of the activity, you are asked to review how well you thought your team worked together to accomplish the task.

Whether doing this activity or completing a Coordinating Council task, there are two major considerations for your team to keep in mind:

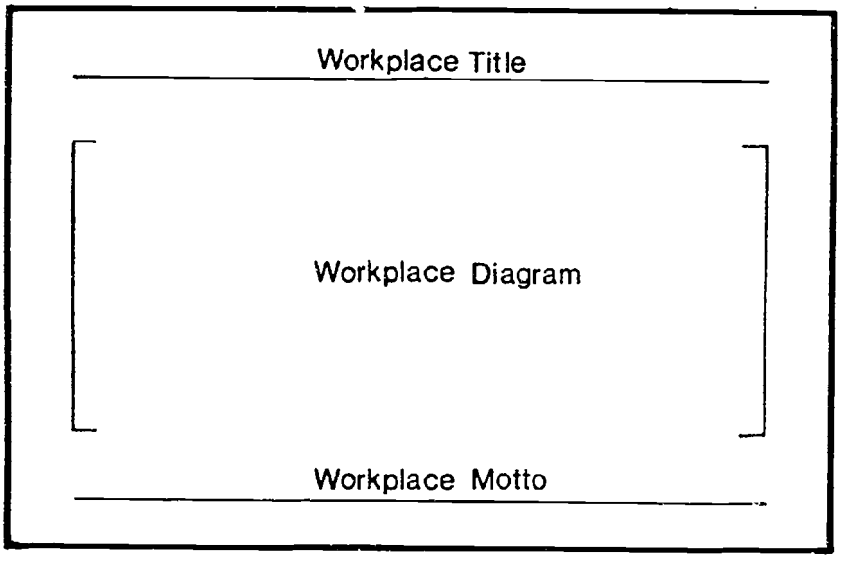
- What does it take to do the job?....what you have to know; and
- What does it take to maintain your team?....what you have to do to keep members involved and participating.

Try the activity. Take it seriously, but enjoy it.

Team Building Activity

This team-building activity calls for your "team" to create a WORKPLACE POSTER. Divide into small group teams identified by your natural work groups and complete the task outlined below. You will need large sheets of paper and magic markers to construct your WORKPLACE POSTER.

Draw Your WORKPLACE POSTER



- Plan and produce a GRAPHIC DEPICTION of your common workplace. Use a picture, diagram, cartoon, or stick figures and other illustrative symbols to convey the organization that you are about to improve through a team effort. Try to keep words or written explanations to a minimum. Designate your WORKPLACE TITLE at the top of the poster.
- Use color markers to decorate your GRAPHIC DEPICTION.
- Plan and complete a WORKPLACE MOTTO -- a saying or slogan related to your team's sense of purpose, values, or expectations in this improvement effort.
- Obtain materials and work efficiently as a team.
- Allow 30-45 minutes for poster development.

Team Building Discussion Guide

Now that you have completed the development of your team's poster, take a few minutes to look back at the interaction that occurred as you created your poster. It may help to make notes about your perceptions of how your group completed the activity.

Look for patterns in the perceptions of the members of your team. Members of your team will be asked to report on each of the areas listed below. Remember, work independently first, then discuss each of these questions as a group.

- Organization

  -- How did your team organize itself to accomplish this task?

  _____

  _____

  _____

  -- How did you feel during this getting-started phase?

  _____

  _____

  _____

  -- What did you do during this phase?

  _____

  _____

  _____

  -- How did it affect the rest of your group?

  _____

  _____

  _____

o Involvement

-- How involved were all members of the team during the problem solving?

_____

_____

_____

-- How did you feel about your own involvement?

_____

_____

_____

o Creativity

-- What creative processes were used or occurred spontaneously?

_____

_____

_____

-- What was happening with you during the creative activity?

_____

_____

_____

o Conflict

-- If there were disagreements, how were these handled by the team?

_____

_____

_____

-- How did you feel when there was group tension?

o Closure

-- How did the group decide that its task was done?

-- How did you feel at the end of the team's production phase?

-- What do you think about the quality of your product?

o Roles and Behaviors

-- What roles did you perform in this activity?

-- What roles did you observe others perform?

-- Did any sabotaging occur? How did it manifest itself? What did your team do about it?

_____

_____

_____

o Other Observations, Comments, Questions

_____

_____

_____

A Final Note

Many of us are not used to working as a member of a team and we find it difficult to make the sacrifices that teamwork takes. A team should bear this in mind, especially if the team is not functioning smoothly. Teamwork takes practice and developing a smoothly operating team will take time. It is, however, worth the effort.

Process for Educational Change

1- Team Building

2- Prioritizing

3- Problem Solving

4- Planning

5- Implementation Analysis

notes:

Prioritizing

Help! What do we do first? Sounds familiar, doesn't it. Coordinating Councils have many things they have to do. From sorting through ideas in the suggestion box to reviewing recommendations from a task group; from planning a schoolwide inservice to writing a proposal -- all of these situations have demands on the time, energy, and resources of the council. And they all have to be addressed one way or another. So when you don't know which task to begin first it's time to start prioritizing.

How do you set priorities? Which one makes the most noise? Which one can be finished quickly? Which one is more fun to work on? All of these are useful questions to ask when setting priorities, but by itself, any one of them may not be enough. You can finish up with the one that makes the most noise and then find out that it's the quiet concern that is the killer.

Prioritizing is a process that helps councils organize their concerns or activities in a structured way to establish some order or agenda for action. There are seven basic steps involved.

- Listing Activities -- What are the activities/ concerns with which you're working?
- Responsibility/Authority -- Who has authority over those domains?
- Seriousness -- How serious are your concerns?
- Urgency -- How urgent are your concerns and how do you know?
- Growth Potential -- If left alone, what is the growth potential of your concerns?
- Educational Impact -- What is the impact of your concern on the educational program.

- o Priority Ranking -- Is one concern more important than another? Situations that can benefit from prioritizing are those that require multiple demands on time, multiple tasks, consensus from the group about priorities, and emergency actions.

What follows is a series of process questions and an activity to help councils address these concerns.

Prioritizing Activity

Using the space provided, work through the following prioritizing process questions. Select some concerns on which you and your group are currently concentrating. Examples are provided to assist you.

Step One: Concerns/Activities

What are the concerns/activities for which you want to set priorities? Be brief. Be specific. List each concern separately; no lumping together. Don't censor each other or yourself. When you have completed your list of concerns, check them out to identify those that are obviously of low priority. You don't need to spend the time applying the prioritizing questions to those low concerns. For each one remaining, however, you must ask each of the questions separately. Examples of concerns/activities may be rule enforcement, scheduling, physical conditions, communications, and paper work.

On the space below, list all the issues that you're working on from which you must set your priorities.

_____

_____

_____

_____

Step Two: Responsibility/Authority

What is the situation for which the council is setting priorities? Who, given the situation, has the responsibility or authority? Does the council have any power to act? Can the council alter the situation?

Respond to the following questions:

What is the situation for which the council is setting priorities?

Who has the responsibility and/or authority?

Can the council alter the situation?

Step Three: Seriousness

What evidence do you have that the concerns are serious? A serious concern may be one which costs you or someone else something, such as time, money, energy, worry, and so forth. A concern may be serious because someone else tells you so. List your evidence of seriousness in the space provided.

Step Four: Urgency

What is the evidence you have that tells you that each concern is urgent? Does it have to be done right away? Can it be delayed? For how long? What evidence do you have that your issues are urgent? List your evidence of urgency.

Step Five: Growth Potential

What evidence do you have that relates to the growth potential of your concerns. If you don't act now, will that concern grow larger, or conversely, will it go away? What is the potential for the concern to snowball, growing more serious or more urgent? Continue analyzing your concerns by answering some of the following questions:

If action is not taken now, will this concern grow larger?

If action is not taken now, will this concern grow smaller?

What is the potential for this concern to snowball, growing more serious, more urgent?

Reminders for seriousness, urgency, and growth potential functions.

- Seriousness, urgency, and growth potential are independent. Treat them individually.
- There is no best order in which to ask the questions or record the responses. Deal with each category as you get to it.
- Seeking evidence asks for information which is more useful than someone's opinion. Stay away from asking for opinions.
- Hold off on your judgments about how serious or how urgent a concern is until you have established why each concern is so. Then make your judgments.

Step Six: Educational Impact

How does each concern or issue affect the educational program? Does it affect instruction? Does it affect motivation? Answer these questions to determine the educational impact of each of your concerns.

Step Seven: Priority Ranking

Is one concern more, equal, or less serious than another? Here's one useful way to establish and record the relative priority of your concerns. Using the priority ranking chart, ask your group to apply the rating of high, medium, low, zero, don't know, to the information that supports the seriousness, urgency, or growth potential of each concern. Count up how many people in your council identify a concern as high and record it in the appropriate column. Then count up how many identify that same concern as medium and record those results in the medium column. Continue this process (to include low, zero, and don't know) until you have rated your entire list of concerns. When you have completed the ratings, you will have a picture of how your council views the seriousness and urgency of its concerns. Now you can rank each one. Ranking is a judgment call but you will have information necessary to make good judgments.

List concerns here	High	Medium	Low	Zero	Don't Know

A Final Note

Here are some key points about the activity you've just completed:

- Look for evidence, not opinions, when discussing seriousness, urgency, and growth potential.
- Don't forget "little" concerns in your efforts to take care of the "big" ones. Prioritizing will help put all concerns into perspective.
- Try not to jump into your ratings until you have obtained all the facts.
- Ranking is a judgment call. Don't avoid it. Go for it!

So, what are you going to do now that you have all this information? Your options include acting, postponing, or forgetting about it. If you decide to act, it's time to move into problem solving and planning.

Process for Educational Change

1- Team Building

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notes:

Problem Solving

Problem solving is an extremely important process for Coordinating Council members to master. Problem solving is utilized continuously throughout the school improvement program and can be seen as the major task of council members. It is the process that reveals the opportunities and the alternatives for change within the school. Coordinating Council members use problem-solving processes when they are involved with identifying major problem areas in the school. Task and factor group members use problem-solving techniques when they are addressing specific areas and seeking solutions.

In general, problem solving is broken down into four major steps:

- Identifying the problem -- It is critical that team members define the problem in the same way. If there is no consensus as to what the problem actually is, attempts at resolution will be chaotic and unproductive.

- Generating Alternatives -- It's useful to amass a wide range of ideas so team members can see the many options and possibilities.

- Assessing Alternatives -- It's important to carefully weigh each alternative before selecting a solution so team members can be fully aware of all the pros and cons of each alternative.

- Selecting a Solution -- Revise the possible solutions, think about how they would fit into an overall plan for action, and select the most appropriate one.

The process set forth here is one that emphasizes the resolution of problems through teamwork. It enables all members to contribute their best thinking about what constitutes the problem and the most effective way to

remediate it. It also allows team members to resolve school-related problems through consensus, thereby minimizing threats to any individual member's sense of contribution, motivation, or enthusiasm.

Problem-Solving Activity

The four-step problem-solving process is presented here. Select a problem on which your council or work group is currently working and using the space provided, practice each step of the process.

Step One: Identifying the Problem

It seems trite to say it but how many times have we jumped to a solution before we have correctly identified the problem? For example, a customer whose gas heater is not working calls the gas company after fooling with the thermostat on a cold morning. The emergency truck arrives and the person says, "I need a new thermostat. My gas heater will not turn on." The gas man checks the heater and finds that the pilot light is not working, which is the reason why the gas heater won't turn on. Rather than with the thermostat, the problem correctly is with the pilot light.

This example highlights the importance of knowing exactly what the problem is before attempting to solve it. Because of this, our problem-solving process begins with the team coming to an agreement about the nature of the problem. Defining a problem by consensus is very difficult as different people view dilemmas differently. However, there are a few things that can help your team overcome this difficulty:

- Generate a number of different statements of the problem. Make sure everyone uses his or her own words in describing the problem.
- Insist that these statements be as concrete as possible. Mention actual people, places, and things. Ask questions like, "What evidence do you have of that? What do you really mean by that? Who's affected by that? Where exactly did this happen? What did you see or hear?"
- Write these problem statements where everyone can see them.

- Once each team member has made his or her problem statement, have the team restate each one so that it describes two things -- the situation as it exists now (the real) and the way the situation should be (the ideal).

- Reduce or combine these problem restatements to as few as possible. These are your problems -- the gap between the real and the ideal.

It is very important to keep three things in mind during this problem identification stage of the problem-solving process. First, this is not the time to argue about or debate solutions -- that comes later. Second, never make value judgments about problems. If one team member sees something as a problem, it should be considered as the team's problem. Any time someone perceives a discrepancy between the real and the ideal, it's a problem. It may be an easy problem to deal with, but it's still a problem. Third, the use of data is critical. If you have a hunch there might be a problem but you have no concrete evidence, go out and collect some.

Using the work space provided on the next page, make a list of problems on which your team is concentrating. Write this list on the left-hand column of the worksheet. Now go back and restate each problem considering the real and the ideal aspect of each item.

When you have completed this step, you will have identified those areas that need to be attended to and you will have compiled a realistic picture of what those problem areas truly look like.

Statement of the problem	Real	Ideal
Sample Worksheet Go to next page.		

Identifying The Problem Worksheet

Statement of the problem	Real	Ideal

Step Two: Generating Alternatives

Brainstorming is a technique recommended for generating alternatives. It is an activity designed to generate creative ideas and to let ideas flow freely. In brainstorming, critical judgment is suspended and creativity is encouraged; no evaluation of ideas should occur. Also, quantity of alternatives is more important than quality at this stage. The following principles* will help council members use brainstorming effectively.

Brainstorming Principles

- You will be more productive if you refrain from evaluating ideas or discussing them at the time they are proposed. This is important because education and experience have trained most of us to think judgmentally. By deferring judgment on your ideas, you can think up far more alternatives from which you can choose later.
- Group production of ideas can be more productive than separate, individual production of ideas. Experiments in group thinking have demonstrated that the average participant in this form of creative "togetherness" can think up twice as many possible solutions as when working alone.
- The more ideas you think up the better. In problem solving of almost any type, you are far more likely to choose the right path toward solution if you think up 10 ideas by way of possible alternatives instead of only 2 or 3.

There are two ways a team can approach brainstorming. It can be an unstructured activity where group members randomly share ideas, or it can be a more structured activity where each team member contributes his or her

* Adapted from NJEA, School Effectiveness Training, 1981.

idea in rotation. This continues until all ideas have been exhausted. Each member offers only one idea per turn, regardless of how many ideas he or she has in mind. When a member runs out of an idea, he or she says "pass." The main advantage of the structured approach is that it encourages everyone to participate, not only the more vocal team members.

Whether a group uses a structured or unstructured approach, there are some rules that should be followed to ensure the best results.

Brainstorming Rules

- ➤ No judgments or evaluations are allowed. Ideas, not analysis is what is wanted here.
- ➤ Wild ideas and exaggeration are fine. They add humor and fun. Practicality is not so important at this stage.
- ➤ Quantity counts.
- ➤ Pool your creativity.
- ➤ Write down all ideas generated on a large sheet of paper so everyone can see them.

Select one problem statement that you identified in Step One. In your work space, brainstorm as many alternatives as you can think of for the problem statement you selected. Try both the structured and the unstructured approach and don't forget the "rules."

Brainstorming Worksheet

Sample Worksheet

Go to next page.

Brainstorming Worksheet

Step Three: Assessing Alternatives

After brainstorming, the council or task/factor group will probably have a long list of ideas and solutions. It's time to organize and analyze the alternatives so a solution can be selected and implemented. At this stage the problem-solving process becomes more systematic and reality oriented. Team members have to examine each of the most promising alternatives. One technique to do this is called force field analysis.

The objective of the force field analysis is to allow team members to assess the workability of each alternative solution by describing the benefits or those forces which support the solution, versus the barriers or those forces which hinder the adoption of the particular solution. The team lists positive forces -- those that make the solution workable, and negative forces -- those that make the solution unworkable. If the positive forces appear more powerful or the negative ones can be reduced or controlled then that solution may be a viable one.

On a large sheet of paper, draw a vertical line down the center of the paper. That line stands for the idea under consideration. To the right of that line are the negative forces, to the left are the positive forces.

Positive Forces (benefits) +	− Negative Forces (barriers)
What are the forces working for the solution, inside or outside of the group?	What are the forces working against the solution, inside or outside of the group?
→	←
→	←
→	←

Once the lists of positive and negative forces have been generated, they must be reviewed with the following questions in mind:

- How important is each force? Is it a real one?
- Can any negative forces be turned into positive ones? Neutralized? Can positive forces be strengthened?
- If the negative forces significantly outweigh the positive ones, will it be too difficult to overcome the negative forces? If so, is that still a viable solution?
- If the positive and negative forces are equal, will those involved with the positive forces be strong enough to push on and overpow[illegible] the negative ones?

Using the force field analysis worksheet on the next page, list the positive and negative forces relative to some of the alternatives that were brainstormed in Step Two.

It is important to be specific when listing positive and negative forces. Indicate who, what, and where the forces are and how each force works either for or against the alternative solution.

After you have listed the forces, ask yourselves the questions listed at the bottom of the work sheet.

Postive Forces - benefits +	− Negative Forces - barriers
Sample Worksheet Go to next page.	

Force Field Analysis Worksheet

Postive Forces - benefits	Negative Forces - barriers

- How important is each force? Is it a real one?
- Can any negative forces be turned into positive ones? Neutralized? Can positive forces be strengthened?
- If the negative forces significantly outweigh the positive ones, will it be too difficult to overcome the negative forces? If so, is that still a viable solution?
- If the positive and negative forces are equal, will those involved with the positive forces be strong enough to push on and overpower the negative ones?

Step Four: Selecting a Solution

Once you have isolated major strengths and obstacles in each solution, you are ready to select the best solution.

As you prepare to make your choice, ask yourself some of the following questions:

- Does the proposed solution fit the problem?
- Do the objectives relate to the problem?
- Why are you rejecting other options?
- Is the proposed choice consistent with school and/or board policy?
- Will your choice lead to a better school if it's objectives are met?

Which solution are you selecting?

_____ _____

_____

_____

_____

The problem-solving process will benefit the Coordinating Councils and teams who utilize it because it allows for the council as a team to define clearly the situation being examined. Secondly, it encourages creativity and outspokenness. It also requires some degree of analytical thinking. And finally, the solutions selected will reflect the collective thinking of the team.

A Final Note

Here are some things you should remember about this problem-solving process:

- Don't get hung up with discussing or arguing about unsolvable issues when no data are available. Collect some concrete data about a problem. If no data are available, forget it!

- Don't evaluate the ideas generated during the brainstorming session. Suspend critical judgment; at this stage, quantity is more important than quality.

- Remember group-building behaviors to strengthen the council's ability to work together.

Process for Educational Change

1- Team Building

2- Prioritizing

3- Problem Solving

4- Planning

5- Implementation Analysis

notes:

Planning

Planning, a process of laying out a course of action to achieve a goal, is a natural outgrowth of problem solving. The team has completed the problem-solving process by selecting what it considers to be the best solution. Now, that solution must be translated into a concrete, systematic plan for action -- one which specifies who will do what, by when, and how.

The planning process discussed here includes these eight steps:

- o the development of goals -- the statement that describes what those planning intend to do;
- o setting objectives - specific results teams wish to attain;
- o listing activities - what actually has to happen in order to achieve objectives;
- o identifying resources - having what you need in order to achieve objectives;
- o identifying constraints - knowing what will get in the way of your achieving the objectives;
- o assigning responsibilities - establishing who will do what;
- o setting time lines - determining when these activities will be completed; and
- o evaluating progress and outcomes - looking at the extent to which you accomplish what you set out to do.

Coordinating Council members need to possess planning skills in order to develop the school improvement plan. Task/factor group members can use this planning process when approaching their specific recommendations for change.

Planning Activity

An eight-step planning process is presented here. Select a problem statement and solution you developed from the problem-solving process. Using that solution, work through the following eight planning steps.

Step One: Setting Goals

The question team members have to answer is, "What is the overall end result you wish to achieve by implementing this plan?" Answering this question requires the team to translate its problem solution into a goal statement. The solution must be turned into a statement that clearly describes what the planners intend to do to solve the problem.

The goal statements should be:

- specific -- specific goals imply next steps;
- realistic -- realistic goals are attainable, unrealistic goals will cause frustration;
- observable -- goals should be stated in a way that allows one to see the results; and
- measurable -- goals should be measurable in concrete ways.

For example:

- To increase the number of school staff working on task/factor groups by 10 percent.
- To reduce student absenteeism by 20 percent by x date.
- To increase the number of minority students taking college preparatory classes by 25 percentage by x date.

In the space provided, record your goal statement. Remember to keep your goals realistic, specific, observable, and measurable.

Step Two: Setting Objectives

Objectives are the specific results you wish to attain within the goal. They are specific statements of what is to be done. They are more targeted insofar as they include references to concrete activities. Continuing with the example of increasing the number of school staff working on task/factor groups, some sample objectives might be:

- To develop a written overview of task group activities for the current year.
- To publicize task group activities to all staff.
- To recruit staff currently not involved in a task group.

Objectives, while they might refer to a subsequent activity, should also state a result and not an action step.

Review your goal statement, then break out the objectives and record them on the space provided.

Step Three: Listing Activities

The question to be answered here is, "What activities have to be undertaken to achieve the goals and objectives of the plan?" Planners must identify what actually will happen in order to achieve the objectives described earlier. It is vital to be as concrete and specific as possible. And the activities described must directly relate to the goals and objectives. For example:

- Goal: To increase the number of school staff working on task/factor groups by 10 percent.
- Objective: To recruit staff currently not involved in a task/factor group.
- Activities: Identify those staff currently not involved. Divide them up into small groups. Have each group meet with a member of the Coordinating Council. At each meeting discuss activities of different task groups.

  Identify staff who have expertise in some of the areas under consideration. Allocate members of the Coordinating Council to meet with identified staff individually.

What activities need to be undertaken in order for your team to accomplish its goals and objectives? List those activities here.

1. _____

_____

_____

2. _____

_____

_____

3. _____

_____

_____

Recap: Steps One, Two, and Three

Let's review what you've done so far. You've identified the overall end result you want to achieve (goal statement), you've listed specific results (objectives), and you've considered what you need to do in order to achieve those results (activities). Write your goal statement, objectives, and activities in the form provided.

Goal Statement	Objectives	Activities

Review your work for its consistency. Do your objectives really flow from your goal statement? Do the activities address your objectives? Will those activities help you reach your goal?

Step Four: Identifying Resources

After describing the actual activities the team will be undertaking, the next question to be answered is, "What do you need in order to carry out these activities and what do you have available?" When identifying

resources the team needs to identify anything that's needed. Resources generally include people -- guest speakers, consultants, exemplary programs, institutions who have solved the problem; materials -- books, films; location -- the library, the gym, money, and time. Be specific and remember to indicate ones that you need compared with ones to which you already have access. As with earlier steps, be sure the materials are related to the goals, objectives, and activities. For example:

- Goal: To increase the number of school staff working on task/factor groups by 10 percent.
- Objective: To recruit staff currently not involved in a task/factor group.
- Activities: Identify those staff currently not involved. Divide them up into small groups. Have each group meet with a member of the Coordinating Council. At each meeting, discuss activities of different task groups.
- Resources: Needed -- list of staff, list of task/factor group membership and activities, meeting time.

Who and what are your resources? What do you need in order to achieve your objectives. Complete Step Four by listing resources needed to accomplish your goal.

Step Five: Identifying Constraints

Constraints are limitations on your resources or outside considerations such as other demands on your resources, other responsibilities, other people priorities, organizational policies, procedures, and so forth. So the question that needs addressing now is "What are the limitations within which you have to work to achieve your goals, objectives, and activities?" Using the example with which we have been working, time is a needed resource. Time or lack of it may be a constraint. Constraints may not apply to every planning situation. When appropriate, select out the ones that apply. Be specific!

What limitations exist in your situation that could prevent your accomplishing what you are trying to do? If there are some specific constraints, list them below.

_____

_____

_____

_____

Step Six: Assigning Responsibilities

"Who?" is the question that needs to be answered in this step. If planning as a team, it's best to solicit volunteers rather than make assignments. Try to match responsibilities with skills and talents. Secondly, spread the responsibility around. Try to encourage new people to become involved so it isn't the same people volunteering over and over again. It is important that there be a name associated with each activity. This makes people accountable for completing that task.

Assign the name of the person who will oversee each activity. If the same persons' names keep coming up, review your assignment. But make sure there is a name associated with each activity.

Assigning Responsibility Worksheet

Activity	Person Responsible

Step Seven: Setting Time Lines

"When do certain tasks need to be completed? What tasks have to be done in sequence? Has adequate time been allowed? Are deadlines realistic?" These are some of the questions that need answering at this stage of the planning process. This step requires a specific amount of time to be allotted for completion of each activity. This indicates explicitly that the activities will not go on adinfinitum. Each activity has a beginning and an end. Using the example of increasing staff participation, the activities identified are:

Activities	Time Line
Identify uninvolved staff	By 10/20
Divide them into small groups	By 10/20
Have each group meet with a member of the Coordinating Council	11/2
Discuss activities of different task groups	11/2

Using your own example, allocate the time you think it will take to complete the tasks you have outlined. Record your time lines on the following chart.

Activity	Time Line

Step Eight: Evaluating Progress and Outcomes

"Did you do what you set out to do? What are your milestones -- the points at which you check your plan for progress? What checks do you need to assume so that tasks will be done properly and on time so as to meet your objectives?" It is often helpful when planning to include an explicit statement of your strategy for evaluating your efforts. This explicitly stated strategy gives the planning team benchmarks to measure progress.

Do you know how you will evaluate your efforts? Are there any natural milestones or check points in your plan? Use the work space that follows to complete the planning process by outlining your evaluations strategy.

Activity	Evaluation

An Activity Planning Form

Now put all these steps together on the Activity Planning Form, provided on the next page. It includes all the steps already outlined and provides space to fill in the required information. Use a separate planning form for each goal.

A Final Note

Careful planning overall will help to ensure results. But remember, there are some commonly expected "things that can go wrong." Watch out for:

- o starting to plan before enough basic decisions have been made to make planning practical;
- o mistaking tasks and activities for objectives;
- o not paying enough attention to what can go wrong with the plan;
- o failing to take into account approvals and decisions from other people; and
- o allowing the plan to become too rigid; if conditions which created the plan change, then the plan may need to be adjusted.

These steps are all interrelated. As you are working through the various steps, you might find that when focusing on one step, you will need to modify an earlier one, for example, listing your activities may lead you to realize that your goals are not what you originally wanted. If this occurs, go back to your goal statement and modify it.

Activity Planning Form

1. Goal Statement _____

2. Objectives	3. Activities	4. Resources	5. Constraints	6. Responsibilities	7. Time Li...	8. Evaluation

Process for Educational Change

1- Team Building

2- Prioritizing

3- Problem Solving

4- Planning

5- Implementation Analysis

notes:

Implementation Analysis

Once a plan has been developed, council members might feel that their job is completed. But that plan now must be implemented and in a school, changes can occur so rapidly, almost anything can happen. Of course, we hope everything will go well, that plans will be implemented smoothly, but that may be unrealistic. Therefore, it makes some sense to try to sort out in advance what is most likely to go wrong and how much it will hurt. Implementation analysis is a process for improving and protecting plans by asking what can go wrong with them and establishing steps to deal with potential or actual problems.

Implementation analysis is a flexible process and can be used in a variety of situations. It can be used for:

- o monitoring a plan in progress,
- o analyzing future plans, and
- o reacting to organizational changes.

How comprehensively council members apply this process will depend on the plan being implemented. In many situations, remembering to ask a few key question may be all that is necessary. However, in very new, unfamiliar, or complicated plans, it might be advisable to go through a more complete process that will allow planners to consider:

- o potential problems -- what might go wrong,
- o likely causes -- what might cause these future problems,
- o preventive actions -- what to do to prevent likely causes from occurring, and
- o contingent actions -- what to do in order to minimize the effects of a potential problem, if a preventive action fails.

The implementation analysis process includes the following steps:

- Reviewing the Planning Statement -- A planning statement should include the "whats," "wheres," and "whens" of what you're trying to accomplish.

- Anticipating Potential Problems -- Look out for what might go wrong.

- Anticipating Likely Causes -- Look for what might cause that potential problem.

- Selecting a Preventive Action -- Develop a plan that will prevent that potential problem from occurring.

- Selecting a Contingent Action -- What will you do if potential problem occurs anyway?

- Identifying Triggers -- This is your alarm system that lets you know that you're in trouble.

Implementation Analysis Activity

Using the workspace provided, lets go through Steps One - Six of the implementation analysis process, and see if the plan you developed needs protection.

Step One: Reviewing the Planning Statement

The planning statement needs to include the major goals, objectives, activities, resources, constraints, responsibilities, time lines, and evaluation. In general, the statement focuses on the "whats," "wheres," and "whens" of what you're trying to accomplish (see section on planning). If the plan is still being developed, implementation analysis will probably not be very productive. Let's look at the statement used as an example in this handbook's section on planning.

- o Goal: To increase the number of school staff working on task/factor groups by 10 percent.
- o Objective: To recruit staff currently not involved in a task/factor group.
- o Activities: Identify those staff currently not involved. Divide them up into small groups. Have each group meet with a member of the Coordinating Council. Discuss activities of different task groups.
- o Resources: Needed -- list of staff, list of task/factor group membership and activities, meeting time.

Activities	Time Line
Identify uninvolved staff	By 10/20
Divide them into small groups	By 10/20
Have each group meet with a member of the Coordinating Council	11/2
Discuss activities of different task groups	11/2

Select your plan. Review your plan. Does it include goals, objectives, activities, resources, constraints, responsibilities, time lines and evaluation strategies?

Step Two: Anticipating Potential Problems

Once the basic steps of the plan are in place, it's time to step back and look for areas where problems might arise. By locating areas of potential problems, it's possible to plan actions against them. Ask yourself, "What are the specific things that can go wrong with my plan?" Some general problem areas include those where several people share responsibilities. Others are close deadlines. When anticipating potential problems, examine your entire plan. For the purposes of our example, however, we're going to zero in on one activity.

Activity: Identify those staff currently not involved.

Potential Problems:
- o confusion about who will be doing the identifying, who's in charge
- o realistic deadline (?)
- o lack of hard information about who is or who isn't actually involved

It is sometimes helpful to assess potential problems in terms of probability and seriousness. Try using a high-medium-low scale and record your judgment of the probability and/or seriousness of each potential problem occurring.

Potential Problems	Seriousness	Probability
Confusion about who will be doing the identifying, who's in charge	High	Medium
Realistic deadline (?)	Medium	High
Lack of hard information about who is or isn't actually involved	High	High

If a potential problem has a low probability of occurring and low seriousness if it does, that's an acceptable risk. Move on to pay attention to a potential problem that has a high probability of occurring and has serious implications if it does.

When identifying potential problems, be specific. You won't be able to take action against a general problem.

Look at your plan. See any areas where potential problems might arise? Any trouble, possible trouble spots? List potential problems. Secondly, assess the potential problems in terms of seriousness and probability using a high-medium-low scale.

Potential Problems	Seriousness	Probability

Step Three: Anticipating Likely Causes

From this point on, implementation analysis follows a cause and effect approach. Begin by asking yourself, "What are the likely causes of the potential problem?" Look for the cause of the problem until you find one that you can address. State those causes specifically, remembering the more specifically the cause is stated, the more likely you are of finding an appropriate action. It is against the likely causes of specific potential problems that you take preventive actions. For example:

Potential Problems	Likely Causes
Confusion about who will be doing the identifying, who's in charge	No one named to be in charge and organize the activity
Realistic deadline (?)	School year start-up confusion Staff vacancies
Lack of hard information about who is or who isn't actually involved	No record keeping system

What do you think are the causes of the potential problems you identified? List all the likely causes next to the corresponding potential problems below.

Potential Problems	Likely Causes

Step Four: Selecting a Preventive Action

Preventive action does away with the problem before it happens and keeps it in a potential rather than actual state. The question to ask yourself here is, "What can I do to prevent these likely causes from occurring?" But what happens when a preventive action doesn't work or if there is no way to prevent a problem? For example:

Potential Problems	Preventive Actions
Confusion about who will be doing the identifying, who's in charge	Name a person to be in charge of the activity.
Realistic deadline (?)	No preventive actions (You need a contingent action.)
Lack of hard information about who is or who isn't actually involved	Task group leaders must keep a roster of who's involved in the group.

What can you do to prevent your potential problems from occurring. Think of this the same way you might think of getting an innoculation to prevent an illness. Identify your preventive actions.

Potential Problems	Preventive Actions

Step Five: Selecting a Contingent Action

Contingent action deals with a problem if it happens. Contingent action is aimed at minimizing the effects of the potential problem. What you need to do here is focus on the question, "What will I do if this does happen?" You are dealing with reducing the effects or the results of the problem. Also, a contingent action goes into effect when there is no way to prevent the problem.

In the case of our example, it may be hard to assess the realistic nature of the deadline because many things can happen at the beginning of a school year that could make that deadline unrealistic, for example, staff turnover, layoffs, transfers, or a strike. These cannot be prevented, so a contingent plan must be developed.

Potential Problem	Contingent Action
Realistic deadline (?)	Don't set your deadline until after the first month of school.

OK, your preventive action may not always work, so you must have a contingency plan ready. What kinds of contingent actions do you have planned in case potential problems arise anyway? Record your contingent actions.

Potential Problems	Contingent Action

Step Six: Identifying Triggers

A contingent action needs an early warning system -- an alarm to let you know when you are in trouble -- that sets off or triggers your contingent action. This early warning system lets you know you are about to experience some difficulty. In order to trigger each contingent action, you have to identify certain kinds of information or events. The example below illustrates this point.

Potential Problem	Trigger
Realistic deadline (?)	Notification by principal of staff changes alerts you to study the school staff roster.

What kinds of early warning systems do you have in place to let you know that there is trouble brewing? Develop your triggers and record them.

Potential Problems	Triggers

Once you have completed the above six steps, you are ready to reanalyze your plan and decide if you need to make any modifications or changes in it. In our example, the final plan needs to be modified to include the name of the person(s) put in charge of the activity and the

elimination of the fixed deadline. What about your plan? Note, your modifications on the form below and let's review what you've done.

Planning Statement _____

Potential Problem	Likely Causes	Preventive Action	Contingent Action	Triggers

The implementation analysis process focuses on protecting a plan. After reviewing your implementation analysis, what's your judgment on the condition of your plan? Any modifications necessary? If so, modify!

A Final Note

Implementation analysis takes some time and effort. However, if the plan is a critical one it will probably be worth it. Remember these key points to guide you through the process:

- Make sure your original plan is fairly well developed.
- Be specific about potential problems and their impact.
- Remember the difference between preventive and contingent actions.
- Include your preventive/contingent actions in your original plan.

Resources

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