



Section H: Operational Systems

Section Contents

Introduction to Operational Systems page 141



Focus Areas

Systems Thinking page 142
Decision-Making page 143
Communication page 146
Collegiality page 148



Tools

Adult Culture Survey page 151
Re-Thinking Your Organizational Design page 153
Sample School-Based Organizational Design Model page 154
Effective Meetings page 155
Getting Your Point Across page 156
Ways to Bring a Group to Consensus page 157
Communications Loops and Bands page 158
Vehicles for Communication:
 Nine Times, Nine Ways page 159
 Creating Simple Rules page 160
 Study Group Logistics and Tips page 162

Introduction: Operational Systems

Organizations depend on operational systems to ensure that the day-to-day work is accomplished in effective and efficient ways. School operational systems clarify roles and responsibilities, standards for performance, procedural expectations, and provide support for ongoing learning and professional growth among the staff.

Four critical focus areas are Systems Thinking, Decision-Making, Communications and Collegiality. The table below forecasts the focus areas and tools in this section, and offers some practical tips for building leaders to implement in their schools.

Focus Areas	Role of Building Leader(s)
Building Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate school systems for effectiveness. How might they be strengthened? • Identify practices and processes that are ineffective and fix them. • Engage others in designing systems that exist to serve them. • Ensure that systems include ongoing communication processes. • Is staff building-wide using a similar problem-solving method? If not, will they reach coherent, equitable results?
Decision-Making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure staff are clear about how to participate in decision-making. • Clarify with staff whether decisions will be made through consensus or voting. If both, be sure that all agree on when consensus is used, and when voting is used. Clarify who makes which decisions. • Identify delegated decisions and review them to ensure appropriate authority, accountability, and responsibility. • Talk with those who are in charge of delegated decisions and see if adequate information is provided to make effective decisions.
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review six recently printed communications with the staff and parents to determine if communication vehicles were appropriate for type of messages. • Ensure communication among committees. • Review six recently printed communications with staff and/or parents to determine appropriateness of language, tone, use of jargon. • Establish a calendar for communications that addresses timing for the whole building.
Collegiality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk with staff about creating a short list of simple rules/values. Discuss behaviors that would be seen if rules were implemented. • Explore the possibility of establishing professional learning groups among staff.



Focus Area: Systems Thinking

“There are so many committees and groups working on so many issues that I feel like popcorn, moving from one group to the next. The accomplishments of our committees and workgroups seem valuable, but they often run into conflict, and their work seems disjointed and incomplete when I look at the total effectiveness of the school.”

Overview of Effective Systems

To run a building effectively and efficiently, the leader must ensure that there are processes and procedures in place. When operational systems are structured well, they contribute to the overall effectiveness of the instructional program. When those systems are absent or poorly structured, they draw energy away from classrooms.

Effective Systems

- Have predictable structures and processes to accomplish and sustain the work
- Ensure appropriate representation and participation of stakeholders (engage staff, students, and families in planning and implementation)
- Have ongoing methods for two-way communication
- Use an effective problem-solving method
- Provide professional development to build staff expertise/capacity
- Use best-practice research, data and communication to make decisions

Effective systems answer **Who? Where? When? How? What?**

Structures explain *who, where, and when*. They are predictable, inclusive, visible and known by all.

Processes explain *how*. They ensure communication, problem solving, decision-making, and accountability.

Best Practices explain *what*. They ensure expertise and employ evidence-based approaches.

Effective systems support:

- staff in doing what works
- School Improvement Plan (SIP)
- staff to stop doing what is ineffective or not a priority
- effective use of resources (time, money, energy, etc.)

A positive school climate that supports students in performing to high standards emerges when energies and resources are focused on learning. That can only happen when the systems are in place to ensure effective and efficient operations across the school. **The remainder of this Section describes major systems that are the foundation for operations that set the stage for a supportive learning climate.**



Focus Area: Decision-Making

“No one knows how decisions are made. When they are made, no one communicates them to us. There are no vehicles to support or develop ownership of decisions in this school.”

When a clearly articulated decision-making system is in place and consistently used, staff members in the school feel respected.

- They know what is being discussed.
- They understand their role in the process.
- They receive appropriate and clear information about what was decided.
- They believe they have a voice in their workplace.

Effective decision-making in a school requires that all staff members understand and participate in a system that clearly addresses the following:

- **Delegation of Decisions**
- **Types of Participation**
- **Types of Decision-Making Processes**

Delegation of Decisions

In shared decision-making, leaders often delegate decisions that they have traditionally made. Delegation of those decisions requires three considerations.

- **Accountability** indicates the formal, organizational point where “the buck stops.” When people are accountable for a decision, the outcomes of that decision are part of their performance assessment.
- **Authority** indicates that the organization has given the permission for an individual to make a decision.
- **Responsibility** indicates that a job or duty has been assigned to someone in the organization.

There are decisions, which, by law and/or local policy, cannot be delegated. Generally decisions around personnel performance, overall student safety, and building fiscal issues cannot be delegated.

The over-riding factors to consider when deciding what decisions to delegate, include:

- legality of the delegation, according to state law and/or local policy
- level of expertise of those to whom the decision is to be delegated
- degree to which there is a shared commitment to outcome
- amount and accuracy of information and data that can be shared with those to whom the decision is delegated.

Types of Participation

As decisions are delegated or shared, people can be involved in a number of ways. The following describes the three levels of participation, along with the ways each might be used. **It is vital that those who are affected by the decision understand which level is being used.**

Type of Participation	When it Should Be Used
<p>Direct Participation All parties who will feel the impact of a decision are sitting at the table and have a voice in the decision that is being made.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When fewer than 10 people will feel the impact • When there is a great deal of time for working a full group toward consensus • When voting rather than using consensus
<p>Full Representation A representative brings each person's ideas to the table, even when they are in conflict. When that is the case, the representative has to voice each person's perspective as the discussion goes on.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is an individual decision in the school • If trust is high and relationships are strong, partial representation is enough • If relationships and trust are problematic, then the full representation is recommended
<p>Partial Representation A representative listens to constituents and then takes those perspectives to inform his or her own decision to take to the table.</p>	
<p>Decision Considering Perspective An individual or group makes a decision by considering the perspectives of those who will be affected by the decision.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In emergency situations when there is little or no time to get input • When the person making the decision know the constituents so well that he or she knows what they would say • When greater involvement would be detrimental to the progress and day-to-day operations in the school

Types of Decision-Making Processes

When a group comes together to make a decision, there are multiple approaches. Two of these decision-making processes are consensus or by voting. In **consensus**, discussion continues until the group comes to an agreement that each person can live with. The other approach is to use a majority **vote**. Each approach has both positive and negative impacts.

Consensus	Voting
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good approach for when decisions are important, have large ramifications or affect many people • Takes longer than voting and should be allotted time for full discussion and communication • Works best in small groups of less than 10, but can work with larger groups—although it might take longer • Allows for an exchange of ideas • Good approach when the group is informed, equally invested, and all voices are critical to a positive outcome • Groups should agree ahead of time on a back-up plan in cases where consensus cannot be reached 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Works when members of the group are equally informed on the subject matter and understand one another’s points of view • Good approach when it is known that consensus is highly unlikely in the allotted time • When it is clear that a majority can manage the implementation of the decision without the active involvement and support of those who do not support the decision • Creates “winners” and “losers” • Groups should have ways of addressing the concerns of those who do not support the final decision

Source: Royce Holladay, M.Ed., HSDP, Human Systems Dynamics Institute.



Focus Area: Communication

“I communicate lots of things, but it seems like messages never get through. Either they aren’t listening, or I am not clear about what I want them to know. How can I communicate more effectively?”

Communication, one of the most important jobs of the leader, is the thread that runs throughout the organization. Leaders who establish effective communication systems are better able to reach and engage others both in the school and in the community.

In a positive school climate, people feel they know what is happening; they understand their environment; they feel heard. When effective communication connects the home and the community with the school, parents and visitors to the school feel more welcomed, more supportive, and more engaged. Effective communication systems allow school staff members to share data and information. An effective communication system contributes to student achievement.

This topic will address some important considerations that contribute to a highly effective communication system.

- **Communication Loops and Bands**
- **Audience**
- **Multiple Exposures**

Communication Loops and Bands

Communication loops refers to the distance a message travels before it is received. For instance, **short loops happen in face-to-face meetings** and telephone conversations. **Long loops occur in newsletters** and announcements. In short loops, a message can be explained and questions can be answered. In long loops, that luxury does not exist.

Information bands refer to the width or depth of the message. **Wide bands carry a great deal of information**, such as the rationale for pursuing a new instructional program or the elimination of positions. **Narrow bands carry straightforward, unambiguous messages**, like meeting announcements and current lunch menus.

Effective communication will match the message band with the appropriate length of loop for the message. **Broad bands require discussion and explanation; they must be shared in short loops**. When broad bands are delivered through long loops, people feel distanced from the organization. Communication is slow, cumbersome, and confusing.

On the other hand, it is tedious to receive only narrow band information—meeting announcements, deadlines—during a meeting. **Messages that require no discussion should be shared through longer loops**, saving time for more meaningful dialogue during meetings.

Audience

The following considerations should be addressed by the school's communications systems:

- **Native Language:** Parents, caretakers and community members should be addressed in their native language, whenever possible.
- **Tone:** Communications should convey a tone that is appropriate to the message.
- **Jargon:** Often educators speak with a kind of "shorthand" to address issues that are common among them. This use of jargon to talk about issues is allowed and appropriate.
- **Frequency:** People today are inundated with information and messages. Communications should be carefully scheduled.

Multiple Exposures

How many times have each of us thought, "They should know this; I told them last fall." All leaders have experienced that frustration, and there will always be situations where one or more people don't get messages. However, the chance of a message being heard and remembered rises significantly when following this rule: "If you want someone to remember what you said, tell them nine times in nine different ways."

It is best to follow the "nine times/nine ways" rule with narrow band information, such as invitations to events/meetings, requests for input (form retrievals) and announcements.

Find ways to repeat a message seriously, with humor (when appropriate), verbally, visually, literally, metaphorically...whatever it takes, be sure that the information gets out there repeatedly. This is true whether telling students or adults. A tip sheet at the end of this section provides a number of suggestions for how to share messages.

Source: Royce Holladay, M.Ed., HSDP, Human Systems Dynamics Institute.



Focus Area: Collegiality

“This is a great group of people, but they don’t seem to get along or have anything in common. How can I build collegiality among my staff?”

When teachers relate to each other as colleagues with the common goal of achievement for all students, their conversations shift to focus on supporting each other in pursuit of that goal.

The staff at a school is made up of diverse individuals who may or may not know each other outside the school setting. They come from different backgrounds, are at different stages of their lives, and have varying interests. They may even have personalities that conflict with each other. So how do you build positive, respectful relationships among a group that is potentially this diverse?

Systems that support positive, respectful relationships will include the following components:

- Clearly stated expectations
- Positive approach to behavior
- Opportunities to talk about the expectations and what they mean
- Shared responsibility for modeling the expectations for others
- Shared responsibility for behaving according to the expectations and for supporting others in doing so
- Predictable and consistent consequences

The use of simple rules is one way of creating a foundation for such a system. (Procedures for creating and using simple rules in your building are included later in this section.) The expectations must cover a wide range of situations. Simple rules provide a comprehensive, portable support for staff and students as they solve problems and make decisions. The simple rules carry the essence of the values and intentions of the school community and help everyone know what is expected, even where specific procedures don’t exist.

For example, **one middle school has changed its overall culture** to one of respect and high standards **by implementing three simple rules:**

- 1. Take care of yourself.**
- 2. Take care of each other.**
- 3. Take care of this place.**

These rules have taken the place of long lists of what not to do in this school—in classrooms, in the cafeteria, in the hall, in any place where students and staff come together. At the beginning of each year, teachers have conversations with students about what it means in a classroom to live by those three rules. The staff talks about what it means to the adults in the building. These three simple rules have come to guide behavior, and no other rules are necessary.

Simple rules differ from norms in their scope and portability. Norms are created for a particular place and time. When a committee lists norms, they describe how that group will behave with each other when they are working together. Their scope is much narrower than simple rules. Simple rules are broader, in that they have the capacity to guide decision-making in any

situation. They speak to organization-wide issues and behaviors, rather than situation-specific actions.

Another way that simple rules are different is that they are stated as positive actions, rather than negative behaviors. **This approach provides instruction about what to do, rather than what not to do.**

There is always a question about what is to be done when someone violates or forgets about the simple rules. The answer should be found within the simple rules themselves. For instance, in the simple rules in that middle school, when someone breaks a rule, they are treated with respect, and helped to understand what rule was violated.

Consequences are clearly articulated and applied consistently. They are designed to “fit” the violation, and students know what will happen if they choose to step outside of those expectations. Consequences are applied quickly and discreetly.

One important aspect of simple rules is that everyone in the school is accountable for ensuring that the simple rules are observed. In the classroom, students as well as the teacher are responsible for holding each other accountable.

Professional Learning Communities

Professional study groups provide an effective venue for staff members to learn about best practices and new research on teaching and learning. Study groups have been used in schools to create a collegial culture where shared learning moves staff members toward common goals.

The following precepts can guide development of study groups.

- They are developed to meet the needs of students.
- They will change teacher/staff behavior.
- They use evidence-based practices to inform the knowledge base.
- They are driven by data and results of student performance.
- Participants have a strong interest around the content in a study group.

A tip sheet that describes logistics and expectations of a study group is included at the end of this section.



Tool Guide: Operational Systems

⇒ Adult Culture Survey	page 151
⇒ Re-Thinking Your Organizational Design	page 153
⇒ Sample School-Based Organizational Design Model	page 154
⇒ Effective Meetings	page 155
⇒ Getting Your Point Across	page 156
⇒ Ways to Bring a Group to Consensus	page 157
⇒ Communications Loops and Bands	page 158
⇒ Nine Times, Nine Ways	page 159
⇒ Creating Simple Rules	page 160
⇒ Study Group Logistics and Tips	page 162



Tool: Adult Culture Survey

This tool is helpful in assessing components of adult school culture and school climate in a building. It can be administered at the beginning of the year or at some point during the year, and then repeated at the end of the year for comparison. It suggests areas for further focus by building leaders and staff. Results should be shared and structured dialogue should be the next step.

Rate each of the statements on the following scale:

1=strongly disagree 2=disagree 3=neutral 4=agree 5=strongly agree

Teachers utilize professional networks to obtain information and resources for classroom instruction.	1	2	3	4	5
Leaders value teachers' ideas.	1	2	3	4	5
Teachers have opportunities for dialogue and planning across grade levels and subjects.	1	2	3	4	5
Teachers trust each other.	1	2	3	4	5
Students are invited to point out instructional behaviors or practices that are discriminatory.	1	2	3	4	5
Teachers support the philosophy of the school.	1	2	3	4	5
Teachers and parents have common expectations for student performance.	1	2	3	4	5
Teachers show awareness of their own bias in terms of what they expect from students of color.	1	2	3	4	5
Leaders in this school trust the professional judgment of teachers.	1	2	3	4	5
Teachers spend considerable time planning together.	1	2	3	4	5
Teachers regularly seek ideas from colleagues and conferences.	1	2	3	4	5
Teachers are willing to help out whenever there is a problem.	1	2	3	4	5
Leaders take time to praise teachers who perform well.	1	2	3	4	5
Parent trust teachers' professional judgments.	1	2	3	4	5
Teachers at this school believe parents of color have the will and skill to help their children at home.	1	2	3	4	5
Teachers are involved in the decision-making process.	1	2	3	4	5
Teachers take time to observe each other teaching.	1	2	3	4	5
The faculty values professional development.	1	2	3	4	5

Teachers value other teachers' ideas.	1	2	3	4	5
Leaders in our school facilitate teachers working together.	1	2	3	4	5
Teachers are kept informed about current issues in school.	1	2	3	4	5
Teachers and parents communicate frequently about student performance.	1	2	3	4	5
My involvement in policy and decision-making is taken seriously.	1	2	3	4	5
Teachers are generally aware of what others are teaching.	1	2	3	4	5
Staff members receive assistance to identify racial/cultural bias in themselves, students and instructional practices.	1	2	3	4	5
Teachers maintain a current knowledge base about the learning process.	1	2	3	4	5
Teachers work cooperatively in groups.	1	2	3	4	5
We teach people how their race/culture affects people around them.	1	2	3	4	5
Teachers are rewarded for experimenting with new ideas and techniques.	1	2	3	4	5
Teachers work together to develop and evaluate programs and projects.	1	2	3	4	5
The faculty values school improvement.	1	2	3	4	5
Leaders protect instruction and planning time.	1	2	3	4	5
Disagreements in instructional approaches are voiced openly and discussed.	1	2	3	4	5
Teachers are encouraged to share ideas.	1	2	3	4	5
Students generally accept responsibility for their learning.	1	2	3	4	5

Rate each of the statements on the following scale:

1= strongly disagree 2=disagree 3=neutral 4=agree 5=strongly agree

Source: Steve Gruenert, Middle Level Leadership Center, University of Missouri



Tool: Re-Thinking Your Organizational Design

Use this tool to review critical attributes of current organizational infrastructure. This also provides a process for re-designing structures that do not provide adequate support. It can be used by building leaders alone, or to engage others in a school-wide discussion.

Step 1 List all existing committees, task forces and other groups in your building.

- Identify the charge statement for each structure, assess it for clarity and determine if it is critical to school functioning and assists with achieving the school's goals.
- Identify the membership in each group.

Step 2 Review all committees and groups listed in Step 1. Consider the following questions about them.

- Efficiency
 - Are there any groups with a similar focus that could be combined?
 - Are there any groups that are unnecessary (e.g. outdated purpose, could be accomplished by an individual).
- Accountability
 - Is it clear which groups are responsible for key areas in the SIP and other priority building functions?
- Appropriate Representation
 - Are key roles appropriately represented on each group (e.g. is the Behavior Specialist involved in the behavior/climate committee)?
- Linkages, communications, and decision-making
 - Is there a clear link between all groups and the leadership/management team in the school?
 - Is it clear which decisions are made and by whom? How are they communicated internally and to all stakeholders?

Step 3 Re-think how the school structure is organized.

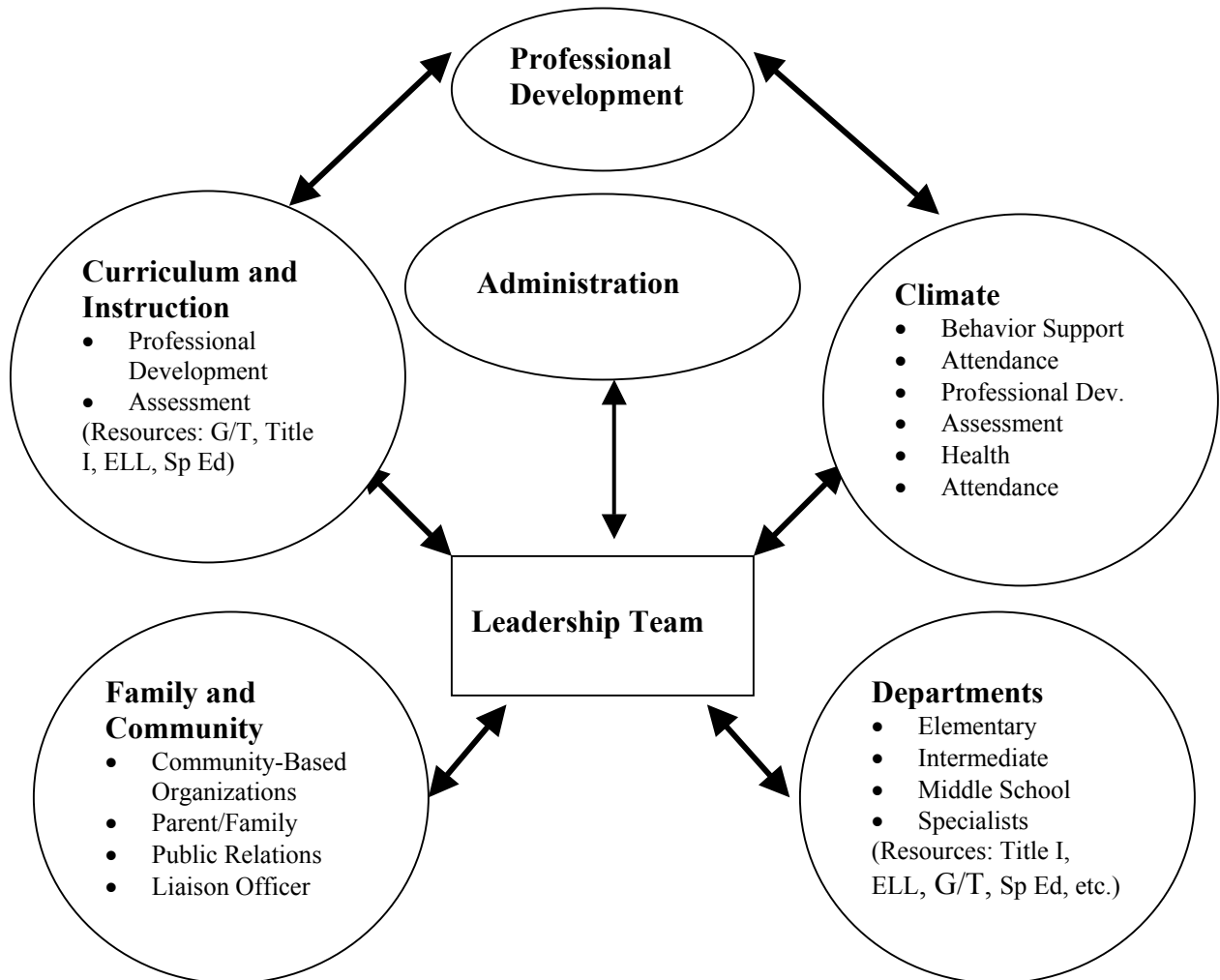
- List key committees and/or task forces you intend to include.
- Create a charge statement of purpose for each group that clearly defines the main purpose for the group and key responsibilities/outcomes. Clearly articulate how it fits with your SIP and school's vision/mission. Whenever feasible, include the staff in this discussion.
- List all positions/roles that should be represented in each group. Be sure the groups are balanced for representation across grade levels, gender, etc.
- Determine how often each group needs to meet to accomplish its tasks.
- Determine how each group will connect to the whole to share information and resources. Include those expectations in the charge statement.
- Draw a picture of your organizational design (refer to the example in this section).
- Communicate the design and rationale to all staff and school stakeholders.



Tool: Sample School-Based Organizational Design Model

This sample model from a Minneapolis school reflects communication flow and possible committee responsibilities. It illustrates an infrastructure for improving decision-making. The focus of this model is the leadership team, which is linked in all directions with the various committees.

<p><u>Each committee should have:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A charge statement Delineated tasks Defined membership A set meeting schedule A one-year chairperson position Cross-representation from the school 	<p><u>This model incorporates the following strategies.</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shared leadership 1-2 outcomes that align with the SIP Building-wide planning calendar that reflects work of all committees Action planning notes are taken and distributed Agendas distributed before the meeting Administrators attend leadership team meeting and others, as possible
---	---





Tool: Effective Meetings

This brief guide outlines the steps for creating an effective agenda for building meetings. A common agenda form that is used across the building helps support consistency as groups are making their decisions.

Developing an Agenda

- Define purpose of meeting and expected results.
- Set length of meeting.
- List content (agenda items).
- Set times for each agenda item.
- Plan process for each topic (action needed).
- Scale down if necessary.
- Post clear agenda with times and persons presenting.

Closing Steps

- At end of each meeting, recorder reads over notes. This provides group an opportunity to remember and recap discussion before they disperse.
- Close meeting with these questions:
 1. Who will do what by when?
 2. Who will communicate informally and formally to whom?
 3. What will be communicated regarding decisions at today's meeting?
 4. What are the next steps?
 5. Under what conditions would you be tempted to deviate from these communication agreements that we just made?



Tool: Getting Your Point Across

Use these tips when leaders need to set a specific direction for the school.

Make your thinking and reasoning visible

- Describe the focus of your advocacy: “An issue that is important to me is...”
- Describe your reasoning: “I came to this conclusion because...”
- Describe your feelings: “I feel _____ about this.”
- Distinguish data from interpretation: “This is the data I have as objectively as I can state it. Now here is what I think the data means.”
- Reveal your perspective: “I’m seeing this from the viewpoint of _____ or _____ or _____.”
- Frame the wider content that surrounds these issues: “Several groups would be affected by what I propose...”
- Give concrete examples: “To get a clear picture, imagine that you are in school X...”

Test your assumptions and conclusions

- Encourage others to explore your model, assumptions and data: “What do you think about what I just said? Do you see any flaws in my reasoning? What can you add?”
- Reveal where you are least clear: “Here’s one area you might help me think through...”
- Stay open. Encourage others to provide different views: “Do you see it differently?”
- Search for distortions, deletions and generalizations: “In what I’ve presented, do you believe I might have over-generalized, or left out data or reported data incorrectly?”



Tool: Ways to Bring a Group to Consensus

This tip sheet provides some simple ways to bring a group to consensus as they make decisions.

Table Go Round

One person states position. Next person in circle either agrees or modifies first statement. Third person either agrees with second person's statement or modifies it. Process continues until one statement has made it all the way around the table, with everyone agreeing to it without modification.

Fist to Five

Members indicate opinion of a proposal by holding up hand:

- Fist: "It is not a good plan and I will block it."
- One finger: "I do not like the plan, but I can live with it and won't block it."
- Two fingers: "I do not like the plan, but I do not have strong feelings about it. I will support it."
- Three fingers: "I am neutral on the proposal and will support it."
- Four fingers: "I like the plan and I will work for it."
- Five fingers: "I am very enthusiastic about this plan and will be a leader in implementing it."

Once all participants have indicated how they feel, facilitator asks any blockers, "What part of the proposal do you object to?" This is done to deal with misunderstanding or overlooked points. Additionally, it places accountability and responsibility where it rightfully belongs.



Tool: Communications Loops and Bands

This tip sheet provides a visual reminder about the use of bands and loops in planning for communication.

Broad bands of information require short loops of communication.

Narrow bands of information can go through long loops.

Loops	
Long loops occur when messages are written or printed. They work best for narrow bands .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newsletters • Journal or newspaper articles • Note home • White papers • Advertisements or announcements • Email (most of the time)
Short loops occur when people talk to each other directly or over the phone. They are effective with broad bands .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent conferences • Conversations • Focus groups • Phone/online conversations • Chat rooms/text messaging • Meetings
Bands	
Broad bands carry complex messages that may have an emotional impact. They require short loops .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explanations for decisions • New policies or procedures • Information intended to convince or change minds.
Narrow bands carry clear and unambiguous messages. They work with long loops .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time and date for meeting • School closing dates • Phone numbers and addresses

Source: Royce Holladay, M.Ed., HSDP, Human Systems Dynamics Institute



Tool: Vehicles for Communication: Nine Times, Nine Ways

Use this tip sheet to plan a variety of ways to communicate with staff, students, parents and caregivers, and community members.

School Newsletter

- Make it simple and straightforward: Just the facts!
- Embed the information in a story about the school.
- Use a simple schedule if information is date, time and place.
- Use a “Note from the Principal” to convey information.
- Use a cartoon or illustration to carry message.
- Include a direct invitation from one or more classes or students in school.

Notes Home to Parents

- Use notes home to parents from teacher of their child.
- Have each class send a fun and interesting invitation to own parents.
- Have oldest grade level “host” event and issue invitations to parents and community.

Use Pictures/Words

- Have students draw pictures or make posters about event and post throughout school.
- Have student make posters that can be distributed in community or shared with members of parent organization.
- Create a motto or unusual name for an event and build all communications around this theme.

Involve Parent Organization

- Provide copier-ready text for them to use in own newsletters.
- Provide stories or articles for their own newsletters.
- Provide information from students about upcoming event.

Source: Royce Holladay, M.Ed., HSDP, Human Systems Dynamics Institute.



Tool: Creating Simple Rules

Simple rules are broad, with the capacity to guide decision-making in any situation. They speak to organization-wide issues and behaviors, rather than situation-specific actions. This tip sheet provides instructions about how to develop simple rules along with the “rules” that will help with implementation.

Creating simple rules

- Use verb phrases. The rules should indicate action to take.
- Make the rules general, rather than specific. The rules should describe the actions that will carry out the values of the school in any situation.
- Keep the list short and general. It is best that you have no more than nine. If there are more, then you are not being general enough, and people won't be able to remember them anyway.
- Establish the conditions for success. Include at least one rule about each of the following:
 - Who you are as a school (class or group)
 - How to deal with the diversity among you
 - How you will share resources (information, time, energy, etc.)

“Rules” about living according to simple rules

- Make the expectations explicit. Talk about and agree on what kinds of specific behavior are expected in different situations, given these rules. Talk about what is not expected or tolerated.
- Teach everyone how to use these rules. Talk about how these rules can influence decision-making and how to let them guide behavior.
- Agree on actions to be taken when the rules are violated or forgotten. Make sure that the “punishment fits the crime.” Make sure that each individual (student and staff) understands his or her responsibility for using respectful and supportive ways to hold others accountable for using the simple rules.
- Review the rules periodically to ensure that they still “fit.” Reviewing the simple rules often will help in two ways. First, review emphasizes the importance of the simple rules and gives people a chance to talk about them. Second, review gives people an opportunity to address new issues if and when they arise.

Steps to develop and use your own list of simple rules

Step One

Talk about the current simple rules.

- What are they?
- What do they mean here?
- What have they been in the past?

Step Two

Brainstorm a list using questions such as:

- What do we value?
- What do we want to create in our relationships?
- How do we want to function?
- What is important to us?

Step Three

Refine the list:

- Which rules are redundant?
- Which are subsets of others?
- What will be done anyway?
- Anything missing?

Step Four

Implement the list:

- Publish the list.
- Talk about and decide what exact behaviors the simple rules call for in various situations.
- Agree on the actions that will be taken when someone forgets or violates a simple rule.
- Set the expectations and make sure that everyone understands them.
- Hold each other accountable.



Tool: Study Group Logistics and Tips

This tip sheet provides guidelines for establishing study groups to build collegiality in your school.

Establishing a professional learning community through the use of study groups will help create a collegial culture and support student achievement.

Precepts of Study Groups

- They are developed to meet needs of students.
- They will change teacher/staff behavior.
- They use evidence-based practices to inform the knowledge base.
- They are driven by data and results of student performance.
- Participants have passion around content in study group.

Study Group Logistics and Tips

- Meetings are regularly scheduled at least twice each month.
- Study groups focus on one topic for a half-year or full year.
- There are three to six members in a study group.
- Minimal time for study group is 60 minutes with 90 to 120 minutes recommended.
- Norms are established at first meeting.
- Roles of facilitator, recorder, and timekeeper are rotated among team members and set up on a schedule for each meeting.
- Protocols are used to drive meeting agendas and developed with times for each item.
- Action plan is written at second or third meeting that includes what group will learn to change their practice and how they will conduct study group.
- Artifacts of student work, observation in learning environments and video taping of instructional practice are necessary to bring reality to study group.
- Minutes or logs of study groups are taken at each meeting and reflect discussion of group and participants' change in behavior.
- Minutes/logs and group action plans are displayed so all members can see work.
- Each month study groups connect with each other to share learning and reflections on how their practices are changing.
- Celebrations are held each quarter to acknowledge work of the group.
- Administration is part of study group process. Recommend that principal be in one study group for duration of group.
- Professional steering committee is made up of one member from each study group and administration meets monthly to monitor and adjust study group process.