Assess yourself

Using self assessment for performance improvement

Accounts Commission
Commission
for Scotland

MAY 1998

This paper is structured as follows:

The Accounts Commission is a statutory, independent body which, through the audit process, assists local authorities and the health service in Scotland to achieve the highest standards of financial stewardship and the economic, efficient and effective use of their resources.

The Commission has five main responsibilities:

- securing the external audit

- following up issues of concern identified through the audit, to ensure satisfactory resolutions

- reviewing the management arrangements which audited bodies have in place to achieve value for money

- carrying out national value for money studies to improve economy, efficiency and effectiveness in local government and the NHS

- issuing an annual direction to local authorities which sets out the range of performance information which they are required to publish.

The Commission secures the audit of 32 councils, 36 joint boards (including police and fire services), 15 health boards, 47 NHS trusts and five other NHS bodies. In total these organisations spend public funds worth around £12 billion a year.

This is the first in a series a series of management papers being produced by the Management Studies Unit at the Accounts Commission for Scotland. These papers are intended to support best practice in public sector management by disseminating ideas, approaches and techniques which managers should find useful.

The Unit welcomes feedback.

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(00053)

1 Introduction

This paper describes how self assessment can be used to promote improved performance in local authorities and contribute to continuous improvement. It is intended for managers using the Accounts Commission management arrangements modules.

It draws on the experience of self assessment in the private and public sectors and sets out some practical tools that managers can employ to get the most out of self assessment sessions.

Self assessment underpins many quality and performance improvement initiatives and can be used by managers to improve understanding of their organisations and to identify opportunities for continuous improvement. Continuous improvement is central to the Accounts Commission's management arrangements audits and to the Best Value framework.

Management Arrangements Modules

1: Corporate and service planning and budgetary control
2: Managing people
3: Managing resources
4: Organisational design

In 1997, the Accounts Commission launched two self assessment modules for the audit of local authority management arrangements. This approach represents a new development in the audit of local authorities. The audit is structured as a self assessment audit to support continuous improvement. Managers assess their current performance against elements of good practice set out in the Commission's modules and develop action plans for improvement which the auditor will monitor in future years. The auditor's role is supporting the authority's improvement processes and monitoring the implementation of action plans.

The Commission's first two management arrangements modules covered Corporate and Service Planning and Budgetary Control and Managing People. Two further modules are planned for 1998, on Managing Resources and Organisational Design.

Authorities have approached self assessment in different ways. The most comprehensive assessments have been undertaken by groups of managers working together to reach consensus on current performance and areas for improvement. Consequently, the Commission now recommends that the management arrangements audits are undertaken using group self assessment by senior managers.

2 Continuous improvement and self assessment

Self assessment is a key tool in the drive for continuous improvement. Continuous improvement is the challenge facing all organisations in the public or private sectors. Pressure on resources, increased expectations from customers and service users, technological advances and the increasing availability of comparative information mean that organisations are required to deliver more and better services to meet customer needs and maintain customer satisfaction.

Most organisations have experienced improvement or quality initiatives that have failed. Many such initiatives either falter quickly, or are abandoned, before they have achieved their aims, often to be replaced by some new approach or technique. Consequently, improvement initiatives come to be seen as faddish and it is little wonder that organisations and individuals become weary of them and sceptical about their likely success. If performance improvement is tackled as a series of initiatives that can be started and stopped, or simply allowed to lapse, it can feel like an additional burden, rather than as central to the success of the organisation. Many organisations have now learned that it is better to maintain and support a continuous focus on performance improvement than have to set up new initiatives to meet new challenges. Sporadic or intermittent focus on improvement can mean that organisations fail to identify poor performance or opportunities for improvement until it is too late.

Continuous improvement maintains momentum and drive for performance improvement. The classic quality cycle of Assess, Plan, Act, Check can be embedded into planning programmes to ensure that continuous improvement becomes integral to the organisation's working. Poor performance is seldom the result of an isolated incident or mistake. It is more often the result of inadequate, or outdated, management arrangements or processes. What was good enough last year, may not be effective today.
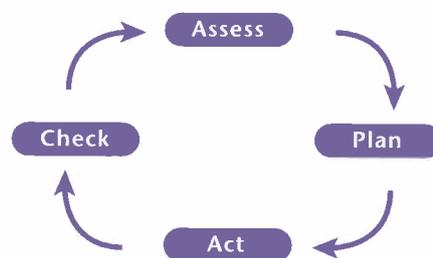
Continuous improvement requires a shift in culture and approach within organisations. Self assessment can help deliver this because it creates new opportunities for involvement and ownership. It is also often less threatening for managers to identify and rectify organisational weaknesses themselves than have a third party to do it for them. This can shorten the time between recognising a problem or opportunity and acting on it.

Continuous improvement is a key element of the best value framework. The task force report on best value includes the following guidance on the continuous improvement that is expected from councils:

> "There are 5 essential questions about each service which councils need to address in planning for continuous improvement:
>
> - What are we seeking to achieve?
>
> - Why are we doing it?
>
> - How are we doing it?
>
> - Are we achieving our goals? and
>
> - Can we get better?
>
> Best Value requires councils to show that they are addressing these questions regularly and are acting on the conclusions reached."

Continuous improvement requires considerable commitment and momentum to flourish beyond initial successes. It is most likely to succeed when:

- there is focus and clear objectives

- effort is made to develop and maintain the involvement of people throughout the organisation in the process

- effective measurement is in place to ensure that results can be monitored and that change is happening in the right areas.

Self assessment contributes to continuous improvement by providing a structured opportunity to assess performance and identify improvements. The Commission's management arrangements modules will provide local authorities with the opportunity to assess and continuously improve their key management arrangements. Each module provides a clear focus on a set of management arrangements to make it easier to generate a manageable action plan of improvements. Improvements to the management arrangements of local authorities will support improved performance.
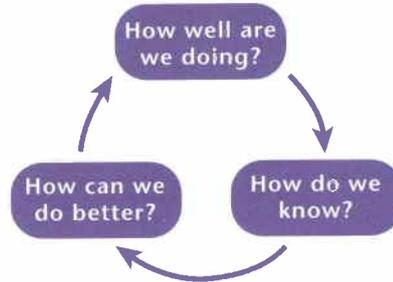
3 Self assessment

Performance improvement starts with the question: "How well are we doing?" Self assessment helps to answer that question, and those that flow from it:

"How do we know?" and "How can we do better?"

Internationally, nationally and at the level of organisations and individuals, self assessment has become widely used to secure performance improvement. It is a central element of the most widely used quality improvement models.

The *Baldridge Award* in the United States and the *European Quality Award,* organised by the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM), both involve self assessment against a model set of criteria for excellent performance. One million copies of the Baldridge Award criteria have been distributed in the United States. Well over 30,000 copies of the EFQM Guidelines for Self Assessment have been produced and over 10,000 of those copies have been sold in Britain.

Investors in People (IIP) also requires organisations to assess themselves against a national standard of good practice in managing people. By July 1996, around 4,200 organisations had gone through this process and were recognised as Investors in People. Over 20,000 organisations - covering 27% of the UK workforce - have committed to achieving IIP status.

The *Quality Initiative in Scottish Schools* is underpinned by *How Good is Our School?* This is a comprehensive self-evaluation package for use in individual schools and education authorities which includes a set of performance indicators covering all key areas of a school's work. This pack has been distributed to every school in Scotland and is being used to involve teachers, parents and pupils in identifying and planning improvements.

Self assessment is also a key part of many appraisal and performance management systems which encourage individual employees to reflect on their past performance and identify how it can improve.

Benefits of Self Assessment

The popularity and growing use of self assessment stems from the benefits that it generates. Self assessment uses and values the knowledge of those who work in an organisation and this can help to secure their participation in, and ownership of, the performance improvement programme. Securing ownership can be the most difficult aspect of performance improvement and the absence of ownership is often the reason why improvement programmes fail.

The most detailed research into the use of self assessment in organisations has been carried out to assess the impact of self assessment using the EFQM framework. A 1993 study[1] found that self assessment helped organisations to identify and prioritise strengths and weaknesses and ensure these were addressed and integrated into business strategies and plans. Self assessment also encouraged internal and external comparisons between divisions and departments and contributed to setting strategic direction and to business planning processes. Self assessment can also help to create a learning culture by encouraging participants to ask "How well are we doing?" and "How can we improve?"

Other benefits realised by organisations using self assessment include:

- securing greater focus on, and commitment to, continuous improvement among managers and employees

- better performance measurement

- better action planning

- improved operational and financial performance

- improved customer satisfaction

- shared understanding among management teams

- management education

- personal growth and development of those involved in the process.

Self assessment uses the knowledge that already exists within the organisation. It does not require specialist knowledge to be brought in. Consequently, the skills and knowledge that are acquired during self assessment stay with the organisation after the assessment process is complete.

Bringing together managers with knowledge of the authority means that the assessment process can begin and progress quickly. There is no steep learning curve about the organisation - although participants in self assessment will usually learn things about their organisation that they did not already know. Group discussion and consensus building encourages ownership of the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation and of any improvement plans generated to address weaknesses.

The process of self assessment works. It can be applied to any size business unit within a company including those that do not have external customers. Through the self assessment process, management teams are setting the agenda for their improvement activity in the forthcoming period.

BT
Business Improvement through Self Assessment

Self assessment is essentially concerned with organisational learning. There is no "right" approach, only an approach that suits your organisation.

Assessing Business Excellence

[1] 1993 Bristol quality survey - see Assessing Business Excellence

4 Group self assessment

In the first year of the management arrangements audit, authorities undertook self assessment in various ways, with varying results.

The most comprehensive assessments were undertaken by groups of managers reaching consensus on current performance and areas for improvements. Those assessments reflected a shared view of current performance and priorities that could be recognised within the authority. Assessments completed by one person are more likely to be subjective and incomplete.

It is essential that the people who complete the assessment also agree and can implement the action plan. In some councils, the management arrangements action plans were put to management teams for approval separately from the assessment from which they came. This wasted time and effort as one group of people tried to work out why another group of people, or person, had chosen to address a particular set of issues.

The Commission now recommends that managers use group self assessment to complete the management arrangements proformas.

This approach has the following benefits:

- group self-assessment enables consensus to be reached about current performance and areas for improvement

- those responsible for delivering improvements are involved in assessing what those improvements should be

- open discussion reduces the risk of subjectivity and bias

- managers will gain a wider understanding of the authority/department.
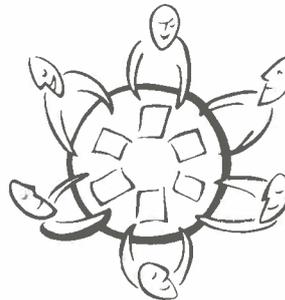
Group self assessment will only be as good as the group involved. The group needs to have detailed knowledge of the part of the authority being assessed. It may be that additional members are brought into the management team for the assessment, or that the task is delegated to a small group drawn from the management team. In either case, it is worth spending time ensuring that the group undertaking the assessment has the necessary breadth of knowledge and understanding of all parts of the authority being assessed. There is usually a compromise to be made between ensuring that a group is large enough to have the breadth of experience, skills and knowledge to undertake an assessment, and ensuring that it remains small enough so that individual members can contribute effectively. The larger the group, the more important the role of the chair or facilitator in ensuring that all members of the group become involved and can participate.

Maximum benefit will be gained if the group approaches the exercise as a constructive opportunity to learn more about the organisation and identify how it can improve.

Pitfalls to avoid

Self assessment is widely used because it delivers results. However, as with any performance improvement technique, it can be implemented badly, and implementation will affect the outcomes of the process. Creating the right conditions for successful self assessment can save time and increase the rewards from the process. Common pitfalls include failing to ensure that participants understand the process that will be used, the purpose of the exercise and their own role in it. Lack of preparation for self-assessment sessions can mean that time is wasted trying to find evidence to shore up, or discredit, subjective opinions expressed during the assessment session. Assessment sessions are different from most of the meetings that management teams will have and require an atmosphere which enables participants to share and test out opinions, listen to the views of others and be prepared to adjust and alter opinions in the light of discussion.

5 Getting started - success factors

Organisations which have used self assessment effectively to improve performance stress the importance of the following factors in securing positive results from self assessment:

- commitment
- communication
- preparation
- evidence.

Commitment

As with any improvement activity, commitment is required from the senior management team. Without that commitment the exercise will fail to be seen as important and it is unlikely that the necessary inputs to the process will be secured. Commitment is required:

- to the assessment process
- to enable participants to contribute
- to use the process as a learning opportunity
- to use the results of the assessment and implementing improvements
- to integrate the self assessment into existing planning and review frameworks.

Creating the right climate for successful self assessment means ensuring that the exercise is given sufficient status. The involvement of key senior managers is important. Having identified who will take part, commitment to the process can be demonstrated by ensuring that participants are given the time to prepare for, and complete, the assessment. Commitment can also be demonstrated by ensuring that the results of the assessment are shared widely within the organisation and by highlighting and supporting agreed actions resulting from it.

Communication

Effective communication is important. The way in which people first hear about the assessment will have an important influence on how they approach it. Setting out clearly to participants what the purpose of the exercise is, who is involved and what is expected of them will save time and avoid confusion.

It is equally important to ensure good communication with those who are not directly involved in the assessment, particularly employees. This can help to avoid suspicion about the process and the actions that will flow from it. Communicating quickly and clearly the results of the assessment and the actions that will be taken will help to demonstrate commitment to the exercise. It may also help to stimulate the participation of employees in further improvement processes throughout the authority.

It is vital that senior management buy in to the benefits of self assessment and visibly drive this element of business management. They must be seen not only to drive the assessments themselves, but also the follow up activities which will result in business improvement.

Northern Telecom
Business Improvement through
Self Assessment

Communication checklist

Have you set out clearly for participants:

- what the assessment is for
- who is involved and why
- what is expected of them (preparation, participation, approach)
- timescales?

How widely you will report on the assessment?

Who needs to know?

Will you explain:

- what the assessment was for
- who was involved and why
- what the assessment found
- what action will be taken?

How will you report back on the implementation of actions?

Preparation

The value of the outputs from the self assessment will in part be dependent on the quality of the input, ie the quality of the evidence collected and the depth to which the assessment is done.

Introducing Self Assessment

Managers will get out of a self assessment only what they put in. Preparation involves reading self assessment material, becoming familiar with the framework set out in proformas, and coming to an individual view about the strengths and weaknesses of the authority.

Assessment involves putting forward a justifiable assessment of the current situation to help determine:

1 Is it acceptable?

2 Is improvement required?

3 What specifically should be done?

Part of the preparation must be gathering the evidence needed to justify opinions. This will save time in the assessment meeting. Lack of preparation can lead to the wrong focus and, in the long term, little performance improvement.
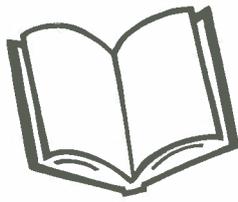
Evidence

A self assessment is only as good as the information on which it was based. Effective management of self assessment means minimising the opportunities for bias by emphasising the need for participants to evidence their views about performance. Time spent collecting evidence will be rewarded with soundly based judgements.

Performance information is essential. The first task is to establish current levels of performance. Establishing trends over time is important. Survey information and performance reports will be useful. Collecting this evidence will be a test of the organisation's performance information system. If robust information to evidence performance is not available, it may indicate that the performance information system needs to be improved.

Having established current performance, the second task is to compare that performance with others. Comparisons may be made within the authority or with external organisations. Performance may also be judged against local or national standards. Comparisons will help decide whether current performance is good enough or could be improved. Evidence should be drawn from the following sources:

- documentation (minutes, plans, reports etc.)

- explanation of a process that has been followed (benchmarking, for example, or training needs analysis)

- feedback/discussion (eg communications about performance standards to employees)

- research/review reports.

6 Assessment to action - generating and prioritising ideas

Assessment

At the assessment meeting, the group will need to work through the proforma and reach agreement on the authority's current performance, based on evidence. It is important that the group maintains a positive approach throughout. Identifying ways in which the authority can improve its performance means identifying ways in which individuals can do their jobs differently or better. This needs to be handled constructively. Discussions should try to focus on solving the problem rather than criticising people. Encourage participants to state problems constructively - "We need more detailed information on budgets more quickly" rather than, "The information finance gives us is rubbish."

Once an assessment of current performance has been agreed, the group needs to prioritise what action should be taken. Ideas for improvement may be collated from individual suggestions made during the assessment process. Collating these ideas may give a wide range of options for improvement, in which case it will be necessary to prioritise the suggestions. A self assessment will usually produce far more ideas for improvement than can be implemented, so prioritisation will be necessary. For the management arrangements audit, the focus is on agreeing a few (say 5 - 6) key improvements that will be implemented. The tools set out later in this section will help to prioritise potential actions.

If areas for improvement have been identified, but not actions that will deliver improvements, it will be necessary first to generate ideas.

Generating ideas

Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a simple process that helps to open up discussion in groups and generate large quantities of ideas. Formality is best kept to a minimum, but there are a few guidelines to follow:

- ensure that everyone has a shared understanding of the question, or topic, being brainstormed

- ensure that someone is responsible for writing all suggestions onto a flip chart

- ensure that there is no evaluation or criticism of ideas during the brainstorming session. This is particularly important. It can be very difficult to resist commenting on suggestions as they are made, but once evaluation or criticism of ideas begins, the flow of ideas will diminish.

Two approaches to brainstorming are:

- everyone shouts out ideas as they think of them

- everyone takes it in turn to offer ideas.

The latter approach can help ensure participation from everyone. A brainstorming
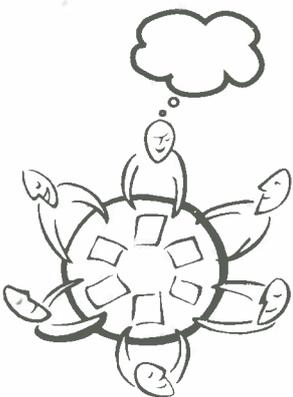
session finishes either once everyone has exhausted their supply of ideas, or after a fixed time period agreed at the beginning of the session.

One of the barriers to successful brainstorming can be the awkwardness people feel when switching out of the formality of their day-to-day roles into the informality of shouting out ideas as they occur, without thinking them through or evaluating them first. A warm-up brainstorming session can be helpful to get everyone in the mood. For example, brainstorm 100 uses for last year's annual report.

Brainwriting

Brainwriting is another way to generate ideas. It operates in the same way as brainstorming, but participants write their suggestions on cards or Post-it notes, rather than shouting them out. After an initial period during which participants write on their own cards, the cards are placed in the middle of the group and participants can then read and add to the suggestions of others. This enables groups to develop ideas more fully, more quickly.

Cause and Effect Diagrams

Cause and Effect, or Fishbone, diagrams can help focus brainstorming when a group is assessing the causes of a particular problem or effect.

The first task is to define the effect or problem to be addressed. In the illustration on p13, the problem or effect is delays in processing planning applications. This effect is written on the right-hand side of the diagram. Causes are written on the left of the stated problem under a number of headings. There are many variations of this diagram, depending on the environment in which it is being used. In manufacturing, for example, it is common for the causes to be listed under the 5 'Ms': Machinery, Manpower, Method, Material and Maintenance. In the service sector, the headings can more usefully be listed under the 4 'Ps': People, Procedures, Policies and Plant. Whichever version is used, it is important that the causes identified include all the likely causes of the problem. Other headings can be added, for example, a heading to reflect environmental causes (Planet). Alternatively, compile a new set of headings that seem more appropriate - if the heading "Plant" doesn't feel right, substitute another heading which does.

The causes and effect are joined by lines, which, before they are filled in, look like the skeleton of a fish.

To use the cause and effect tool during brainstorming, either:

- take each cause heading (eg people, policies etc.) in turn and brainstorm all the possible causes under this heading of the effect being discussed

- brainstorm the effect, and allocate suggestions to each of the four headings.

Cause and Effect Diagram

Brainstorming the causes of delays in processing planning applications.
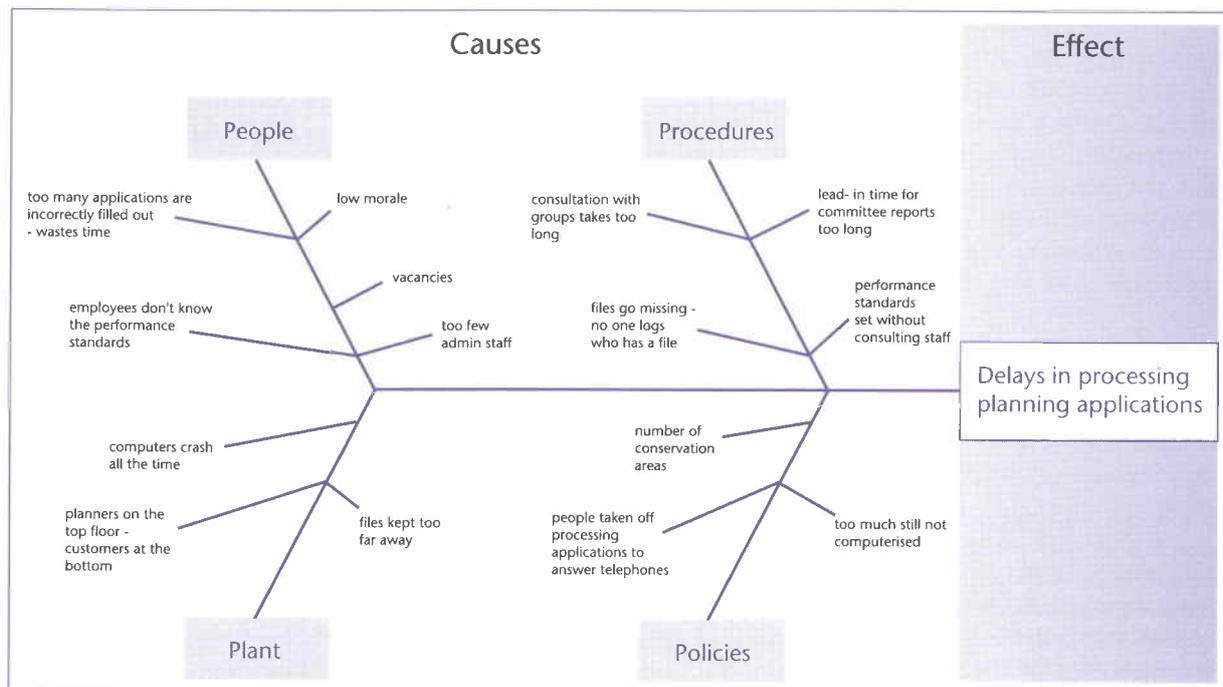
The advantages of the Cause and Effect diagram are that it clearly illustrates the relationships between causes and the effect being discussed. It offers a more structured approach to brainstorming which forces participants to consider all possible causes, rather than just those that come to mind first. If parts of the diagram look relatively empty, it may be worth spending more time discussing whether any possible causes have been missed.

The example above illustrates suggested causes from a brainstorming session on the causes of delays in processing planning applications. Using the Cause and Effect diagram enabled participants to group possible causes quickly.

Prioritising ideas

Brainstorming and brainwriting help to generate ideas. The following tools help to prioritise ideas and reach consensus on the ideas that will be taken forward.

The challenge at this stage is to maintain the commitment to, and ownership of, the assessment process when ideas are being discarded or developed. The following processes can help when there is a need to prioritise competing ideas.

Voting

Voting is one of the simplest ways to prioritise competing suggestions. There are numerous options for voting systems. Three of the most commonly used are set out below.

Weighted voting   Everyone is allocated the same number of votes as there are ideas, but the votes are weighted. For example, if there are 7 ideas, everyone will have 7 votes, one worth 7 points for the most important , one worth 6 votes and so on, with 1 vote for the least important.

Free voting   Everyone is allocated the same number of votes as there are ideas, but they can be allocated in any way according to the importance the voter attaches to different ideas. For example, all 7 votes could be allocated to one item, with none to the others, or the 3 votes and 4 votes could be allocated to two items. The votes can be split in any way.

Pareto voting This is based on the Pareto 80/20 principle - that most of the problems in organisations stem from a small number of causes. In this way of voting, if 40 courses of action have been suggested, everyone is allocated eight votes (ie 20% of the 40) with which to choose the ones they think are most important. This approach is useful when prioritising from a large number of ideas.

Hurdles

A further way to agree priorities is to agree a series of barriers which all proposals have to cross, for example:

- does the proposal address our key weaknesses?
- how long will the improvement take to deliver results? Do we need results sooner?
- is the improvement a discreet improvement (can we deal with it ourselves) or does it require the agreement of others not present?
- can we live without the improvement?

Assess all the suggestions against the criteria to reach agreement on which should be taken forward. Other factors to consider include the importance of generating "quick wins" - actions which will deliver improvements quickly and so build momentum.

The first step in establishing action is to prioritize the outputs from the Self Assessment. The temptation, and reality, in many organisations is to start too much at once and this often results in acheiving very little.

Introducing Self Assessment

Cross impact analysis

Cross impact analysis can be used to prioritise between a number of different proposals for improvement that are being considered as the result of self assessment. Typically, such proposals will impact on each other – some positively, some negatively. For example, the self assessment might have identified that there is room for improvement in the way staff deal with customers. Consequently, a proposal (a) to introduce customer care training for all staff is being considered. At the same time, the self assessment has identified that operating costs are higher than comparable organisations, so proposal (b) to reduce these costs is also being considered. In cross-impact terms, implementing proposal (b) will have an adverse impact on proposal (a) because it will make staff training more difficult to fund. Proposal (a) on the other hand, may have a positive impact on (b) as improved customer care might well lead to a reduction in costs given the "right-first-time" philosophy.

Cross impact analysis is intended to help managers assess the impact that individual proposals will have on each other and to prioritise between these proposals. The starting point is a list of proposals that have been generated following some form of assessment. For purely practical reasons, the number of proposals should be limited to no more than fifteen. Where the initial number is larger than this, weighting or voting procedures should be used to reduce the number. The process is illustrated using the planning application example detailed earlier (to illustrate cause and effect diagrams). From the cause and effect diagram, 5 improvement proposals have been identified:

A: train staff to deal with applications correctly (given existing procedures and standards)

B: introduce a formal file logging system in the department

C: relocate the planners

D: computerise all data and records

E: upgrade the IT equipment

The proposals are grouped in a matrix vertically and horizontally. A score is then allocated at each intersection to show whether there is no impact (score 0), a positive impact (the action helps the other action), or a negative impact (one action makes the other worse). Scoring can be sophisticated (e.g. a 10 point scale) or relatively crude (e.g. using only 0, +/-1, +/-5, +/-10). Scoring is best done as a group exercise, so that consensus can be reached between the action points.

Cross impact analysis

		A	B	C	D	E	
	Proposal	train staff to deal with applications correctly	introduce a formal file logging system	physically relocate the planners	computerise all data and records	upgrade the IT equipment	Total
A	train staff to deal with applications correctly	*	+10	0	+10	0	+20
B	introduce a formal file logging system	+5	*	0	0	0	+5
C	physically relocate the planners	0	+10	*	0	0	+10
D	computerise all data and records	+5	-10	-5	*	0	-10
E	upgrade the IT equipment	+5	0	0	+10	*	+15
	Total	+15	+10	-5	+20	0	

Note: scores are illustrative only and would be different in different organisations

Reading across proposal A, shows that this proposal will impact positively on two of the other proposals. This proposal will have a maximum positive impact (at +10) on proposals B and D, but will have no impact on C or E. Proposal D will positively impact on A, but is judged to have a negative impact on B and C (computerising all records will, after all, remove the need for a file logging system and reduce the need for a physical relocation of planners).

The scores are then totalled, both horizontally and vertically.

- A high horizontal score means that the proposal has a significant impact on other proposals, with a positive score implying an overall positive impact.

- A low horizontal score indicates that this proposed action will have little effect on our other proposed actions.

- A high vertical score means that the proposal is strongly affected by other proposals.

- A low vertical score indicates that the proposal is relatively unaffected by other proposals. This means that if it is important to address this issue, it will have to be tackled directly, rather than relying on the knock-on effects from other actions.

Proposal A has the highest horizontal score, at +20. This implies that, apart from the direct benefit of introducing staff training, this proposal would positively support other proposals (notably B and C). Proposal A should be the first improvement action to be initiated, other things being equal.

Proposal D has the highest vertical score, at +20. This indicates that this proposal is critically dependent on other proposed actions: in other words, this should not be the first proposal implemented. Rather this proposal should be adopted once other proposals have been initiated (notably A and E).

Proposal E, upgrading the IT equipment, has a zero vertical score implying that this proposal is not influenced by the other proposals being considered and should be addressed independently. Similarly, the horizontal score for E indicates that undertaking the IT upgrade would have a positive impact on other proposals implemented later.

The matrix also reveals tension and conflict between individual proposals. Proposal D has a negative horizontal score, thanks to B and C. This indicates that whilst proposals B, C and D might seem beneficial in their own right, taken together they are not a sensible set of actions. Clearly, computerising all data and records removes the need for proposal B and C and vice versa.

The cross impact analysis demonstrates that the first priority would be proposal A, providing staff training. A decision would then need to be taken between implementing proposals B and C together, or proposal D (which will be influenced by other factors such as budget availability). If proposal D is to be implemented then E, upgrading the IT equipment, also becomes desirable and should be implemented before D.

The causal relationships between actions, and hence the scores, will vary between and within organisations.
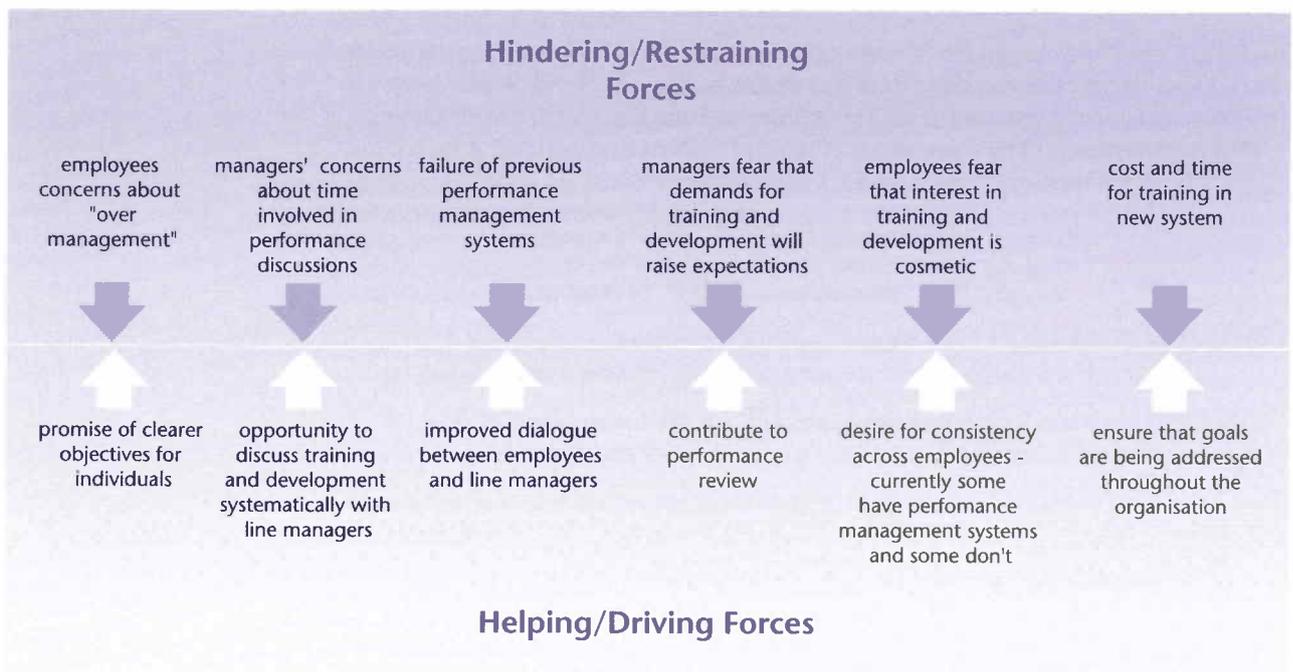
From assessment to action - preparing for implementation

Force Field Analysis

Force field analysis helps to identify the forces operating in favour of, and against, proposed changes. Brainstorming all the positive and negative forces that are likely to help or hinder initiatives can be useful in preparing implementation plans. This will help to clarify what the likely response to change will be in different parts of the organisation and may help to prioritise the key stages of implementation. The objective of using force field analysis is to ensure that in implementing proposed changes, likely problems are anticipated and minimised and allies are identified and employed to best advantage.

1   Write the proposed change that is to be introduced on a flip chart or white board.

2   Brainstorm all the forces that will drive or restrain the introduction of the change.

3   Record the forces identified in a diagram showing forces in opposition to each other (see below).

4   Brainstorm how to minimise the restraining forces.

Force field analysis on introducing new performance management system.

Hindering/Restraining Forces

employees concerns about "over management"	managers' concerns about time involved in performance discussions	failure of previous performance management systems	managers fear that demands for training and development will raise expectations	employees fear that interest in training and development is cosmetic	cost and time for training in new system

promise of clearer objectives for individuals	opportunity to discuss training and development systematically with line managers	improved dialogue between employees and line managers	contribute to performance review	desire for consistency across employees - currently some have perfomance management systems and some don't	ensure that goals are being addressed throughout the organisation

Helping/Driving Forces

7 Getting more from the management arrangements modules

Building the results of self assessment into corporate and service planning will help to ensure that improvements are integral to the organisation, rather than a bolt-on activity. Authorities will already have defined corporate and service planning cycles and processes. The Commission has set out its programme of management arrangements modules until 1999, so there is an opportunity to plan to incorporate the modules into planning cycles to ensure maximum benefit. Many authorities have already identified how they will incorporate the annual management arrangements assessments into their planning processes to best effect.

8 Conclusion

Self assessment is a valuable tool in improving performance. Group self assessment brings maximum benefits by ensuring that assessments are informed by a variety of views about performance and by encouraging consensus to be reached about current performance and improvements which should be prioritised.

Key factors which ensure the success of self assessment are:

- **commitment** from the senior management team

- **communication** about the assessment, how it will be used and who will be involved

- **preparation**

- **evidence** ensuring that assessments are based on evidence and not opinion

Assessment is best approached constructively and as an opportunity to learn about the organisation. Once current performance has been assessed, ideas for improvement should be developed. This can be done using the tools set out in this paper:

- brainstorming

- brainwriting

- cause and effect analysis.

Improvement ideas can be sorted using voting or hurdles to reach agreement on the ideas which will be taken forward. Cross impact analysis can help to identify high impact actions. Force field analysis can be used to help assess the likely responses to proposed changes within the authority and so help plan implementation.

Self assessment will contribute to performance improvement when it is integrated into planning and review processes, rather than conducted in isolation from them.

9 References and further reading

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Management Studies Unit mission

We aim to be a centre of excellence for encouraging continuous improvement in the management of Scottish councils.

We will achieve this through the audit of management arrangements and by promoting good practice.

We will be customer driven, innovative and work in partnership with councils, auditors and other bodies.

We aim to ensure that we have the skills and knowledge necessary to achieve this.

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