School improvement planning guide

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Action strategy	**Project implementation team(s)**	**Guidelines & accountabilities**

Expanded view

SMART improvement goal(s)	Goal vision statement(s)	Evidence of need

1.
 	
2.
	1.
	
	2.
	
	Include what is being improved and why, with reference to
	  • Improved student outcomes
	  • Program standards
		Consider data from the following four sources.
		  • Student academic achievement
		  • Stakeholder perception
		  • Systems & procedures
		  • Community demography

Itemised budget(s)

Item	$
Materials & subscriptions	
Staff travel, accommodation & meals	
Venues & catering	
Publications	
Student events	
External expertise and support	
TOTAL	

SMART goal(s)	Goal vision Statement(s)	Evidence of need
Itemised Budget(s)	**Improvement plan**	Targeted program(s)
Action strategy	Project implementation team(s)	Guidelines & accountabilities

Targeted program(s)

Program	Aspect
Learning	e.g. Mathematics
Human resources	
Material resources	
Environment	
Administration	

Action strategy

Detail each action needed to reach the goal, who is responsible for it, when it is to be completed, and any resources required for its successful completion.

Factors impacting success (SWOT)

Impellers: What will support progress.
Optimisation: How impellers will be optimised.
Impediments: What will hinder progress.
Mitigation: How the effects of impediments will be minimised.

Project implementation team(s)

Team leader:

Member	Representing

Guidelines and accountabilities

The team leader reports to: [name]

Project summary:
Include the goal, goal's vision, statement of need, and the role of the project leader.

Project milestones:
Performance measures and any important attainments that lead to success.

Unpacking the expanded view

Determining the starting point

There are three possible starting points for creating and implementing the tactical plan.

1. **Evidence of need**
   With this starting point, data is analysed from several sources to identify a trend or issue of concern. From the data, a SMART goal is created, and the rest of the process is then followed.

2. **SMART improvement goal**
   From anecdotal evidence, senior leadership teams already have a general perception of a priority issue in their school. Having identified the issue, its root causes can be identified using an issue tree and solution tree. Evidence of the need to address the issue is then gathered from data sources to validate the need and a SMART goal is created to match the root cause. The rest of the process is then followed.

3. **Project implementation teams**
   The senior leadership team may decide to form a school improvement project team first and then assign the task of identifying priority issues and creating SMART goals to the team. The rest of the process is then followed.

SMART improvement goals

The acronym, **SMART**, is a prompt for writing goals that are:

Specific:	each goal is clear, succinct and jargon-free
Measurable:	each goal includes performance measures that indicate the degree of success achieved
Achievable:	each goal can be readily achieved in terms of time constraints and available resources
Relevant:	each goal is relevant to student learning and perceived as a priority need
Time-bound:	each goal can be achieved within one year with a minimal impact on workload

Examples

- **Goal**: By the end of the year, an agreed aspect of current best teaching practice has been identified to introduce at the beginning of the following year, along with the creation of a plan of how to introduce and resource it.
- **Goal**: An efficient procedure for identifying and providing needs-based professional development to teachers has been created by the end of the year.
- **Goal**: By the end of the year, the use of expectations and guidelines for teachers to follow after each professional development provision has been created, published, implemented and monitored, including the sharing and use of new knowledge.
- **Goal**: By the end of the year, a handbook of exemplary formative assessment activities that teachers will adopt or adapt for inclusion in their lessons has been created, along with a checklist to monitor that inclusion during formal lesson observations.
- **Goal**: By the middle of the year, an agreed understanding of the relationship between formative assessment and differentiation in teaching has been published and progressively applied to lesson planning and delivery for the rest of the year, including the use of a checklist to monitor its implementation.

- **Goal**: The number of authentic and practical problem-solving activities for teaching Mathematics this year has been increased to represent one third of the Mathematics syllabus.

Why a goal is SMART
Example:

To increase the number of authentic and practical problem-solving activities for teaching Mathematics this year so that they represent one third of the Mathematics syllabus.

S   " … authentic and practical problem-solving activities … "
M   " … one third of the Mathematics syllabus."
A   the cost is low, requiring minimal resources, and the improvement of one third is achievable
R   the goal addresses student learning and has been identified as an issue
T   the goal is to be achieved this year

Goal vision statements

These statements seek to describe **what** the vision for the goal is and **why** there is a need to improve. They also describe the **relevance** of each goal, especially referring to
- Its connection with the school's strategic plan
- Improved student outcomes
- Program standards

Example
What

The vision for our goal is to ensure that the curriculum is taught in a way that is relevant to the needs of our students and perceived as being useful by them. This year, we will concentrate on Mathematics.

Why

The student academic results of 2016 strongly indicate that our students lack a satisfactory ability to apply their learning in mathematics to everyday, practical situations. An audit of our approaches to teaching mathematics further reveals that insufficient time is devoted to applying mathematical reasoning to solving authentic problems. We, therefore, feel the need to address this situation as a priority.

Relevance

Making the application of mathematical skills and knowledge relevant to the everyday lives of students gives meaning and purpose to learning. If it further empowers them to thrive in their future adult lives, it will provide them with a readiness for the demands of the 21st century, including the ability to use higher order thinking skills and be solutions-based in their approaches to life's challenges.

Our improvement goal is relevant to the proficiency strand of **problem-solving** in the curriculum framework of our accrediting body, which includes formulating and solving authentic problems and creating financial plans.

Evidence of need

Evidence of the need to improve can be collected from four sources and, whenever possible, it is good practice to strengthen the evidence base by using more than one source.
1. Student academic achievement
2. Stakeholder perceptions

3. Systems and procedures
4. Community demography

Student academic achievement data

There are three main categories of student academic assessment.

1. **Assessment for learning or formative assessment**
   This is used by the teacher to determine what students already know and need to know for a particular unit of work or skill set. It is used before the intended learning begins and throughout the learning to guide which strategies and approaches should be used by the teacher and student at any given time. It can be in the form of quizzes, tasks, samples of work, interviews, and incidental questioning. Assessment for learning is often used by teachers to group students according to their ability or readiness to learn.

2. **Assessment as learning**
   This is used by the student to learn about themselves as learners and become aware of how they learn. Learning how to learn is an essential requisite for self-directed independent learning. It involves the skills of self-assessment, setting goals, action planning, and recognising success. It can be guided by high-order thinking skills, checklists of learning strategies, peer and teacher feedback, and a learning environment where risk-taking is valued.

3. **Assessment of learning or summative assessment**
   This is usually done at the end of a task or unit of work and is designed to provide evidence of achievement to the students, parents, and other educators. It can be in the form of student portfolios, teacher portfolios, student productions and presentations, and formal tests or examinations. It is often used to equip students for student-led reporting sessions to their families.

The assessment **of** learning or summative assessment results are the source of data that is mostly used to provide evidence for the need to improve learning and teaching. However, the assessment **for** learning results can also be very useful. National and international assessment platforms can also provide global data to indicate concerns that require intervention.

Stakeholder perceptions data

The stakeholders in education are depicted as follows.
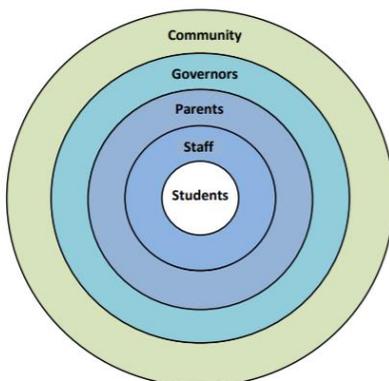
N.B.: *The 'Governors' category includes the school board or council, and any other higher-level bodies impacting the school, such as an accreditation body.*

Because it is difficult to gain perception data from stakeholders outside the school community, the data is limited to that from students, staff and families. The data can be gathered using anonymous surveys, individual interviews, and small group discussions or debates. The use of several of these methods adds increased validity to the results.

For perception data to be valid, a significant proportion of the school's student, staff or parent population must be represented in the surveys, interviews, discussions or debates. Small samples cannot be considered as being useful indicators of general opinion.

An example of a survey prompt for parents is: Teachers at our school motivate my child to want to learn. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 (where 1 is 'I don't know', 2 is 'I strongly disagree', and 7 is 'I strongly agree')

Systems and procedures data

Systems that record useful data to identify improvement needs include the following.

- Staff and student **absence and lateness data**, including reasons for absences linked to workplace issues. This can indicate levels of commitment and morale, welfare and support needs and the relevance of approaches to learning and facilitation.
- Staff **performance management data** that indicate professional development needs, budget priorities, succession planning and team structures.
- Budget **expenditure data** can indicate priority asset replacement needs, equity of resource allocations, and where efficiencies in spending can be made.
- **Student behaviour records** can indicate welfare needs, the relevance of approaches to learning and facilitation, overcrowding issues, and student morale levels.
- **Accident and incident registers** can indicate unsafe facilities, unsafe practices, security issues, and 'hot spots' needing increased attention.
- Regular **audits** of the curriculum coverage, the condition and suitability of resources, building and playground hazards, and financial management can also indicate priority improvement needs.

The data from systems and procedures is a good prompt to seek or delve more deeply into other data sources to help verify an indicated concern or need.

Community demography data

Demography is the science of social statistics. It analyses the make-up of the population. A targeted study of the community's demographics can reveal the strengths and challenges of the community, including the school students and staff members. It can indicate what to consider when planning how to address the needs of the improvement project when developing the action plan.

Demography data includes such aspects as

- Staff qualifications and training
- Staff experience, expertise and talents
- Staff gender ratios
- Student projected enrolment trends
- Student ethnicity and language backgrounds
- Student special education needs, including disability, impairment, gifted and talented needs
- Student gender ratios
- The socio-economic status of families
- The distances students travel from home to school and access to transport
- The family compositions, such as single parent or extended family contexts
- The education attainment levels of parents
- Parent occupations
- The availability of parents to be involved in school programs
- The expertise and talents of parents and other community members
- The people and networks of influence within the community
- The provision of community resources, such as a library, museum, health & recreation facilities, and significant employers

Targeted programs

The programs that operate within the school context can be categorised under the following headings.

1. Learning (including students, staff members and families)
2. Human resources
3. Material resources (including facilities, equipment, furniture, fittings, consumables and non-consumables)
4. Environment
5. Administration

It is useful to track which programs are targeted for improvement over time so that a balanced coverage can be considered when deciding the next priority goals. That said, student learning should always take priority. Other programs can be considered if the school has chosen to target more than one program for improvement. Staff and family learning often flows from the need to address student learning and is usually incorporated into the strategies designed to reach the improvement goal.

Project guidelines and accountabilities

Project implementation teams need guidance and support to provide the direction and resources needed for success. The most important guidance is provided to each team leader before the teams are created. It is the form of a project brief, which includes the improvement goal, the **what** component of the goal's vision statement, and a statement of need. It also includes a role description for each team leader, defining the responsibilities and any expectations the senior leadership team may have of them, and lists the significant milestones that each team needs to meet in their improvement journey. An example of guidelines and accountabilities for a team leader is as follows.

Example

Project brief for the Mathematics improvement project, 2017.

Goal

The number of authentic and practical problem-solving activities for teaching Mathematics this year is increased to represent one third of the Mathematics syllabus.

Goal vision

To ensure that the curriculum is taught in a way that is relevant to the needs of our students and perceived as being useful by them.

Statement of need

The student academic results of 2016 strongly indicate that our students lack a satisfactory ability to apply their learning in mathematics to everyday, practical situations. An audit of our approaches to teaching mathematics further reveals that insufficient time is devoted to applying mathematical reasoning to solving authentic problems. We, therefore, feel the need to address this situation as a priority.

Team leader role description

The role of each team leader is to;

- in consultation with the senior leadership team, form a representational project team
- with the project team, facilitate the development and implementation of an approved action plan
- convene team meetings on at least a fortnightly basis

- publish a shared agenda, with input offered to each team member, at least one day before each team meeting
- ensure that action-based minutes or notes are taken at each team meeting and digitally published immediately after each meeting
- guide and support team members with the implementation of their assigned actions that arise from meetings
- attend periodical team leader meetings, as convened by the senior leadership team
- share the project team's successes and challenges at the team leader meetings and provide support to fellow team leaders
- provide timely reports to the senior leadership team as issues and challenges become apparent
- provide a mid-project progress report to the senior leadership team, indicating to what extent the project is progressing, identifying significant successes and challenges, and recommending any amendments to the action plan
- provide an end of project report to the senior leadership team in the format provided

Significant milestones

1. The successful formation of a team
2. Regular periodical team meetings
3. The successful creation of an approved action plan
4. Submission of a mid-project report to the senior leadership team
5. Submission of an end of project report to the senior leadership team

Project implementation teams

Creating the teams

When creating the project teams to implement the improvement goals, there are three considerations to take into account.

1. Provide incentives for people to join the team, such as a time allowance each week to meet or develop resources, and a budget allocation to provide any training that the team may need. During the project implementation period, provide lots of support and recognise and acknowledge the team achievements.
2. Identify a leader who has some expertise or experience in successfully leading change. It could be a staff member who is a community or sporting leader or someone who is good at organising events. If none are available, publish a one-paragraph role statement, call for expressions of interest from within the school staff and interview those who respond. If no-one responds, begin to promote the role as a good opportunity to gain leadership experience for future promotion positions and approach particular staff members to take on the role of leader.
3. As much as practically possible, create the team with a diverse representation of people who are either interested in the project or affected by it.

For example:

Team leader: Naseer (Head of Math. Department)

Member	Representing
Indira	Mathematics teachers
Raj	Senior teacher
Anika	Parents
Other	Other or same

The autonomous team model

If there is more than one improvement goal for the year, a project team is needed to implement each goal and a manageable system is needed for the senior leadership team to support and guide the teams. A useful model for supporting and guiding their progress is the autonomous team model.

Autonomous teams implement projects without direct senior supervision, operating instead under well-defined guidelines and accountabilities designed by the senior leaders of the school. The team leaders develop action plans with their teams and submit them to the school leadership team for consideration, negotiated amendment and approval.

The team leaders then periodically meet to report to the senior leadership team and to each other. At these meetings, successes and challenges are shared, progress is mapped, and action plans are adapted to accommodate changing needs. The meetings are also an opportunity for the leaders to gain synergies with resources and strategies and support each other with suggestions for dealing with the challenges they face. Usually, the meetings occur every two weeks or so.

A shared agenda is published before each meeting to guide discussions, and action-based minutes or notes are recorded, noting who is responsible for ensuring each action is implemented. The actions are followed up at subsequent meetings until they are recorded as being completed. An example of a proforma for action-based minutes is as follows.

Action-based minutes proforma

Issue	Why it is an issue	Actions arising from discussion	Implemented by whom	By when	Progress to date
1.					
2.					
3.					
Etc.					

The autonomous team framework

```
                    ┌─────────────────┐
                    │    Principal    │
                    └─────────────────┘
                             │
                    ┌─────────────────┐
                    │     Senior      │
                    │   Leadership    │
                    └─────────────────┘
                             │
                    ┌─────────────────┐
                    │ Projects & Roles│
                    └─────────────────┘
                             │
              ┌──────────────────────────────┐
              │ Expectations, Guidelines &   │
              │      Accountabilities        │
              └──────────────────────────────┘
                             │
                    ┌─────────────────┐
                    │  Team Leaders   │
                    │     Brief       │
                    └─────────────────┘
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| Team [Action Plan] | Team [Action Plan] | Team [Action Plan] | Team [Action Plan] | Team [Action Plan] |

Team Leaders Report

Evaluation & Final Report

Guidance & Support
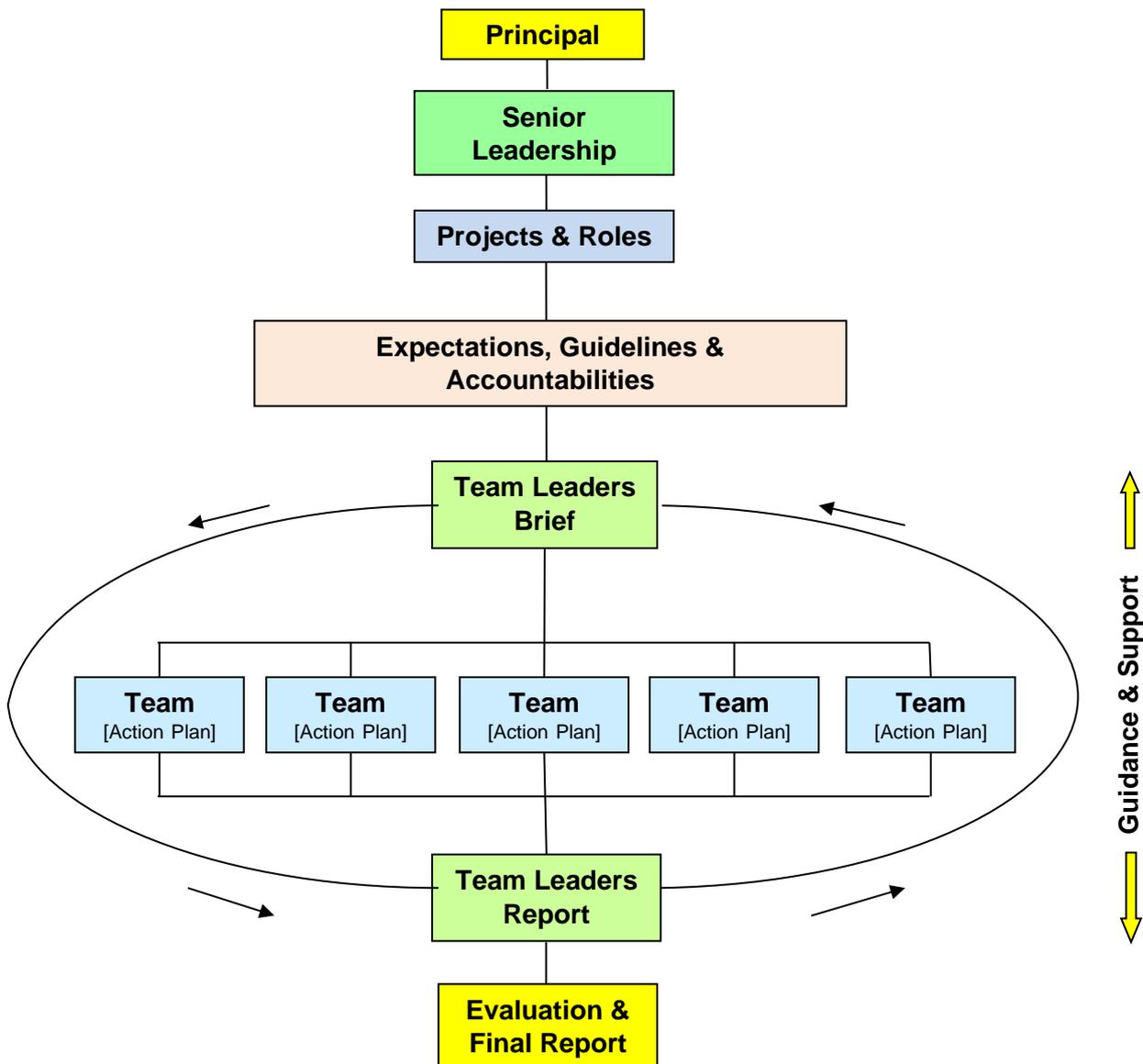
Throughout the implementation of school improvement projects, each school is supported by members of the senior leadership team and, on completion of each project, a formal report is submitted to the senior leadership team by the leader of each team.

The action strategy

When creating strategies for action, at least three important considerations need to be made. The first is the process that is going to be followed to guide action. The second is a consideration of the main factors that affect successful change. The third is an analysis of the 'impellers' and 'impediments' (SWOT) that are likely to be encountered when implementing the improvement project. All three are factors that impact the success of the project team.

The action process

As with many strategies, the action process is cyclical. It uses four main tools; PLC's, learning walks, PDCA (Plan, Do, Check, Actions) and discrete classroom observations. The model looks like this.
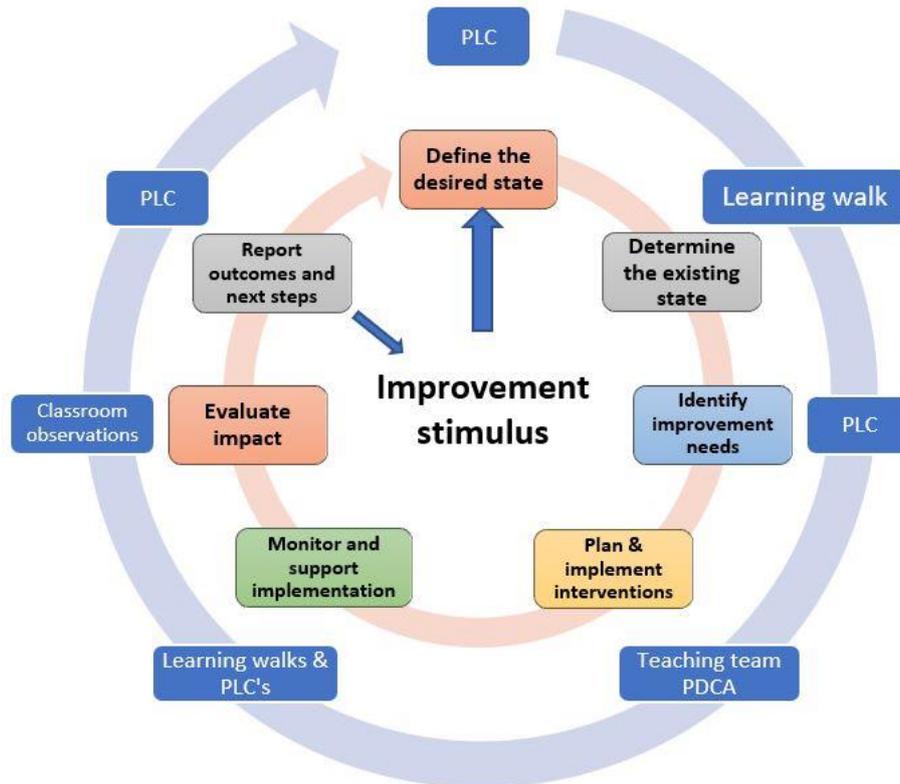
Professional Learning Communities (PLC)

A professional learning community, or PLC, is a group of educators that meets regularly, shares expertise, and works collaboratively to improve teaching skills and the academic performance of students. There is no formal structure to an effective PLC meeting, except the requirement to reflect on performance and focus on improved performance. By default, then, a project team is a PLC and each meeting of the project team is a PLC meeting.

From time to time, the project team may also conduct PLC meetings with stakeholders throughout the duration of the improvement project. This is a wise strategy, designed to increase engagement with and ownership of the transformation journey. At the meetings, a simple agenda may include such items as
- Our journey so far
- A feedback session on
    - What should we do more of?
    - What should we do less of?
- Improvement suggestions

Learning walks

A learning walk is a tour of selected classrooms to gain a snapshot of the implementation of a specific teaching practice or other initiative. Because it can be quite threatening to teachers, it needs to be well planned, with agreed protocols and understandings in place before implementation. The process for a learning walk is represented by the following graphic.
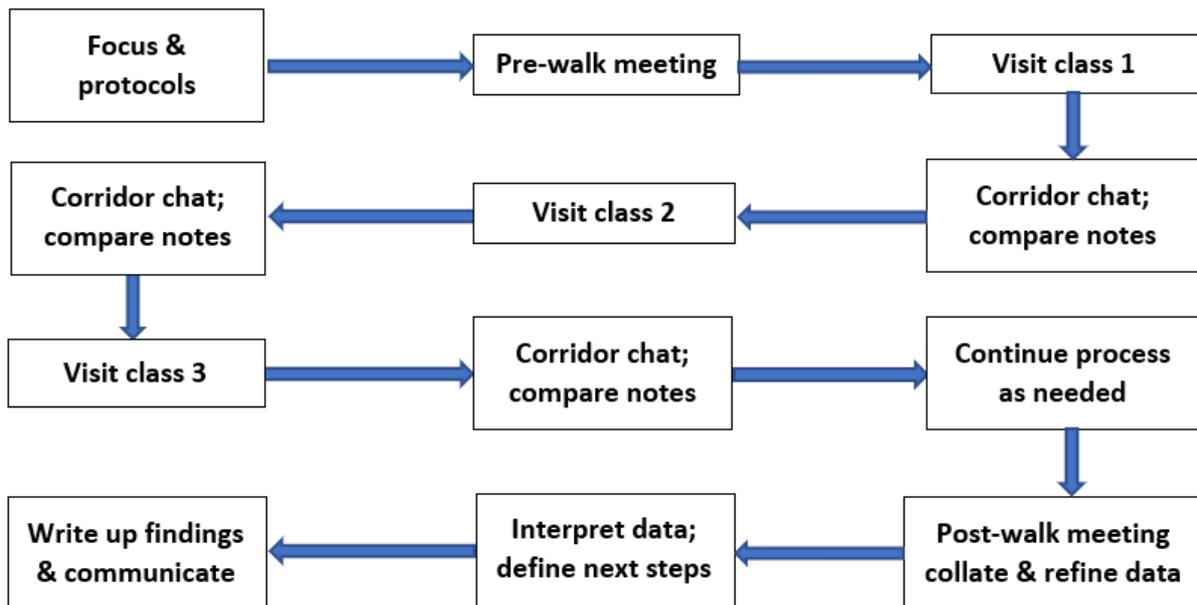
Discrete classroom observations

As distinct from a learning walk, which gains a snapshot of common practice, a classroom observation focuses more deeply to evaluate the impact of a trialled teaching strategy. The purpose is to gain a sense of the difference that the strategy has made to student learning.

PDCA (Plan, Do, Check, Actions)

The Plan, Do, Check, Action process (PDCA)
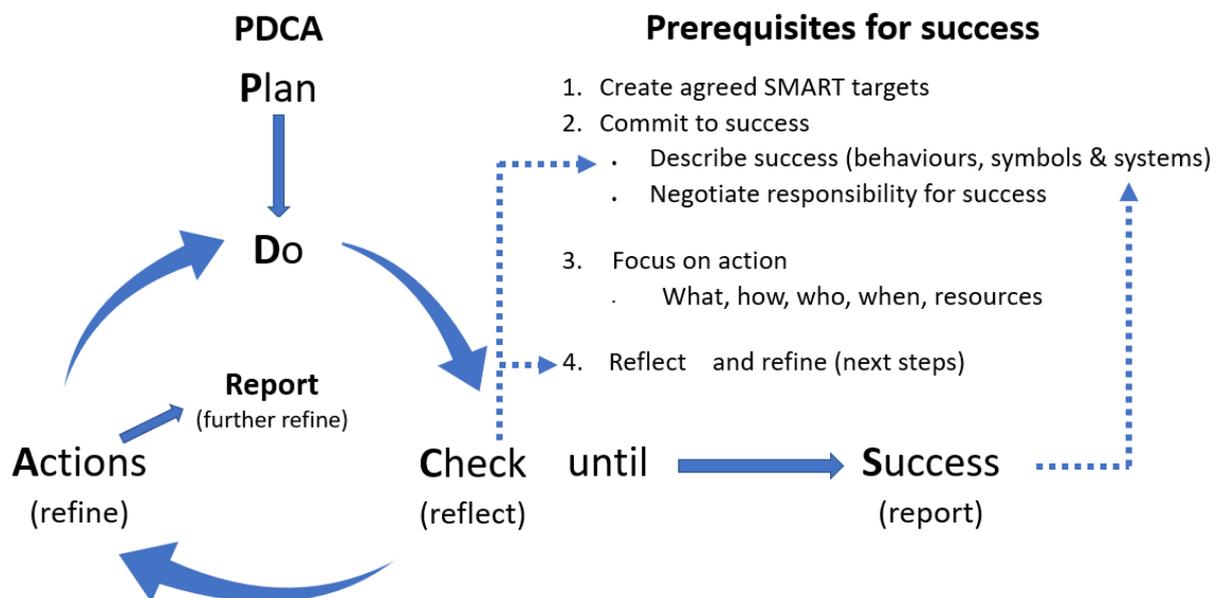
Factors impacting success

Change management elements

The following chart provides a useful snapshot of the five change elements that need to be considered during the planning stage. It illustrates how the effectiveness of the change process is diminished if one or more of the elements is not properly addressed.

The action strategy needs to include actions designed to optimise each of the elements. The goal's vision is already provided by the senior leadership team and the project team is developing the action plan.

Managing Complex Change

Vision	+	Skills	+ Incentives	+ Resources	+ Action Plan	=	Change
■	+	Skills	+ Incentives	+ Resources	+ Action Plan	=	Confusion
Vision	+	■	+ Incentives	+ Resources	+ Action Plan	=	Anxiety
Vision	+	Skills	+ ■	+ Resources	+ Action Plan	=	Resistance
Vision	+	Skills	+ Incentives	+ ■	+ Action Plan	=	Frustration
Vision	+	Skills	+ Incentives	+ Resources	+ ■	=	False Starts

Adapted from Knoster, T., Villa R., & Thousand, J. (2000). A framework for thinking about systems change. In R. villa & J. Thousand (Eds.), Restructuring for caring and effective education: Piecing the puzzle together (pp. 93-128). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

It is the skills, incentives, and resources that need attention at this stage of the improvement process and the most challenging of these is the incentives.

Ideally, incentives should be intrinsic, arising from the desire to do what is best for the school and its students. However, because teachers and support staff are already very busy people, practical incentives need to be provided to help make being involved in an improvement project attractive.

Such incentives can be in the form of time allowances, recognition and acknowledgement for being involved, and simple resource provisions, such as refreshments. It is the task of leaders to remove as many obstacles to progress as possible and make the process simple and easy to implement.

Identifying impellers and impediments
A SWOT analysis will help to identify the **S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities and **T**hreats (SWOT) for the improvement process. Once the impellers are identified, they need to be optimised for best effect. Once the impediments are identified, they need to be minimised for least effect. An example of a SWOT analysis is as follows.

Example SWOT analysis for a high school

The importance of communication (socialising)
An important role of the senior leadership team is to provide incentives that make the improvement project attractive and to socialise the need for the project with the key stakeholders. To socialise a project, a communication plan is needed.

The communication plan is strategically designed to engage any stakeholders who are either unsure of the need for the project or strong resistors to the project. Its purpose is to normalise the existence of the project by giving it constant exposure through everyday conversations, publications, such as bulletins or newsletters, meeting agendas, and school events. By focussing on the benefits of the project, especially how students will benefit from it, stakeholders will see it as a worthwhile venture.

The communication plan also keeps stakeholders constantly up to date with the progress of the project, especially with its successes. It uses positive language, congratulating people for their involvement and praising teams for their achievements. It conveys passion and excitement, making others feel happy and making the project increasingly attractive and relevant to them.

Communication methods and tools may include
- Video updates and mail-outs
- Social media posts
- Small information sessions with influential stakeholders, such as popular parents, popular teachers, student leaders, and service providers
- Being a guest speaker at community functions
- Publishing articles in local newspapers and family newsletters
- Conducting special fund-raising events that engage families and are targeted to support the project
- Progress updates at parent meetings and Board of Governors meetings

Example of a communication plan proforma

Aspect of project	Who I Need to Tell	How?	Date Done	Who I Need to Meet	Date Done

Identifying what needs to be done
To identify what needs to be done to achieve success, consider four tasks relevant to the SMART goal.
1. Describe the current situation.
2. Explore agreed values and beliefs about good practice.
3. Describe the desired situation.
4. List the steps needed to progress from the current situation to the desired situation.

When describing the current and desired situations, it is useful to focus on the following three manifestations of school culture.
Behaviours: What are the students, teachers and support staff doing?
Symbols: What can be seen in the buildings and grounds that indicates performance?
Systems: What policies, procedures, plans, strategies or approaches are people using?

Using these three manifestations, create two Y-charts, one each for the current situation and the desired situation, and make lists under the headings.

Behaviours
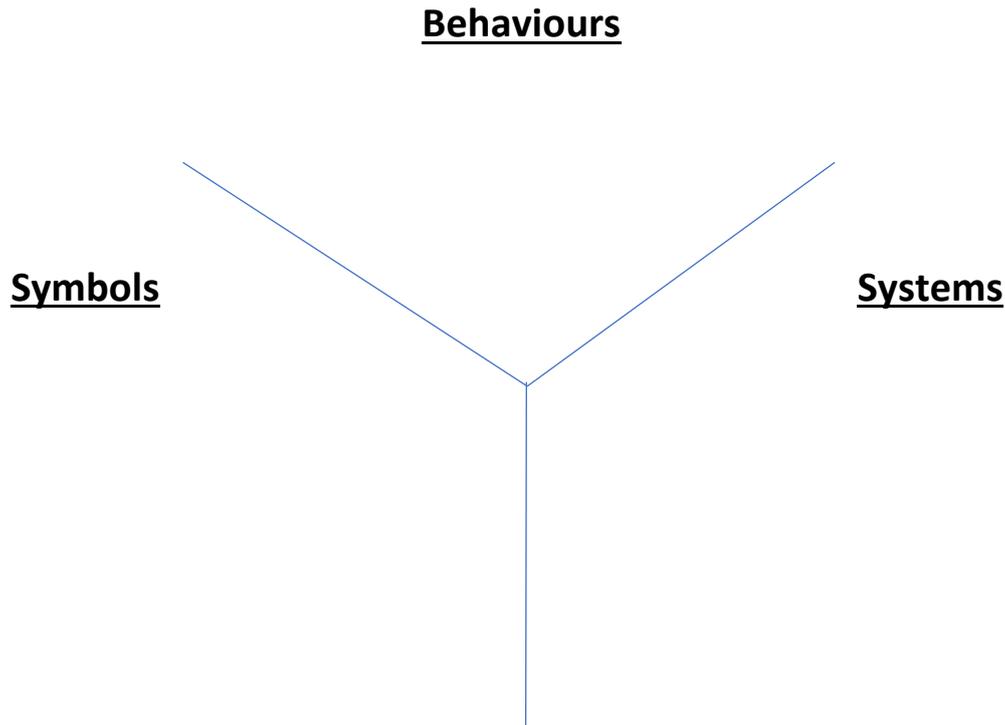
Symbols   **Systems**

To help decide what to list in the Y-chart for the current situation, conduct learning walks that focus on the three headings. The behaviours, symbols and systems should be specific to the SMART goal.

To convert the Y-chart for the desired situation into reality, create an action plan that lists the steps that need to be taken to progress from the current situation to the desired situation. Implement the action plan using a Plan, Do, Check, Action, process to monitor progress and modify the action plan as necessary.

The action plan

The action plan is the main tool that each project team will use to implement their project. The actions that are planned will result from the identified skills, incentives and resources that are needed for success, and the outcomes of the SWOT analysis. The plan may include such activities as

- Conducting surveys of staff CPD needs
- Conducting learning walks and peer observations to identify strengths and challenges
- Interviewing school leaders, teachers, students and parents to identify strengths and challenges
- Conducting Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings to share strengths and challenges
- Analysing data
- Accessing expertise and models of excellence
- Seeking opinions and advice about intended strategic steps
- Planning and conducting CPD workshops
- Evaluating the effectiveness of CPD workshops
- Resource production or acquisition
- Producing procedures, such as checklists, flow charts, manuals and guidelines
- Conducting information sessions

Example of an action plan proforma

Step	What	Why	Who	When	How	Resources	Progress
1							
2							

What	What is the action that we need to take?
Why	Why do we need to take this action?
Who	Who will be responsible for completing the action?
When	When do we expect the action to be completed?
How	How will the action be implemented (sub-steps)?
Resources	What resources are needed for the action to succeed?
Progress	Has the action been completed successfully and on time? If not, what do we need to do to support its completion?

Itemised budgets

Usually, improvement projects are not expensive to fund as the costs are very low. Teachers are very resourceful people, often producing their own resources or acquiring them through their extensive professional networks. However, it is important to identify any significant resources that may be needed and determine how they will be sourced before the project team commences its improvement journey.

The following template may be useful as a guide to what resources are commonly needed for improvement projects.

Example

Category	Item	RM
Materials & subscriptions	Majong paper Display charts Stationery Photocopying	
Staff travel, accommodation & meals	Travel Accommodation Meals	
Venues & catering	Venue hire Venue catering Event catering	
Publications	Printing Binding Cover paper Distribution	
Student events	Excursions Productions & performances	

External expertise and support	Guest speakers Workshop providers Travel costs Accommodation Fees	
TOTAL		