Data-Driven Human Capital Strategies

CYCLE OF IMPROVEMENT PLAYBOOK:
Human Capital

Implement, Monitor and Adjust the Plan

SEPTEMBER 2021

Background

A cycle of improvement uses data and other information to identify key successes and challenges in a system and creates a vision and plan for the most important work that needs to be done. This cycle of improvement playbook lays out a framework that leaders can use within a local education agency (LEA) to improve their human resources work through five key steps [Figure 1]. Using a Cycle of Improvement Framework allows an LEA to identify and focus on the most important work based on their data, context, and available resources. Each step of the Cycle of Improvement Framework is described in detail in this playbook, with examples of what it looks like in practice and recommended tools and resources that can be used at that step.

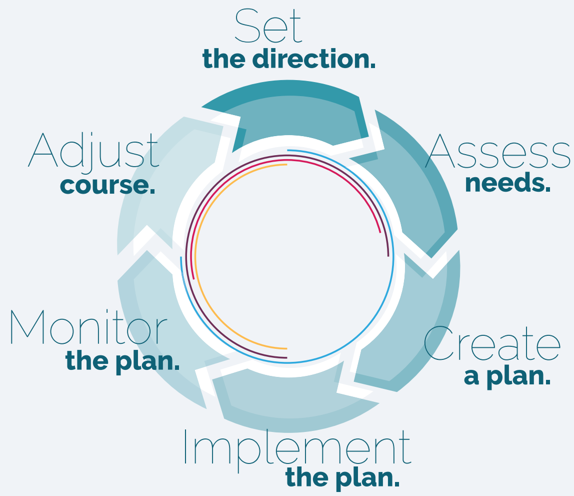

Figure 1.
The Cycle of Improvement

Implement, Monitor and Adjust the Plan

Overview

This is the third and final guide in the Cycle of Improvement Playbook. In the first step, Assess, the focus is on understanding and benchmarking the functionality of an LEA's human capital system. The second step, Create a Plan, lays out a process by which an LEA can set measurable goals, metrics and strategies to improve human capital effectiveness. While it is important to implement plans with fidelity, an organization should be flexible and monitor key metrics and milestones throughout implementation to make adjustments, where necessary, based on what is and is not working. This guide provides details on these three concurrent steps:

1. **Implement:** The process by which the LEA executes on the tactical plan; and best practices to put the right governance structure in place to support execution of the plan.
2. **Monitor:** The process by which the LEA measures and analyzes interim and summative goals to understand the quality of implementation.

3. **Adjust:** The process of making course corrections or pivots in strategy based on metrics.

This guide also includes a sample scenario and templates and tools (e.g., a communications plan) that LEAs can use when executing a human capital change plan (see appendices, beginning on **page 9**).

Implementing the Plan

Before implementation can begin, the HR leader plays a key role in ensuring that the appropriate resources—people, time and money—are in place to effectively implement the plan. Prior to implementation of the plan, the HR leader should ask:

- *Have we secured the necessary funds and resources required to execute the plan?*
  - ↳ ***If yes,*** have these been allocated appropriately based on the needs of the plan?
  - ↳ ***If no,*** does the timeline for execution need to shift or goals need to be re-evaluated?
- *Is the lead for this project accountable for execution of the plan, and does the project lead have proper authority to execute on the plan with support from others?*
- *Does our existing staff have the time, skills and expertise to execute the plan?*
  - ↳ ***If yes,*** do we need to re-prioritize or realign any of their roles or performance expectations?
  - ↳ ***If not,*** what roles are needed? Can we source these roles internally or do we need to hire externally?

In addition, the HR leader has an important role in communicating the goals of the project and its importance to all staff members. Everyone's buy-in to the project is important—whether they are directly involved in executing on the project or not—and all participants need to understand their roles and how they will support the change effort.

Establishing a Project Lead: A project lead must be accountable for the execution of the plan and have the authority to make the day-to-day decisions on the project. The project lead is responsible for monitoring the plan and communicating key information and metrics to decision-makers. Most importantly, the project lead keeps the team focused on executing the tactical plan—hitting key milestones and dates. The project lead can meet regularly with the team to review key priorities for the week and review any items on the plan that are delayed or off-track. The project lead should keep the team focused on the most important priorities for the project at any given moment and help the team troubleshoot issues that arise.

Establishing Project Milestones: An essential part of implementation is for the project lead to establish **critical milestones** to help check progress and determine whether the project is on track to meet its goals. Milestones are generally key events in a project that are necessary to occur for future tasks/activities to be successful. For example, if the goal is to launch a new teacher leadership program in your LEA, a critical milestone is launching the initial application for teacher leader positions and another critical milestone would be accepting the first cohort of teacher leaders.

Establish a Communication Plan: Throughout implementation, be clear about who needs to be in the communication loop. **What** needs to be communicated **with whom** and **when**? To follow the teacher leader example, the LEA should consider **when** they need to communicate with **teachers and principals** about the new program and **what** the key messages are. The communication plan may also contain the timing of updates and meetings for various stakeholders. The plan should specify the following information for each communication activity:

- **Stakeholder: Individual or group**
- **Communications Tool:** *Electronic update, focused meeting, gathering*
- **Purpose:** *Give/get information, working group/problem solving, gaining buy-in*
- **Frequency:**
- **Lead (facilitator):**
- **Attendees:**

OPTIONAL: Establishing a Project Steering Committee

For larger projects that often require a cross-divisional effort, LEAs with the capacity/ enough personnel may consider establishing a steering committee for the project, so they can provide input and guidance to the project lead and other team members on major decisions. A typical steering committee generally includes the project lead, the project sponsor (whoever is in charge of the office allocating the resources—in this case most likely the LEA's HR lead), and other key senior stakeholders who have the authority to make decisions. The size and scope of the project will ultimately influence who is on the steering committee, but a best practice is to have a range of stakeholders who can provide expertise on project-related issues (e.g., Director of Finance, Director of IT).

Purposes of Meetings:

1. To give information... make an announcement
2. To get information... discover, fact find, collect data, question and answer
3. To solve a problem... define, generate alternate solutions, pick one, plan action
4. To gain commitment... persuade, negotiate, sell

For more information on how to engage and communicate with key stakeholders throughout implementation, see the **How to Guide for Engaging Stakeholders**. A sample communications plan template can be found in **Appendix 1**.

Leverage Project Management Tools: Finally, to ease implementation and make sure that the project lead and team can keep track of all the associated project tasks and deliverables, you may use project management software to remind team members of upcoming tasks and deliverables and to allow everyone to see a live version of the plan. Regardless of the size of the implementation team, tools like Google Spreadsheets or Google Docs can help ensure that the project team has access to all the appropriate project documents and materials. For those LEAs with additional capacity, commercial tools like Trello, Asana or Basecamp can be especially helpful and make sure the team stays on top of key tasks (many also have free versions available).

Monitor the Plan

LEAs need strong processes in place to monitor whether the project is on schedule and, most importantly, whether they are making progress toward goals. This includes defining key metrics that will be used to monitor progress and having consistent progress monitoring tools in place, with a shared understanding of how and when those measures are shared with stakeholders.

Establish Metrics to Monitor Progress toward Goals: At the start of implementation, the project team should determine key metrics that will help assess progress towards the stated goals of the project (as defined in Step 2: Create the Plan). For example, if the goal is to hire 95 percent of teachers by May 1 to improve the quality of the pool (again, as identified in Step 2), a critical progress-to-goal metric would be the month-by-month target for the number of teachers hired, leading up to May 1 (e.g., percent of teachers hired each month beginning in late winter). The team closely monitors this critical metric each month and uses the information to assess the strategies in their plan and whether they are in fact leading to earlier teacher hiring. Progress-to-goal metrics are also called **leading indicators:** indicators that provide insight into the cause of reaching goals and provide the ability to track progress in the current year. In this example, the actual percentage of teachers hired by May 1 is the **lagging indicator**, which shows whether the performance measure was attained or not.

Examples of Leading and Lagging Indicators:

Hiring Teachers Early Goal: 95 percent of teachers are hired by May 1 (Lagging Indicator)

Progress-to-Goal Measures (Leading Indicators):

- Number of teachers hired by month (leading up to May 1)
- Number of teacher applications by month
- Number of teacher interviews by month

New Teacher Retention Goal: 90 percent retention of high performing new teachers after their first year (Lagging Indicator)

Progress-to-Goal Measures (Leading Indicators):

- Resignations of new teachers by month
- Number of new teachers receiving mentoring and induction support
- Number of new teachers, non-renewed/number of teachers offered a continuing contract for next year
- New teacher satisfaction measures (e.g., regarding mentoring, induction, or work environment)

LEAs can use the following questions to help develop progress measures:

- *During regular check-ins, what data would show that progress is being made against this goal?*
- *How will you know that implementation is moving you towards the project goal?*
- *What data are already collected that would show progress?* ***What useful data is not currently collected, but could be?***
- *If actions from the plan are taken and there is progress on these measures, on a scale of 1-100, what is the confidence that the goal will be reached?*

The focus on selecting progress measures should be quality rather than quantity; it's best if you can focus on a few key metrics for each goal. The team should also consider:

- *the LEA's ability to collect the data;*
- *the degree of accuracy/reliability and integrity of the data; and*
- *how well the selected measures can accurately predict success with the end goal.*

Once the key metrics are selected, the team will need to determine the frequency/timing of measuring and reporting (weekly, bi-weekly or identify a milestone date). This will help to determine the timing of progress reviews. In addition, identify the owner who will be responsible for gathering and sharing the data. See Appendix 2 for a table to identify and track progress measures.

Develop Dashboards and Other Tools to Monitor Progress: To provide transparency across the project team and various stakeholders, teams can track these key measures in a dashboard that can be reviewed on a regular basis in weekly team meetings. The goal of the dashboard is to give all team members a quick view of what is happening across the project and easily understand whether tasks are on track and whether progress is being made. As mentioned above, when selecting key progress measures, take into account that the dashboard will need to be populated by team members (hence the need to assign an owner to each metric); generally, fewer measures are better. Teams may also find that they have one or two dashboards for different audiences: one for team meetings and another for steering committee meetings or management meetings. See Appendix 3 for a project dashboard template.

Establish Quarterly or Broader Step-Back Meetings: Beyond the weekly meetings that help guide the project team, many organizations use a quarterly or monthly review of the project's progress with HR leadership. This meeting provides information on the goals and project activities and time to discuss **how the strategy may be impacted by work in other areas (or vice versa).** These meetings are a great opportunity to celebrate progress and help the broader team see how their work is integrated and aligned. The entire team can also join in troubleshooting areas where the project may have gone off-track.

Don't Ignore the Qualitative Data: When monitoring the success of a project, the numbers only tell so much. Understand how key stakeholders are experiencing these new strategies. For example, when executing on a plan to hire teachers earlier in the year, an LEA should also hold focus groups and survey teachers who were hired early to understand what worked in their hiring experience and why they selected jobs at LEA. Further, they should also talk to principals to understand the impact the early hiring strategies had on their decision-making. Qualitative data can be time consuming to collect, but it should not be overlooked as a way to better understand what is working or not.

Adjust the Plan

LEAs that are most effective at implementing human capital improvement efforts continually revisit their goals and plan (Step 2) and in some cases find themselves revisiting how they assess their needs and priorities (Step 1) over time. This last step, Adjust, is about learning from implementation and monitoring efforts and making the necessary changes to the plan, its goals, and/or strategies deployed. This last step often requires strong leadership to make critical decisions and help get a project back on track.

Timeline Adjustments: When a project is off-track in terms of its timeline, the project team must **first understand why**. Teams can use the questions below to collectively determine why the project is off-track:

- *Is the right staff involved in the project? (under/over staffed)*
- *Is the project getting the prioritization it needs at the right levels? (leadership, Board, etc.)*
- *Was the timeline for the project realistic? Does the timeline need to be updated based on new information?*
- *Does the project have sufficient resources? (e.g., people, money)*
- *Have any major barriers arisen that weren't anticipated or that may have proven to be more challenging than in initial assessment?*

Based on the answers above, the plan may need to be adjusted to reflect a more realistic timeline or account for external factors that may not have existed at the time of planning. If the team finds that the project is off-track because of resource issues (time, money or people), a senior leader may need to ensure that the appropriate resources are secured.

Programmatic Adjustments: While the progress toward goal measures (leading indicators) can help a team understand whether a project is off-track, the metrics themselves do not always indicate what's needed to be more successful. This is where qualitative data can be particularly useful. Interviewing or surveying key stakeholders can help your team to better understand the data and identify how to change a strategy. For example, if principals are interviewing teacher candidates earlier, but waiting to make offers, the team might need to speak to principals or principal supervisors directly to better understand the reasons behind the delays.

In addition to talking to key stakeholders, project teams can use a variety of tools and frameworks to **understand the root causes of problems they are facing in implementation**. By understanding the problems more clearly, they can better adjust the strategy and plan to meet the needs. A tool that can help the project diagnose the specific challenge and come up with possible solutions to address the issue is a **Root Cause Analysis Tool**. The Root Cause Analysis Tool (also called a Fishbone Diagram) provides a framework for teams to brainstorm and categorize possible causes of the problem—for instance, what processes, policies, people, technology, and/or tools impact your problem?

Finally, when a decision is made to make an adjustment to the project plan—big or small—the project team needs to decide how and when to communicate this change to stakeholders and anyone who may be directly impacted by the decision. The project team should generally consider the following key questions when making an adjustment to the plan:

1. *Why is the adjustment to the plan or program being made? What information or data is this based upon?*
2. *When does the adjustment to the plan or strategy need to be made? Why?*
3. *Who needs to know about the change? How will you communicate about the change?*

The project team should not overlook that while adjustments to a plan or strategy are important, **too many mid-course changes at one time may overwhelm stakeholders**. The balance is in making the necessary adjustments that will drive a more successful implementation, while also not creating so much change that stakeholders end up being confused or disengaged from the strategy or program.

Summary

Successful implementation, with consistent monitoring of progress and results, can improve the quality of an LEA's workforce. While much of the attention may be put on properly assessing current human capital needs and creating a quality plan, without discipline around the execution of the plan the project is unlikely to succeed. Ultimately, successful implementation of human capital strategies year after year can lead to dramatic improvements in student achievement.

APPENDIX 1: Sample Scenario

Hiring Teachers Early

District Profile: Urban **Student Population:** 100K+ **Economically Disadvantaged:** 80%+

Context: The district analyzed their teacher hiring and found that while they were 95% staffed at the start of the school year, most of their new hires were occurring over the summer months and just 30% of new teachers were hired by the end of May. As a result, the district believes they are losing out on some great teacher candidates.*

Current Analysis Themes:

1. Half of all positions are posted by the end of May, but just 30% of positions are filled by the end of May.
2. While the district does offer early contracts to make district-based offers to teachers in the Spring, less than 50% of these convert to new hires by the fall.

Planning: First the Chief of HR brought together a team from across the district to share the importance of early hiring and to determine the goals of the project: hire 95% of their teachers by May 1 and hire 80% of teachers who are offered early contracts from the district. The Chief of HR worked with the cross-functional team on outlining the tactical plan for achieving these goals.

Implement, Monitor & Adjust: The district began by assigning a project lead to work on the early hiring initiative: the Director of Staffing. The project team included the Director of Staffing, Director of Recruitment, Manager from Special Education (in charge of hiring special education teachers), and 2 other HR personnel.

They launched the project in the fall of 2018 by announcing the change at an all-principals meeting and sharing the streamlined hiring timeline and key hiring events for January and February. As the project team worked on execution over the next few months, they found that despite a high-quality early contract pool and more hiring events, principals were still not making earlier hiring decisions on candidates. The project lead decided to raise the issue and share the data at the next Steering Committee meeting. The Committee included a principal supervisor and a principal; the project lead thought they might have some experience that would be useful in understanding the problem. The Committee suggested reaching out to some principals to understand what they thought of the quality of the candidate pool. The Committee also suggested looking at the data to see if there were themes or patterns in terms of which principals were slow to hire.

As a result, the project team reached out to several principals and found that they did not think that the quality of the teacher pool was very high; principals were waiting to hire student teachers or substitute teachers who were working in their schools. Principals also complained that while they knew the importance of early hiring, their school-based hiring committees did not understand the importance and didn't want to move as quickly on candidates.

The team also found that princiapls of low need, higher performing schools were more likely to wait to make hires. As a result, they decided to make two adjustments to their plan and strategies. The first was to ask principal supervisors to share information with each principal on the number of new hires made per month at each school; nothing like a little competition to get them going! The second was to offer trainings to school-based hiring committees on the importance of early hiring. The third adjustment they identified would need to be put in place the following year: they would need to create a stronger rubric for making early contract hiring decisions and provide better training to HR team members who offered early contracts to candidates at hiring events.

They planned to monitor these adjustments and see if it helped increase the progress to goal (leading indicator) of monthly new hires leading up to May 1.

APPENDIX 2: Implement Communications Plan Example

	Communications process				Content to be covered		
Stakeholder	Communications tool	Date	Purpose	Lead	Initiative 1	Initiative 2	Initiative 3
Superintendent	*List type of communications tool (e.g., meeting, email, forum, etc).*	*MM/YYYY*	*Purpose of Meeting*	*Designate leader for each tool*	*List issues to be covered within each related initiative*		
Steering Committee *(i.e., Academics Lead, IT, Finance)*	EXAMPLE: Steering Committee Meeting	Monthly, starting after project kick-off	Communicate project progress	Chief of HR			
HR Leadership Team			In-person presentation	Project Lead			
All Staff							
Teachers, Principals	EXAMPLE: Monthly newsletter with updates and stories on progress	Monthly, starting September 2020	Email	Project Lead			

APPENDIX 3: Monitor - Identifying and Tracking Progress Measures

Progress Measure	**Frequency of measure**	**Reporting/milestone date (Align to progress tracking check-ins)**	**Owner**

APPENDIX 3: Monitor – Project Dashboard Template

Strategic Goal Area	Strategy/Initiative	Upcoming Milestones	Leading Indicators	Status (Code in Color) Off-track Risk of being Off-Track On-Track
Recruit & Build a Quality Teacher Candidate Pool	Offer early contracts to teacher candidates in the winter/ spring	2/1 Early Hiring Event	• # of early contracts offered by month • # of early hiring fairs held each month	
Strategic & Equitable Staffing	Encourage mutual consent between teachers and schools	3/1 Mutual Consent Hiring Fair	• # of mutual consent hiring events • # of teachers receiving mutual consent offers by month	

CYCLE OF IMPROVEMENT PLAYBOOK:

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CREATED BY:

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