

Culture and Sport Improvement Toolkit

8. Improvement planning

Improvement planning

Improvement planning is the most important part of the process. It is the prime reason for carrying out self-assessment in the first place.

The final evaluation will provide a picture of the organisation overall and where it currently stands against the 'ideal' model.

The analysis of strengths and weaknesses can be drawn together and presented to the organisation along with the improvement priorities. A template for an improvement plan is included below. Improvement planning is itself a critical process. It is important that:

- improvements are prioritised, focusing on those that will make the biggest impact
- the plan is SMART [specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely]
- the improvements are themselves measurable and can be monitored to identify if the actions are having the desired effect
- the improvement tasks are allocated to specific individuals who will have the authority to bring about change and improvement, and
- the improvement plan is reported on a periodical basis to senior management and elected members responsible for the service(s).

A mechanism for annual review and subsequent improvement planning should link with the normal business planning processes. It should be integrated into the organisation's policy and strategy framework, as well as corporate, service and budget planning processes.

As well as establishing a baseline for subsequent discussions about how and where improvements have been made and what their impact has been, the self-assessment findings can be used for comparisons with other organisations if required. This can be done to help share best practice and support learning. Discussions with regional partners and agencies in the sector may be based on these findings.

Principles of improvement planning

Improvement planning involves prioritising the key areas for improvement and identifying the improvement projects that will make the greatest difference. The improvement plan should contain a small number of 'breakthrough' improvement projects, rather than many minor actions or incremental improvement tasks relating to parts of the organisation. At first this may seem counter-intuitive, as many areas for improvement will have been established during the self-assessment.

Remember that people will often (and should be encouraged to) go away from the self-assessment and apply what they have learned to their team and individual plans. Remember also that 'awareness is curative'¹ – people often alter their own behaviour merely as a result of becoming more aware of how they are doing.

Implementing improvement projects involves people changing their working behaviour. Therefore, consideration needs to be given to how this change is managed. This could include:

- piloting
- training
- one-to-one and group coaching or mentoring.

The improvement projects should achieve **sustainable** change. This is done by:

- focusing the projects on tackling root causes
- changing the organisation's management system
- embedding the changes into process documentation, team and individual goals, and training and development plans.

Where possible, the improvement projects should be allocated to improvement teams, which are given the complete responsibility to plan and implement the improvement action. Ideally, these teams should comprise staff involved in the particular process at all levels.

Project management techniques should be used to plan and implement the improvements, including:

- identifying defined outputs
- clear start and finish times
- milestones
- pilot projects
- defined outputs.

Improvement tools could also be used, including scenario planning, cause-and-effect analysis, and creativity tools.

To ensure this plan is effective, it is important it is not seen as an 'add-on' to the organisation. It must be seen as the integral element of service plans. So it is important that the self-assessment programme is coordinated with the planning cycle.

Change and investment will require political leadership and support from elected members. Their involvement in the whole process, particularly improvement planning, is critical.

¹ Source: Timothy Gallwey – 'Inner Game of Work'

The improvement plan must be a working document, which enables the organisation to focus its resources and attentions on changing the way it works, which will in turn lead to improvements in the outcomes achieved.

Improvement planning process

To develop improvement plans, the self-assessment team should follow the steps below.

- Review the strengths and areas of improvement to identify themes and improvement priorities, bearing in mind long-term strategic direction and stakeholders' needs.

- Identify improvement projects that will tackle these improvement themes and priorities and make a significant difference to the service. Remember to consider resources and existing workload when agreeing improvement projects. A small number of completed projects is much better than many half-completed projects. Also consider the opportunity for some 'quick wins'.

- Establish a clear output for each improvement project (what changes will be made).

- Identify an improvement team leader to be responsible for completing this improvement project (ie. achieving this output). Identify other members of the improvement team, involving people who are involved in the element of the organisation to be improved.

- Identify a project start date and planned completion date.

- Think creatively about the project. Capture any ideas for action relating to the improvement project, including possible benchmarking partners (see below) and other resources (for example, peer support).

- Document the improvement project, output, improvement team leader, improvement team, start date, planned completion date and any ideas for action.

- Communicate the improvement plan with the senior management team and elected members. Develop their ownership and support for the projects. Add the plan to the business plan, incorporating existing improvement projects into the one plan.

- Distribute the improvement plan to core staff and partners as appropriate. Communicate the plan via meetings, workshops or seminars. Ensure the plan is seen and used as a live, working document. Link individual goals to the improvement projects.

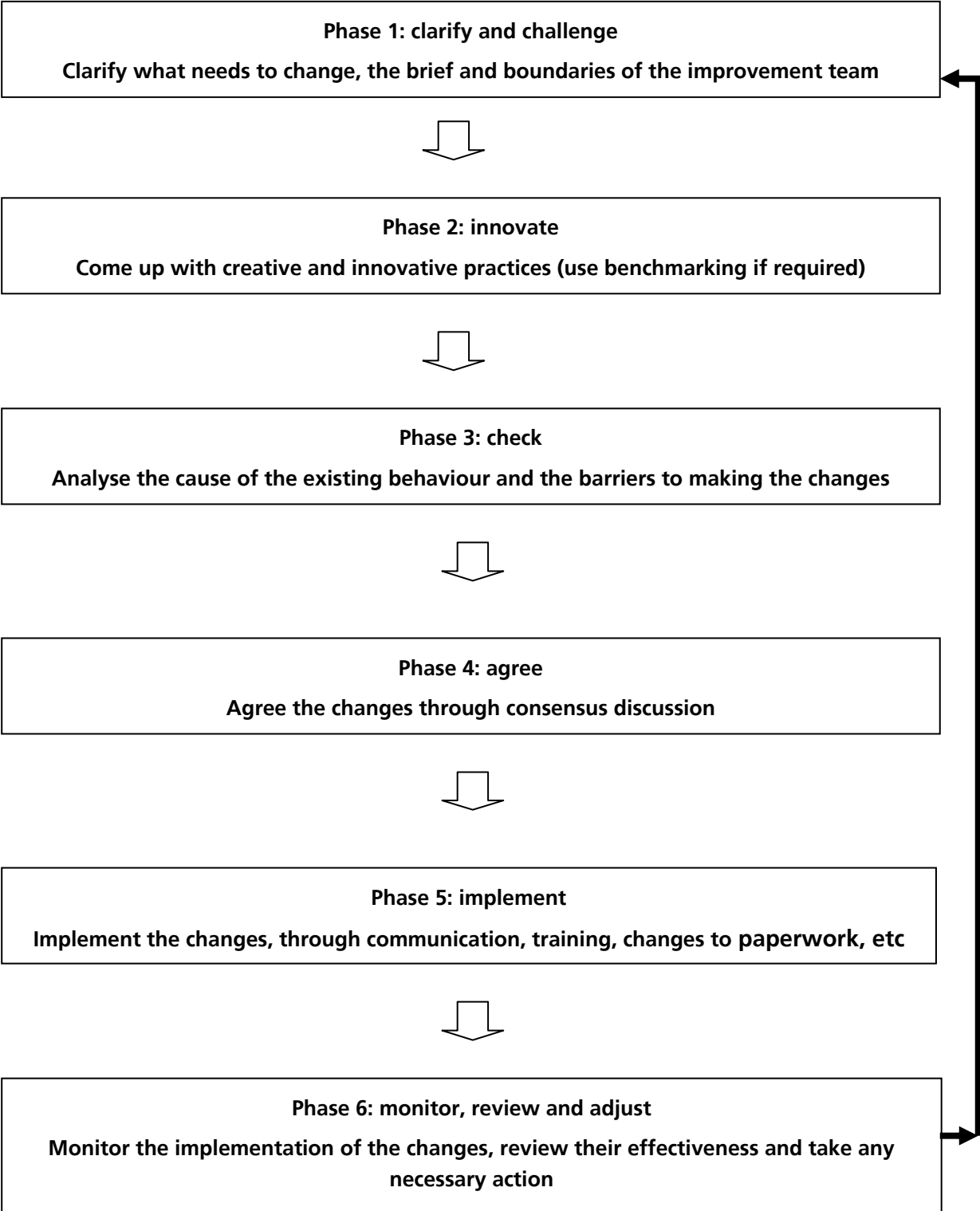
- Review progress in achieving the improvement projects on a regular basis (quarterly, for example). Update the improvement plan document as a result of this review showing achievements, and re-issue.

Improvement teams

An improvement team is a small and representative team established to identify, plan and implement improvements, which should lead to increased value. They work on a specific improvement project to achieve the defined output.

Improvement teams should operate in a structured way and should use a range of improvement tools and techniques (improvement team training could be considered).

This is a typical improvement team process:



Learning and sharing best practice

Once you have identified areas for improvement it makes sense to look to others in the organisation or outside who could support your improvement, rather than you having to reinvent the wheel.

We need to carry out shared learning, because:

- we all have too much to do and not enough time in which to do it
- we need to focus on the outside world
- none of us can keep up with everything.

Making improvements within your organisation involves adopting different processes and practices. It is often quite difficult to be sufficiently innovative to identify different ways of doing things – we are often very caught up in the way we currently do things. One technique available to improvement teams (and to individuals seeking continuous personal development) is simply to ask other people ‘how do **you** do this?’ In its formal sense this is known as best-practice or process benchmarking. It is one of the most popular organisational tools throughout the world.

Best-practice benchmarking can be defined as:

‘A continuous, systematic process for evaluating the work practices of organisations, which are recognised as representing best practices, for the purposes of organisational improvement’.²

Best practice benchmarking could involve the following steps:

- identify the subject of benchmarking (for example, one of the improvement projects)
- establish a project team
- clarify the subject to be benchmarked
- find suitable benchmarking partners, through industry media, professional bodies, regional groups, industry networks, personal contact or consultants

² Source: M. Spendolini

- make contact and establish the partnership
- agree protocol, including confidentiality
- meet, discuss, listen carefully, observe 'their ways' and collect the information
- plan and carry out improvements, and
- review progress.

An example of an improvement plan

Note: in this example, the improvement teams are responsible for agreeing and planning the specific actions.

| Theme and criteria numbers | Improvement priority and key tasks | Person responsible | Project start date | Planned completion date | Resources required | Measured outcomes |
|---------------------------------|--|---|--------------------|-------------------------|---|---|
| Strategy and policy 2.1, 2.2 | <p>Improve the organisation's strategic approach</p> <p><u>Project output:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Community consultation strategy and needs audit completed ▪ Cultural strategy produced and linked to sustainable community strategy ▪ Clear performance outcomes established for the organisation in line with strategic priorities and linked to the local area agreement (LAA). ▪ Performance measures and targets directly linked to these outcomes ▪ Specific change goals developed ▪ Clear links between strategy and service plans | <p>Julie Smith</p> <p>Fred Jones</p> <p>Jane Thomas</p> <p>John Peters</p> <p>Peter Perkins</p> | 1 April 2006 | 30 September 2006 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Financial resources to carry out survey and consultation events ▪ Resources to collect and analyse performance data on a regular basis ▪ Capacity to produce and align all service planning with partners | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strategies reflect current community aspirations and needs ▪ Outcomes, objectives and targets embedded in sustainable community strategy and LAA ▪ Service contributes to corporate and LAA improvement targets |

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|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improvement and service development plans in service plans ▪ A strategy review and development process in operation <p><u>Ideas:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop a benchmarking partnership with in relation to developing strategic synergy with partners ▪ Investigate the use of Balanced Scorecard | | | | | |
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|--|---|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|---|--|
| People management 6.1, 6.2, 6.4, 6.5 | <p>Increase the involvement of staff and partners in improvement activity</p> <p><u>Project Output:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cross-functional improvement teams, including representatives from partners, set up for each improvement project ▪ A system in place for establishing which people will be involved in which teams ▪ A system in place for capturing and using people's improvement ideas | | 1 April 2006 | 30 September 2006 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Time for people to take part in and contribute ▪ Resources to capture and investigate improvement ideas | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Staff satisfaction and morale improve as a result of being engaged in improvement ▪ Customer satisfaction improves |
| Performance, achievement and learning 8.1, 8.2, 8.3,8.4 | <p>Improve performance measurement and review</p> <p><u>Project Output:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A system in place for collecting and collating performance information relating to the performance measures • A system in place to measure user, partner and staff satisfaction • A system in place for analysing the performance information in relation to historical trends and internal targets • Quarterly review process in place | | 1 July 2006 | 31 March 2006 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Systems to collect and store data ▪ Capacity to analyse and communicate performance information ▪ Time to monitor and review data | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Awareness about organisation's performance has increased ▪ Performance information used to inform decision making ▪ Outcomes being delivered |

Improvement plan template

| Theme and criteria numbers | Improvement priority and key tasks | Person responsible | Project start date | Planned completion date | Resources required | Measured outcomes |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
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