

# TAKE OUT SOME EDUCATIONAL PLANNING INSURANCE BY USING THE PLANNING HIERARCHY: WHERE YOU START IS IMPORTANT

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## ABSTRACT

*As a vital part of the educational enterprise, plans must be made to define the future we want to create for tomorrow's child and to enable educators to deliver on the promise. Planning is just a substitute for good luck. Not relying on luck, educators must identify valid and valuable measurable objectives for education and then enable educators to have the professional competencies, the physical and financial resources to do their jobs, and the supportive environment to operate. Where to start the planning is a challenge. Due to immediacy, we often start our professional work at improving parts of the educational enterprise, such as individual performance, leadership for administrators, or assessment, or curriculum development, improve learning, delivery, testing and assessment. These are the important parts of the total educational enterprise but not the entire system and its supporting parts. This article suggests a hierarchy of planning that may be used to assure that there is alignment with what an agency uses, does, produces and delivers with adding measurable value to our shared society.*

## INTRODUCTION

Educators and education help build the future of the world. They do so by providing the opportunities for future citizens to add value to themselves, their families and our shared world. Education is the vehicle for a former partnership of educational professionals, learners, parents, and community members to develop the skills, knowledges, and abilities for graduate and completers to make contributions. Society invests in education and educators to create this future.

As a vital part of the educational enterprise, plans must be made to define the future we want to create and to enable educators to deliver on the promise. Planning is just a substitute for good luck. Not relying on luck, educators must identify the measurable objectives for education and then enable educators to have the professional competencies, the physical and financial resources to do their jobs, and the supportive environment to operate.

Where to start the planning is a challenge. Due to immediacy, we often start our professional work at improving parts of the educational enterprise, such as individual performance, leadership for administrators, or assessment, or curriculum development, improve learning, delivery, testing and assessment. These are the important parts of the total educational enterprise. That works, but only some of the time. Other times, while the symptom for problems is at the operational level, often the problem is somewhere else, such as a faulty objectives or inappropriate curriculum, or offering some deliverable that is not what the learners really require to be a contributing member of society.

We can start with what we are to accomplish and not settle for the low-hanging fruit to deliver useful education. We best look at the overall purpose of our educational organizations and enter where we have the highest probability—not quick fixes-- of designing and delivering effective results. Knowing and using the planning hierarchy may help you assure what you do and deliver is worthy by starting at the 'right' place.

## WHAT IS THE PLANNING HIERARCHY? WHY WILL IT HELP YOU?

When we go to work, we enter a complex organization that has five organizational levels of linked purposes:

1. Organization's contribution to external clients and society is the *Mega* level (Kaufman, 1995; Kaufman, 2011; Kaufman, Guerra, & Platt, 2006). Every educational organization either adds value to society or subtracts value to society. Survival, self-sufficiency, and quality of life for our graduates and completers and their neighbors are what education should target. Think about massive programs that have failed to fully deliver this.
2. Educational organizations provide accomplishments that can be delivered outside of itself. This is the *Macro* level. This is a focus on the immediate graduates or completers or plans, usually assuming it will add value to external clients and society.
3. The internal results which may be combined for contributing to the organization's mission is the *Micro* level. This a focus on what teachers deliver, or what learners master with the assumption that each subject mastered will integrate with all others to what the organization delivers. This is the popular educational planning entry level.
4. The programs, projects, and activities that deliver Micro level results is the *Process* level. This is a focus on how well and how efficiently we do things.
5. The human, fiscal, and physical resources that may be used for programs, projects and activities are called the *Inputs* level. This a focus on what organizations work with.

Together, these organizational elements form a *hierarchy of planning*. Each level is equally important, and all should form a value chain to allow the educational organization to add measurable value to all stakeholders: learners, parents, teachers, administrators, and communities. Organizations falter when they fail to add value to all internal and external partners. Education gets blamed when we graduate people who cannot get and keep jobs or participate in anti-social behavior. If we enter at any level, we best contribute when what we use, do, produce, and accomplish adds value at all levels of the hierarchy. We must do so on-purpose.

### **TAKING OUT INSURANCE ON WHAT YOU DO AND DELIVER**

Research shows that many educational methods do not deliver worthy results. Quality pioneers Deming (1972) and Juran (1988) both noted that if you start, as we often do, at the wrong level of organizational operations, you will be wrong eighty to ninety percent of the time. If you just use a library needs assessment, or a teacher needs assessment, you have a good chance that you will be wrong. Clark and Estes (2002) tell us that if you use some touted-but-not-validated tools, such as learning styles, you will not be successful. Other traps to success are often dressed up as something valuable. You can insure that this does not happen.

Useful planning identifies where we should be going as compared to where we are now headed—needs-- and then identifies the milestones for getting from here to there. Getting that right assures that what we do on the way will add real value. That information will better assure that not only will you start educational planning at the right place but provides the criteria for what you do and deliver.

### **SUCCESS IS DETERMINED BY WHERE YOU START**

Before starting any trip, personal or professional, you should know where you are going, why you want to go there, and know to tell when you have arrived. We do not want to just treat the symptoms and not the causes. Organizations are like our bodies. Every organ and part must work well itself as well as interacting with everything else. Treating only one part might have negative impacts on total health.

Common educational practice, either by job assignment or assuming everything will work out, often has us start in one part of the system with training, incentive schemes, diversity programs, staff selection and E-learning. These are potentially useful things but without real justification of their

overall value or appropriateness. Good ideas often fail for the wrong reasons. We must make sure that the right people do the right things at the right time in the right place with all heading in the right direction. Where you start your work can make a huge difference about how successful you are.

## **FOUR VITAL INGREDIENTS FOR EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS**

There are four vital ingredients required for all educators to be successful:

- (1) Know what to do,
- (2) Know why to do it,
- (3) Know how to do it, and
- (4) Evaluate if you are being successful.

What does it take to better assure that your professional work is worthy and add real value to the organization? Let's look at each of these four ingredients.

### **Know What to Do**

With the destination correctly selected, we have identified and justified where we are heading and, most importantly, why we want to get there. Our next step is to set practical measurable objectives that become the waypoints on our journey to worthy performance as well as letting us know what is working and what is not.

### **Know Why to Do It**

We must make sure we are heading in the right direction. If we are not heading to worthy sustainable success—toward Mega-- all the hard work at where we work will be wasted effort. This is the “why” of our work. We might have wanted to do the right thing but because we really do not know or seek to find out how everything is linked, we fall short. Success depends on everyone agreeing on where the organization is heading, *why* it is going there, and how to tell when they have reached their purpose.

### **Know How to Do It**

When we know what to accomplish and why, it is a matter of finding the best ways to get to valuable and worthy results. As we proceed, we are also going to measure and report on those results to ensure that our journey is on course, and when we finish as planned, success will be achieved!

### **It is All about Success: Adding Measurable Value**

How do we define success? Success is achieved when we add value for all stakeholders, including our associates, the organization, the external clients we serve, and society at large. It is a double bottom line: organizational sustainability and adding value to our shared world. Another way to look at it is to ask yourself a ‘big picture’ question, “If our organization is the solution, what is the problem?” We are either adding or subtracting value for all, from the individual all the way up to society and to deliver value at the Mega level.

## **WHAT IS THE BIG PICTURE—MEGA? WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?**

What can any organization use as its guiding star to assure that everything that is used, done, produced, and delivered adds value to our shared world? If your organization is adding value, you are contributing the kind of world we want to create together for tomorrow's child (Kaufman, 2011).

The basic ideal vision is Mega. There will be no loss of life or elimination or reduction of level of well-being, survival, self-sufficiency, or quality of life from any source. This puts everyone's

organization, including education, responsible for both doing no harm from what do and deliver as well as adding measurable value for all.

The ideal vision gives us a point to aim for as we travel the road of continual improvement. Every organization is a means to societal ends. Each person and function within the educational organization must add value for all, including external clients and society. Everything an organization uses, does, produces, and delivers should add value to our external clients and society.

Former McKinsey CEO, Ian Davis (2005), calls this ‘the largest contract’ in his *Economist* article. This system perspective, when directed to look externally beyond the organization to see the positive and negative impacts on society, is the essence of Mega Planning. It will guide you to success.

Do not stop at improving people’s performance and learning, as vital as that is, but also consider improvement of all parts of the organization to achieve real value. All the parts of the organization interact both in our bodies and in our organizations. What is done in personnel has consequences for teachers and aids as well as public relations and safety and satisfaction. As University of Virginia professor Stephanie Moore (2010), in her book *Ethics by Design*, notes that not including Mega is an ethical lapse.

Ask yourself: “Do I know where my organization is headed and why we should get there? Do your co-workers know and agree? Does everyone share a common understanding of where your organization is right now?” Not all the workers usually agree. But we want to be like a rowing team where all rowers are synchronized.

Using this *planning hierarchy* to structure planning and needs assessment will aid you in making sure everything you use, do, produce, and deliver adds measurable value to all. Starting at the right level is imperative. Too often we see all the work done at one level with the hope that it will magically impact to the others. Others like Kirkpatrick (1994), Philipps (1997), and Bernardez (2012) also identify that there are levels of performance that must be considered when calibrating return.

## **WHERE YOU START PERFORMANCE, IMPROVEMENT MAKES A DIFFERENCE**

If you just do individual performance improvement and do not insure that that will add value to all other levels of planning and doing, failure is likely. Planning best succeeds when you are systemic, considering all facets of the organization, while targeting appropriate internal and external results. The five organizational elements constitute a *hierarchy of planning*. Where you start planning may determine what you plan.

### **Traffic Signals for Where You Start Educational Planning and Improvement**

Where you start your work is important. Make sure you also integrate that with other things going on throughout the organization while linking to the organization’s success (Macro) and the value to external clients and our shared world (Mega). Here is the planning hierarchy with some signals to guide you:

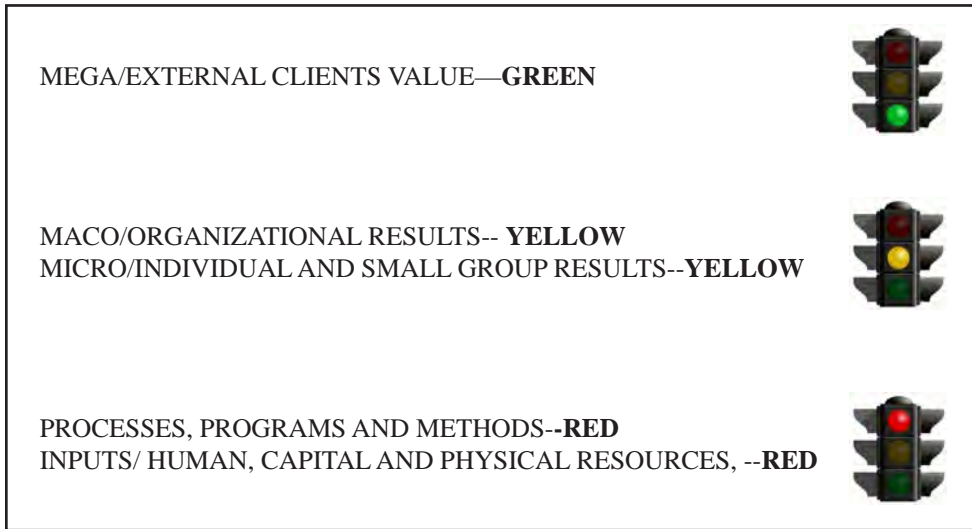


Figure 1. The planning hierarchy and warning signals to guide you on where you start performance improvement.

### Heeding the Signal Lights for Educational Change

You may enter your educational actions anywhere just if you link what is done there with the entire planning hierarchy. Following are some questions to ask for each possible starting level:

1. Starting at Inputs. How confident am I that successful planning for human, capital, and physical resources will add value to each subsequent hierarchy level? What do I risk if that contribution is not made?
2. Starting at Processes. How confident am I that successful planning for human and talent development, performance improvement, workplace redesign, incentives, and human resource development will add value to each subsequent hierarchy level? What do I risk if that contribution is not made?
3. Starting at Micro. How confident am I that successful planning for achieved competence and skill development and production of desired materials will add value to each subsequent hierarchy level? What do I risk if that contribution is not made?
4. Starting at Macro. How confident am I that successful planning for what the organization can or does deliver outside of itself will add value to the subsequent hierarchy level? What do I risk if that contribution is not made?
5. Starting at Mega. How confident am I that successful planning for what my organization delivers to stakeholders does add value to all as well as organizational ones at each previous hierarchy level? What do I risk if that contribution is not made?

Looking through the lens of Mega is vital. It is missing from most models, and it can keep you from starting at the wrong place (and who gets blamed even though you were told to start there). Using it can be valuable insurance. But what to do when others do not consider the big picture and want to start in the middle of the planning hierarchy? Gently ask, “If we get these results, what results will

that lead to?" Keep nicely asking until all focus everything on Mega and education can deliver on its promise.

### **IT'S YOUR DECISION—CHANGE, CHOICES AND CONSEQUENCES**

While doing an appropriate professional job of identifying and then delivering worthy results at all levels of the planning hierarchy may seem time consuming, consider the time and expense that will result if we just fix symptoms, or make improvements in one level that do not contribute to organizational and external client success. Unfortunately, we tend to skimp on correctly identifying and analyzing problems at the start, which leads to finding the additional resources down the road to go back to fix what did not work. We can be successful and prove it.

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