

MODULE 5

Answering “How did we get to where we are?” With The Problem Solving Cycle

OVERVIEW

While using a data profile is focused on trend analysis over time, an equally important area of engagement using data is how school staff use data to address undesirable results. This type of analysis should be happening regularly and at various levels of the organization. Often, it's a sore spot in terms of previous data use. When your school discovered gaps or undesirable results in the past, did you focus on identifying solutions immediately to close the gaps? School staff must utilize a strategy focused on multiple measures of data to uncover the real contributing causes and eliminate them. Effective data analyses and problem-solving methodologies embrace the following key principles of organizational improvement:

- Encourage staff identification and ownership of the process(es) at the root.
- Empower those that need to carry out change.
- Focus on comprehensive data analysis.
- Streamline the improvement process.

Embrace the Problem Solving Cycle. The Problem Solving Cycle is a great activity for getting all staff involved in thinking through undesirable results, or problems, before jumping to solutions:

- Start with brainstorming hunches and hypotheses so all staff can be heard. Staff members will share what they believe are the reasons for the undesirable results, which is an important opportunity to acknowledge specific challenges facing teachers. Once acknowledged, staff can go past them. Ultimately, staff begin to think how their current programs and processes might be contributing to the causes of undesirable results.
- Next, staff will need to determine what questions must be answered with data (and what data) before the “problem” can be solved. It is their idea to go deeper into the data—sometimes into areas they might not go to under typical situations. Staff members naturally use the multiple measures of data with this process. Deeper data analyses show what processes need to improve to get different results.

Revisit your aggregate implications for planning. Problem solving should provide you with further information to add to validate/invalidate your aggregate implications for planning.

Dig deeper into your school programs and processes. Have your process tools ready as staff use Problem Solving to identify current programs and processes that are contributing to the causes of undesirable results.

- **The Program Evaluation Template** for working on program/process design, support, and evaluation.
- **Flowcharting** is a great way to visually describe implementation of a program or process.
- A **School Process Inventory** is a great tool for looking across ALL of your organizational processes and programs.

READ

Bernhardt, V.L. (2018). *Data analysis for Continuous School Improvement* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.

Chapters 7-8

<https://www.routledge.com/Data-Analysis-for-Continuous-School-Improvement/Bernhardt/p/book/9781138294622>

[Download a book order form that contains a 20% off discount code.](#)

DO

- [PPT To Support This Module](#)

Facilitation Guides:

- Problem Solving Cycle Facilitation Guide, p 353.
- Aggregating Implications, p 342.
- Program Evaluation Template, p 252.
- Flowcharting School Processes, p 260.

Templates:

- [Program Evaluation Template](#)

Handouts:

- [Problem Solving Cycle Study Sheet](#)
- [Program Evaluation Template Example](#)

REFER

Examples/Additional Reference Items:

- Problem Solving Cycle, p 106.
- Program Evaluation Template Examples, pp 84-86, 111, 151, 160, 257, 258-259.
- Flowchart Examples, pp 262-264.
- Aggregated Implications, p 341.

Videos:

- [Problem Solving Cycle](#)
- [Digging Deeper into Process Measurement After Problem Solving Undesirable Results](#)
- [Updating Aggregating Implications After Problem Solving Undesirable Results](#)

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

*Additional reflection Qs available at the end of each chapter.

1. What aspects of organizational improvement can be satisfied through effective problem solving?
2. Why is it important to understand how we got our current results?
3. As you look at your aggregated commonalities, how might they evolve given your work in problem solving?

