

Professional Development Activity on Change

This activity allows team members to investigate helping and hindering factors surrounding change events and consider how they might utilize these factors when governing. The activity builds on the force field analysis work of Kurt Lewin (1944), former director of the Research Center for Group Dynamics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Jim Dezieck (n.d.), who developed and extended important force field analysis tools for systematically addressing change.

Time Frame

The team should dedicate two or more hours to this exercise.

Materials

The team will need flip chart paper or a computer and overhead projector, sticky notes, and writing utensils.

Process

The team will do the following.

1. Identify a change initiative that will be challenging for the school board–superintendent team but is aligned with the district’s strategic planning priorities.
2. Describe the change it has decided to address in one to three sentences (for example, *The district expects 100 percent of students to graduate from high school. As such, students with attendance rates of 90 percent or higher will evidence a 30 percent increase in graduation rates among all high schools during the next academic year*). Write the statement for all to see on flip chart paper or on the overhead projector.
3. Answer the following questions.
 - ◆ “What are the problems requiring the change consideration?”
 - ◆ “What supports are available to enable the change?”

There may be far more problems than supports.

4. Now describe the forces that are helping or hindering the change. Examples include:
 - ◆ **Helping force**—The state now monetarily rewards improved graduation rates, and the additional revenue is highly desirable to support district operations.
 - ◆ **Hindering force**—A strong economy in the area has reduced the incentive to graduate, and employers are still hiring young adults without a high school diploma or a passing grade on the GED.
5. Write each helping and hindering force statement out for all to see on individual sticky notes (preferred) or on flip chart paper. Make sure each force is labeled as a help or a hindrance. This phase of the activity is not an easy task. Some team members might be reluctant to discuss hindrances, and others might believe the suggestion of hindrances is an attempt to create

roadblocks to change. In each case, take time to introduce problem-based discussions so hindrances are addressed in a healthy way.

6. Sort all helping and hindering forces into two groups (for example, the helping group and the hindering group). Within each group, arrange the forces into associated clusters (for instance, some hindering forces might cluster around influences external to the schools or district, while other hindering forces may cluster around influences internal to the schools or district). The team may end up with some forces that stand alone from the clusters. Additionally, team members should have permission to offer new helping and hindering forces throughout this clustering phase, should they come to mind.
7. Review each hindering force and decide how important it is (for example, low, medium, or high). Understanding that helping forces serve to move the change initiative forward, focus on the hindering forces that can be reduced or even removed. Then, the team should consider the importance of each force and decide how easy it would be to enact a change (such as, low, medium, or high).
8. Once the levels of importance and ease of change are determined, prioritize the changes to the hindering priorities in a way that best supports the change initiative.
9. Discuss how the helping forces support the prioritized changes to the hindering forces. To adapt this step, the facilitator should make hindering forces visually available to team members. Then, individually or in pairs, team members rate the importance and ease of change. This ensures participation among all members and encourages discussion.
10. Individuals or pairs share their ratings with the team to get an overall collective average based on feedback.
11. As a result of this activity the team now has a strong sense of the future success of the change initiative and may consider next-step actions. This will be based on an awareness of the hindering forces and the ability or willingness to move past them to implement change.

Results

Two major accomplishments come from participation in this professional development activity. First, by thinking about individual transformations (for instance, the six-step process) through helping and hindering forces associated with change, the activity provides heightened awareness about the problems behind the change initiative and supports individuals in moving past the status quo with the increased likelihood of embracing the change initiative over time. Second, next-step planning occurs for the team from an organizational level, enabling a means to address the change initiative in a systematic way through prioritizing the hindering forces in terms of importance and ease of change. Together, these accomplishments set the stage to deal with a number of change initiatives that support both the individual and the collective team.