

A PROCESS FOR THE FORMULATION OF A SCHOOL'S CHANGE STRATEGY

BY: John Brand¹ and Felicity Steadman²

INTRODUCTION

Many South African Schools are facing demands to change and even to radically transform themselves. Some of these demands relate to the 'isms' such as racism, and other identity related issues. Schools are responding to the demands in different ways, some more successful than others. The following is one way to respond.

It assumes that a school accepts that there is a need for change, and that it wishes to develop a change strategy that will enable it to function effectively in and to make a constructive and successful contribution to a changing South Africa. It must also want the strategy to encourage harmony among pupils, alumnae, staff and parents rather than retard it.

It also assumes that a school accepts that the end does not justify the means, but that, in the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., "*the end is pre-existent in the means*" and that "*The means represent the ideal in making and the end in process*".

Therefore, what this process seeks to do, is to gather representatives of all a school's stakeholders and to encourage them to work together to find interest based, and mutual gain outcomes to the challenges which the school faces. It is our experience that changes which are arrived at in a respectful, inclusive and collaborative manner are generally meaningful to all stakeholders and are sustainable. In essence, the process helps the parties critically evaluate the school culture and identify problems, agree on relevant facts and data, creatively search for and evaluate solutions and then agree on objectives and practical and cost effective action plans for the way forward.

For meaningful change to occur, the means to achieve it requires time and effort. Experience shows that quick and superficial processes are more likely to entrench people in adversarial and traditional positions than to facilitate change. They also tend and to generate conflict, rather to moderate it.

¹**John Brand** is a lawyer and retired consultant and ADR specialist at Bowmans in South Africa. He was also a director of Conflict Dynamics in Sandton, Johannesburg. Over the past 30 years, he has arbitrated and mediated many large commercial and employment disputes and he regularly facilitated negotiation, strategic planning, and change processes.

²**Felicity Steadman** comes from an industrial relations background. She has been mediating and facilitating labour/management, employment and workplace as well as commercial disputes and change processes for over 30 years. Her experience has been in both South Africa and internationally. She is a Director of Conflict Dynamics.

The process described below is one based on years of experience in helping schools and other organisations formulate change strategies in multi-stakeholder political, community and workplace environments. It requires a school, and representatives of all the relevant stakeholders, to invest resources and time into the process. The process does not deliver quick-fix solutions and, to be sustainable, the strategy that it delivers has to be properly funded over a period of time. Therefore, the leadership of the school must be committed to change and to the painstaking process required to achieve effective change.

OUTCOMES

The outcomes that the process is intended to deliver are ones that are:

Legitimate – they must be credible and acceptable in the eyes of stakeholders including, at the least, pupils, alumnae, staff and parents.

Comprehensive – they must pay attention to a multiplicity of issues such as history, traditions, rituals, culture, values, demographics and diversity of pupils and staff, performance appraisal, curriculum, sport, pupil and staff behaviour, bullying, leadership, governance, endowment, bursary schemes, access to the school by children of academic and support staff, communication and marketing, management and administration, environment, relationships with parents and ex-pupils, community relations and service, and other relevant issues.

Address hopes and fears – they must, as far as possible, address peoples' hopes, fears, needs, concerns and expectations.

Attainable – they have to be practical, realistic, cost effective and not purely aspirational.

Measurable – they must be capable of measurable implementation.

Effective – they need to deliver change within appropriate time periods.

The strategy which the process is intended to deliver should contain at least the following:

- A statement of the school's existing or revised vision and mission
- An articulation of the school's existing or revised core values
- The reason for change and a description of what a changed school will look like
- Broad change goals in relation to issues such as:
 - the qualifications, demographics, selection and retention of pupils
 - the school's curriculum
 - the qualifications, demographics, recruitment, selection, retention, evaluation and training of teachers and staff
 - governance and management of the school
 - the image and profile of the school
 - the school's social responsibility obligations
 - the school's procurement policy

- Near-term action plans
- Mid-term action plans
- Long-term action plans
- A change strategy management system
- A change strategy monitoring and review plan.

PROCESS SUMMARY

Before describing all the steps in the process in detail, it is useful to give a summary of the process which has the following stages:

- Stage 1: Preparation
- Stage 2: Environmental scan
- Stage 3: Opening
- Stage 4: Critical evaluation or 'SWOT' analysis
- Stage 5: Why change?
- Stage 6: What needs to change?
- Stage 7: Identifying themes
- Stage 8: Goals and action plans
- Stage 9: Re-visit the school's vision, mission, and values
- Stage 10: Develop a change strategy management system
- Stage 11: Development of a change strategy monitoring and review plan
- Stage 12: Presentation of the recommended strategy to the school governing body

DETAILED PROCESS STEPS

The following is what must be done at each stage of the process.

STAGE 1: PREPARATION

PROCESS PROPOSAL

A proposal must be prepared presented and explained to the school's governing body, and once they understand it and, importantly, its implications, they need to adopt it.

NOTIFICATION

All stakeholders then need to be notified of the essence of the process which has been agreed to by the governors.

PROCESS FACILITATORS

A lead facilitator and co-facilitator need to be appointed to facilitate the process. They need to be and also be perceived to be impartial professional facilitators with experience in facilitating relationship building and strategic planning processes. Their role is to design and direct the process and not to be consultants or contributors to substance.

CONVENING OF A REPRESENTATIVE STEERING COMMITTEE

A representative Steering Committee drawn from each stakeholder group, must be convened. The Committee should comprise approximately 20 people. The kind of persons who should make up the Committee are the following:

- Pupils
 - Two senior prefects
 - The chairperson of the alumnae club
 - A recent ex-pupil
- Staff
 - The headmaster/mistress
 - The deputy headmaster/mistress
 - Two teachers
 - Two support staff
- Parents
 - The chairperson of any parents' association
 - A current parent
 - A recent ex-parent
- Two members of the school's Employment Equity Committee
- Four additional persons chosen by the Committee to maximise the diversity of the Committee

Care needs to be taken to ensure that the Committee is as representative as possible of all interested groups and particularly of persons from groups previously disadvantaged by virtue of their rank, gender or race or discriminated against in law.

STAKEHOLDER REPRESENTATIONS

Stakeholders who are not members of the Steering Committee should be invited to make oral or written representations to the Committee.

CULTURAL AUDIT

If possible, a structured cultural audit of the pupils, teachers, and staff, with a change orientation, should be conducted.

PARENT SATISFACTION SURVEY

If possible, a parent satisfaction survey with a change component should be conducted.

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANCE

An administrator and a secretarial assistant need to be appointed to assist the facilitators in administering the process. Among other tasks, the administrator will be responsible, in consultation with the facilitators, for arranging dates, times, speakers and attendance during the process. The administrator will also co-ordinate the parent satisfaction survey as well as the cultural audit.

DATES

Dates must then be set aside for the process and members of the Steering Committee must be notified of these dates. One day for the environmental scan presentations, and three two-day sessions need to be allocated to the process over a period of a few weeks.

VENUE

An appropriate venue must be arranged for the two-day sessions. The venue needs to be capable of comfortably seating all the members of the Steering Committee in a horse-shoe configuration and it should also have all the necessary facilities for the process. In addition, it should be big enough to accommodate three breakaway tables for syndicate work or to have three breakaway rooms in close proximity.

INVITATIONS TO GUEST PRESENTERS

A group of appropriate presenters need to be chosen by the facilitators in consultation with the Steering Committee to make presentations during the environmental scan stage referred to below, and invitations must be sent to them.

STAGE 2: ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

It is essential to conscientise stakeholders in the school, and members of the Steering Committee in particular, about the environment in which the change strategy is to be formulated. They need to understand the environmental forces which impact on the school and to be exposed to as wide a variety of opinions and options as possible. They also need to be made aware of relevant facts, data, statistics, and law.

PRE-READING

The facilitators therefore must compile appropriate pre-reading for members of the Steering Committee and have it distributed to them.

PRESENTATIONS

In addition, a variety of external and internal thought leaders should be invited to make a series of presentations on matters relevant to a change strategy, such as:

- *What 'change' means to them,*
- *The political, economic, social, and historic context,*
- *Relevant legislation,*
- *Relevant examples of change strategies,*
- *What competitors are doing,*
- *What the Government expects of the school,*
- *The school's present parent, teacher, staff, pupil, and supplier demographics,*
- *The cultural audit,*
- *The parent satisfaction survey.*

These presentations should take place on a day prior to the commencement of the rest of the process. It is helpful if these presentations are open to all school stakeholders and not only to the Steering Committee.

STAGE 3: OPENING

At the opening of the first two-day session the following must be done:

HOUSEKEEPING

The facilitators must deal with housekeeping matters.

PURPOSE

The facilitators must remind the Steering Committee that the purpose of the process is to formulate a strategy for the school which enables it to function effectively in and to make a constructive and successful contributions to a changing South Africa and which facilitates harmony among pupils, alumnae, staff, and parents.

RE-VISIT DESIRED OUTCOMES

The facilitators must then remind the Steering Committee that the desired outcome of the process is to deliver a strategy which is comprehensive, legitimate, addresses peoples' hopes, fears, needs, concerns and expectations, is practical, realistic, cost effective and not purely aspirational, is capable of measurable implementation and which delivers the outcomes it defines within appropriate time periods.

RE-VISIT THE VISION MISSION AND VALUES OF THE SCHOOL

The facilitators need to then refer the Steering Committee to the school's stated vision, mission, and values. It is important to develop the strategy within the context of the school's overall vision and mission. If necessary, the Steering Committee may propose changes to the school's vision and mission if it thinks that it is necessary to address change.

EXPLAIN THE PROCESS

The facilitators should then explain the process to be followed over the six days

GROUND RULES

The facilitators must then explain the importance of process discipline and propose to the Steering Committee that it agrees to abide by a set of ground rules. The facilitators should explain the purpose of each ground rule when necessary (see endnote 1 i). It is vital for the success of the process that these ground rules are understood and committed to by the members of the Steering Committee. It is also particularly important for the facilitators to remind the participants of the ground rules they have agreed to when they deviate from them. In many ways the ground rules ensure that the end is pre-existent in the means.

MINUTE

The facilitators should explain that a running minute of the process will be kept and will be given to all participants as the process unfolds. The minute will constitute a summary of the process and will only record what the Steering Committee formally agrees to and what it agrees to place on record. Discussion will not be recorded.

STAGE 4: 'SWOT' ANALYSIS

The facilitators must then assist the Steering Committee to conduct critical evaluation of the school's culture or a 'swot analysis' which looks at the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to the school. It is important to not only focus on addressing the weaknesses of the school but also to build on its strengths.

The 'swot' analysis is done as follows –

The participants must be asked to individually consider and record their personal responses to four questions. It is important for participants to reflect on their own before sharing their thoughts with others, to prevent them being unduly influenced or overwhelmed by the thinking of others. This personal introspection helps ensure participation and diversity of thought and is vital for the success of the process.

The four questions are:

- *What are the school's strengths in a changing South Africa and World?*
- *What are the school's weaknesses in a changing South Africa and World?*
- *What are the school's opportunities in a changing South Africa and World?*
- *What are the threats to the school in a changing South Africa and World?*

The participants should then be divided into three or four mixed groups. The groups must then be instructed to strictly adhere to the following small group process guidelines:

- *Appoint a facilitator, a scribe, and a spokesperson*
- *Let each person in the group contribute an idea in turn*
- *Allow questions and discussion for clarity only*
- *Record the essence of every idea as succinctly as possible on flipchart*
- *Avoid repetition*
- *Agreement on the ideas is not necessary*

Adherence to these guidelines ensures full participation by everyone in the group, no matter what their rank, gender or race might be.

Once every idea has been captured in the groups, the chosen spokesperson for each group must then present the groups ideas to the whole Steering Committee. Questions and discussion for clarity may take place but no agreement is necessary.

This part of the process helps the participants think about the kind of issues that will need to be addressed later in the process.

STAGE 5: WHY CHANGE?

The participants should then be asked, again individually, to consider and record their individual response to the following questions:

- *Why should the school change to function effectively in, and to make a constructive contribution to a changing South Africa?*

The participants will then share their responses to these questions in three or four

differently mixed groups. It helps to build relations as the process unfolds if the composition of the small groups changes so that as many participants as possible mix and meet with each other in a less threatening environment than in the full meeting of the Steering Committee. Once again, each group must follow the small group process guidelines and the chosen spokesperson for each group will present each groups list of ideas to the whole Steering Committee.

Once this is done, a sub-committee of two representatives, chosen by each group, must then discuss and consolidate the points made by the four groups and formulate an agreed draft “Why Statement”. This must then be presented to the whole Steering Committee and a “Why Statement” should be agreed to by it and be recorded .

The purpose of generating a ‘why statement’ is to focus the minds of the participants on why there should be change and to motivate them to move to the next phase of the process which considers what needs to change.

STAGE 6: WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?

In this phase of the process, participants must be asked to individually consider and record their responses to the following questions;

- *What can I, or those that I represent do to change or improve the school for it to function effectively in and to make a constructive contribution to a changing South Africa?*
- *What can others do to change or improve the school for it to function effectively in and to make a constructive contribution to a changing South Africa?*

In answering these questions, the participants should bear in mind what change they think is necessary under at least the following headings. The headings will differ from school to school but usually include headings like - traditions, rituals, culture, values, demographics and diversity of pupils and staff, performance appraisal, curriculum, sport, behaviour, bullying, leadership skills, endowment, bursary schemes, access to the school by children of teaching and support staff, communication and marketing, management and administration, environment, relationships with parents and ex-pupils, community relations and service, procurement.

The participants must then be divided into three or four mixed groups and to share and record their responses. In doing this, the participants must follow the small group process guidelines. Once this is done the chosen spokesperson will present the groups ideas to the Steering Committee as a whole. Questions of clarity and discussion may take place but agreement is not required.

STAGE 7: IDENTIFYING THEMES

The facilitators must then assist the Steering Committee to identify themes under which the changes identified by the groups can be clustered. The kind of themes which may be identified are the following:

- Vision, mission, and values
- Diversity and demographics
- Social, economic and environment responsibility
- Staff
- Behaviour
- Curriculum
- Marketing
- Finance

STAGE 8: GOALS AND ACTION PLANS

The Steering Committee must then be helped to develop broad long-term goals in relation to the agreed themes and to develop action plans within three time frames:

- near-term action plans
- mid-term action plans
- long-term action plans

These plans need to be detailed and task-orientated. They also need clear timelines and the allocation of responsibility to designated persons. The themes should then be clustered into four related groups and the participants should be divided into four groups made up of participants best equipped to address each theme. Then, in their groups the participants must consider and agree what the succinct goal should be for each theme and then what actions should be taken, by whom, by when and who the responsible person should be in order to realise each goal.

Once the groups have done this, the spokesperson for each group must present the groups ideas to the Steering Committee as a whole and the facilitators must facilitate agreement by the Steering Committee on each goal and action plan.

An example of a goal and action plan would look something like this.

THEME – CURRICULUM

GOAL: To ensure that

ACTION 1:

BY WHO:

BY WHEN:

RESPONSIBLE PERSON:

ACTION 2:

BY WHO:

BY WHEN:

RESPONSIBLE PERSON:

There will be many action plans, some of which will require substantive action and others which may put issues into future processes. The Steering Committee needs to be encouraged to try, whenever possible, to agree on substantive action plans and only put issues into further when this is essential.

STAGE 9: DEVELOP A CHANGE STRATEGY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

The facilitators need to assist the Steering Committee to develop a plan for who will be responsible for managing the overall implementation of the strategy.

STAGE 10: DEVELOP A CHANGE STRATEGY MONITORING AND REVIEW PLAN

The facilitators must assist the Steering Committee to develop a plan for when and by whom the strategy will be monitored and reviewed. It is particularly important for there to be a disciplined monitoring and review plan for the strategy because without one, impetus may go out of the process of implementation. In addition, as time passes, the environment changes, challenges change and it is necessary to review and add to, or amend the strategy.

STAGE 11: REVISIT THE SCHOOL'S VISION, MISSION AND VALUES

The Steering Committee must then re-visit the school's vision, mission and values and agree on what, if any changes, need to be made for them to be aligned with the strategy.

STAGE 12: PRESENTATION OF THE RECOMMENDED STRATEGY TO THE SCHOOL GOVERNING BODY

The Steering Committee should then meet with the school governors and elected spokespeople from the committee should present the recommended strategy to the governors. The governors must then decide whether to adopt the strategy as presented, or in an amended form.

CONCLUSION

If this process is followed meticulously, it can be expected that it will deliver a change strategy which:

- Is legitimate
- Is comprehensive
- Addresses stakeholders' hopes, fears, needs, concerns and expectations
- Is attainable
- Is measurable
- Is effective

It will also ensure that “the means represent the ideal in making and the end in process”.

1ⁱ The following are a suggested set of ground rules.

- Follow basic meeting etiquette
- Indicate to the facilitators a wish to speak
- Wait to be asked by the facilitators to speak
- Do not interrupt
- Do not talk while someone else is talking
- Separate problem identification and analysis from solution search – go slow to go fast
- Separate idea generation from idea evaluation – be creative
- Recognise that the facilitators are responsible for process and the delegates are responsible for substance and outcome
- Focus on needs, interests, fears, concerns, and expectations rather than on rigid positions

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- Look for common ground and capture it instead of focusing only on difference
 - Look for mutual gain solutions
 - Be frank, open, and honest
 - Accept that, unless agreed otherwise, the proceedings are off the record and no-one will be prejudiced for anything that they say
 - Listen carefully and seek first to understand before seeking to be understood
 - Respect silence during times of reflection
 - Separate people from the problem and try not to personalise issues
 - Treat everyone equally and with respect without regard to rank
 - Accept that perceptions are as important as reality
 - Acknowledge peoples' feelings and beliefs whether you agree or not
 - Be assertive but polite and respectful
 - Try to improve ideas instead of rejecting them - do not say "no", or "yes....but", rather build on what you have heard
 - Do not draw an adverse inference unless it is the overwhelmingly probable one to draw
 - Make "I" statements not "you" statements
 - Ask problem solving questions – why, why not, what if, why is it fair....
 - Be constructive not destructive