

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT-NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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Abstract

This paper articulates the value of process and protocols in design, development, and implementation of a needs assessment plan. Also, it examines and elaborates on the impact of the company mission, vision, and culture on the needs assessment design, development, and implementation. This paper reflects on the weight that a well-organized and strategically executed needs assessment carries. It asserts that a seamless flow from planning the process, to disseminating the information that identifies deficiencies in any area of an organization, is one of the crucial factors involved in recovering, realigning, and moving towards accomplishing organizational objectives.

Introduction

No arguments needs to be made for the necessity of conducting a needs assessment in an area when and where expectations are not being met. We conduct microcosmic needs assessments all the time, with no forethought. A perfect analogy is when your car has an unusual sound under the motor. You poke around under the hood, adjusting every movable part and checking to see if any the changes produce the desired results. Well, conducting a needs assessment falls along those line. In our case, our students were not producing the desired test scores on the standard reading test, so we poked around looking through the qualitative data and quantitative, making adjustments and monitoring for improvement in our situation.

The impact that the process has on an educational organization's ability to accomplish the mission is momentous. Actually, the mission and the vision of the company impacts the design, development, and the implementation of the needs assessment. What do I mean by that? Well, the relationship between the mission and the needs assessment is an encapsulating type relationship; each one asserting influence over the other. A perfect example that we can use to describe the relationship is the school district that we have studied throughout this course.

Had the state not abruptly stepped in, upsetting the daily processes, the school district may have continued down a rabbit hole of no return. However, because the state essentially rescued the district, we knew that we needed to formulate a plan to turn the situation around as quickly as possible. The urgency to identify the gaps in our reading program greatly influenced the research methodology that we chose to tackle the problem. Because school was already in session when we received notice of the takeover, we needed to continue the reading program, while simultaneously overhauling it. No easy task. The data showed us exactly were the learning gaps existed. We deduced that students were

not taught the basic phonics skills in kindergarten through third grade, which are the grades where the essential decoding skills are learned and cumulatively scaffold-ed each year for four consecutive years. After the study was completed, recommendations made, and supports immediately positioned to bring curriculum back into alignment with state standards, we leisurely went back through data to determine when the district got off course. What we found was remarkable.

It appears that about 10-15 years ago, there was a shift in teacher requirements. Data indicates that teachers were struggling to successfully complete exams to gain state certification, leaving the school with no choice except to employ unqualified staff. Somewhere along the line, it became the norm, with qualified staff being looked upon as the outlier. The pattern continued until the district was taken over by the state. The Arkansas State Board of Education, our chief stakeholder, has reinstated the strenuous certified teacher requirements. This last step was essential to ensure that the reading programs curriculum continues to get executed as it was designed.

The ultimate goal for the district was to have the state declare the district as capable of orchestrating its own educational program. The takeover occurred in 2017, with the state merging and taking control of two of the largest districts in the county. The needs assessment was actively conducted from about December 2020 to May 2021. Administrators worked during the summer months to find the solution. Of course, as stated previously, the solution was to implement a phonics program school wide, using 3rd grade level curriculum for all grades, kindergarten through fifth grade.

The goal was met and the state set a date to begin gradual release of the district in November 2022, provided the growth continues at a steady pace.

When I reflect on the process of designing and implementing a needs assessment to identify and mitigate factors that are causing a public school system's reading program to fail, I realize that the decision to make the inquiry can save a school from permanently closing its doors.

There are instances where neighborhood schools shut down and transported students to neighboring districts miles away using a bus system. It occurred for the very reason that our district was taken over, unqualified staff failing to execute curriculum resulting in learning gaps, especially in reading which affected all other disciplines. In such cases, the problem is accentuated as students spend up to 90 minutes being shuttled to school and 90 minutes being shuttled back home, arriving at both destinations too tired to function at peak attention levels. The circumstances negated any positive results of implementing a recovery program, leading to the inevitable, the school closing.

As an educator, I embrace the process that I studied during the last 10 weeks. Planning and organizing to use a needs assessment as a tool whenever expectations are not met, does not always have to be carried out in a grand fashion either. As I studied each lesson, I reflected deeply on the concepts and how easy it is to organize and execute. It is an ongoing process, to a degree. The method determines the data that is collected. The data is analyzed, trends identified and the data summarized into manageable chunks for disseminating to concerned parties. An invaluable, weighty, process allowing you examine individual elements as they function, and make necessary adjustments to fix anomalies.

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