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# Think, Collaborate, Decide, Teach: A Guide for Success

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# Think, Collaborate, Decide, Teach: A Guide for Success

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Critical Thinking for Decision Making



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## Introduction

Through recent and documented observations, interviews, and assessments, it has been determined that many educational institutions are in need of intervention in regards to four specific areas, particularly as related to its school leadership team and instructional staff. Proper interventions are needed for institutions to reach their fullest potential and ultimately provide students with the most effective and engaging school experience possible.

There are specific challenges related to the ability to effectively make sound decisions, particularly when encountering stressful circumstances that often exist within a complex school environment. This lack of effective decision-making has contributed to shortcomings in the way in which school faculty and staff are working together. This guidebook will present educational institutions with pragmatic ways in which teams can work together to foster collaboration and promote synergy. It will also outline strategies whereby communication may be enhanced to improve student achievement and outcomes. Ultimately, leaders are concerned with the development of critical thinking in the classroom for educators, which will result in behavior issues being solved before administrative intervention. Furthermore, this can reduce or eliminate the pressure on administrators if the situations can be diffused on the classroom level. Therefore, this is the ultimate guide for success: **Think, Collaborate, Decide, Teach!**

## Biographies of the Authors



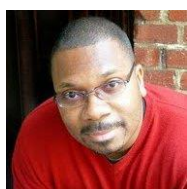
**M. Adam Carswell.** A renowned school leader who provides insight on how to effectively make decisions when working in a stressful environment and how to be successful when working under pressure.



**George Fabre.** An expert in the higher education field who serves as a consultant to developing an effective work team within an organization. In this chapter, the decision is developed by a team effort or a think tank approach.



**Stacie-Jo Howard.** An elementary educator and professional blogger who provides great insight as to how to handle behavior issues in a classroom. Making decisions in 3 simple steps from the bottom-up is the main focus of this chapter through the analysis of the case studies presented.



**Jamez Williams.** A multi-disciplinary professional teacher, professor, public speaker, and published author. This section speaks to power the insight of using enhanced communication tactics to increase academic achievement in learning institutions.

## Chapter 1

# Leadership

## Decision Making Under Fire



by:  
**M. Adam Carswell**

## **Leadership: Decision-Making Under Fire**

Leadership is leadership, no matter the context. Regardless of vocation or organization type, leadership requires and involves a variety of strengths, attributes, and characteristics that are universal, widely referenced, and packaged in a myriad of ways (Notar, Uline, & Eady, 2008). Many tenets of leadership are necessary. However, Thompson (2010) suggested a new and necessary attribute: the ability to make good decisions under extremely stressful circumstances. Decision-making is arguably one of the most critical components of a leader's roles and responsibilities. Compounded by the overwhelming evidence that suggests stress has a profound influence on leaders' ability to make sound decisions, there is clearly a need to manage stress as it relates to decision-making. Selart and Johansen (2011) reported that nearly half of American workers responded to workplace stress by acting unethically or illegally. Stress influences quality control, efficiency, morale, health, and productivity.

### **Definitions**

McVicar (2015) defined a decision-making crisis as either an external or internal influence that is perceived by a decision-maker as having one or more of the following three characteristics: (a) a threat to basic values, (b) urgency, and (c) uncertainty. Stress occurs when demand is considered by the decision-maker to be substantial and overly taxing on one's resources, as well as a threat to that individual's well-being (Selart & Johansen, 2011). Similarly, Murphy (2002) referred to stress as an association between external stressors and a person's ability to cope with these circumstances, all of which result in psychological and physiological consequences. Literature reviews from a variety of fields demonstrate that consensus on the definition of stress has essentially been achieved.

### **The Impact of Stress on Decision-Making – Varied Theories**

The impacts stress has on a leader's ability to make sound decisions are not articulated in

the literature. Some theorists suggest that a myriad of individual character traits found within each leader may impact their response to stress, and therefore, their ability to make decisions under duress. Correlation between varying types of stress has also been acknowledged in some research as being a significant differentiator when it comes to labeling the impact of stress on decision-making as a positive or negative. Several theories have conflicting declarations as to the influence stress has on decision-making (Notar, Uline, & Eady, 2008).

### **Negative Impacts of Stress on Decision-Making**

Heereman and Wall (2011) argued that the way in which people manage the emotional states associated with stress vary from individual to individual, and that in heightened emotional states, increased levels of autonomic arousal can reduce the capacity to perform cognitive tasks, including decision-making. Stressful environments and high arousal states also impair working memory capacity and reduce one's ability to assess risk accurately. Tied closely to stress, Thompson (2010) argued that the impact of heightened stress readily influences the clarity of cognitive and emotional intelligence, which will often sway a leader's ability to implement the correct fusion of acumen needed to make appropriate decisions. As such, smart leaders will often make bad decisions while under stress.

### **Mixed Impact of Stress on Decision-Making**

In their Harvard study, Kassam, Koslov, and Mendes (2009) concluded that in stressful circumstances, even with something as benevolent as a game show, our bodies and brains respond to stress in different ways. The relationship between stress and decision-making needs to be broken down somewhat, and only then can one truly draw positive correlations. Stress responses can be a result of either challenge or threat, commonly differentiated as *good stress* and *bad stress*. In their study, Kassam, Koslov, and Mendes (2009) measured participants' cardiovascular changes to differentiate between responses based on challenge and threat



stressors. In a state of challenge, people experienced an increase in cardiac efficiency, which allowed more blood flow to muscles and the brain, enabling people to be better prepared to manage stress. In contrast, those in a state of threat experienced reduced cardiac efficiency, changes that can often lead to slowed reactions and even immobilization. It is surmised that this may be the body's natural way of preparing for damage or defeat.

### **Positive Impacts of Stress on Decision-Making**

Ganster (2005) studied the topic of stress and decision-making from the perspective of an individual in an executive leadership position. Executives are charged with promoting an organization's vision, developing key leadership teams, and representing the organization to the public, and as such, they are often placed in positions where they experience circumstances of high stress. They are also charged with making choices that require the evaluation of evidence about payoffs and risk, as well as generating new and innovative alternatives. Ganster (2005) purported that the literature available on decision-making and its relation to stress are contradictory, and in fact, argued that stress enhances an executive leader's performance. Stressful situations require a leader to focus their time, attention, and energy in a more coherent and concentrated way when addressing an issue or to make a decision, referred to as the 'narrowing effect.' Further, research suggested that heightened arousal created under duress enables the body physiologically and otherwise to be more efficient in processing decisions and managing the task at hand.

### **Effective Stress Management**

Management of stress in today's ever-changing world where a crisis can happen in the blink of an eye is particularly important for leaders who are in the position to influence others, direct the vision of an organization, and make essential decisions. Spiers (2012) suggested that engaging all levels of a workforce in the development of a healthy cultural organization will

reduce stress and lead to better decision-making at all levels, but particularly for leaders.

## **ARSENAL**

By building capacity in the following three areas, leaders will develop their ability to make decisions under pressure effectively: stress management capacity, cognitive resilience, and stress resilient emotional intelligence. Seven best practices help to develop and maintain a resilient stress system include: Awareness, Rest, Support, Exercise, Nutrition, Attitude, and Learning (ARSENAL). By implementing these strategies and building awareness about stress and its impact on decision-making, leaders can more effectively avoid making bad decisions (Thompson, 2010).

## **The Key**

Darling and Heller (2011) identified something they refer to as *The Key* as an essential tool in the development of organizations and the management of stress. The Key is rooted in the attitudes, thoughts, and feelings that leaders engender and disperse to both internal and external constituents of an organization. It is argued that *like attracts like*, so as leaders consciously and subconsciously emit attitudes and outlooks, they either contribute to or reduce the stress that exists within an organization. That all said, it is critical that a leader proactively work to mitigate negative mindsets and spread positive thoughts. Darling and Heller (2011, p. 82) wrote, “A successful leader must, therefore, carry within himself a recognition that his thoughts and feelings do make a difference within an organization. The leader sets a tone that permeates the cultural fabric of the organization.”

## **Approach or Avoid**

Webster (2014) suggested that the actualization of stress is based mostly on how an individual perceives his or her environment. Coping strategies to manage stress can be classified into *approach* or *avoidant*. When utilizing an approach coping mechanism to make decisions, a

leader takes a stance where he or she considers possible responses and faces the issue head-on. When employing avoidant coping mechanisms, by contrast, a leader simply denies the issue exists in an attempt to escape the problem altogether. Leaders' propensity to lean toward the use of one style of coping mechanism over the other is a reflection of his or her specific characteristics and personality traits.

### **Conclusion**

When making decisions, leaders sometimes run aground when decisions are made in haste, a sentiment often captured by the phrase, *Ready! Fire! Aim!* By contrast, inability to make decisions due to over analysis and indecisiveness is often referred to as, *Analysis Paralysis*. Both problems have the potential to result in failed decision-making, even by the best of leaders (Thompson, 2010). Leaders must manage stress sensibly and proactively, make decisions with a balanced approach, combining both intuitive and rational strategies dependent upon the scenario. For if they fail to take necessary steps to mitigate stress and consider its impact on their thinking processes, even the most effective, intelligent, well-meaning leaders are susceptible to making poor decisions.

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## Chapter 2

# Synergy and Collaboration

Building Effective Working Teams



by:  
George Fabre

## **Leaders Build Work Teams**

Barciz (2014) indicated that poor leadership significantly impacts the ability of developers to adjust to major decisions. Moreover, a leader must be skilled enough to empower, equip, and make a group of people become a strong work team. Irwin and Bradshaw (2011) elucidated, a leader should be proficient in:

- The working information of the organization, its structure, and culture.
- The day-to-day business knowledge.
- Active team communication
- Willing to deal meritoriously with people
- Passion and embrace the importance of togetherness
- Moral judgment, sensitivity, and integral character
- Sobriety and sound authority
- Must have an encouraging and influential personality

The skills mentioned are intricate tools for growth and keeping a standard in any organization. To implement the standards needed to succeed, the team must value the organization's leadership. A strong and skillful leadership will attract and propel the work team to see the standard of the organization and will be motivated to strive to meet the needs and vision exemplified by the leadership.

### **The Importance of Motivating a Work Team**

Teamwork requires a group of individuals who are willing to come together and fulfill one vision. Hill and Bartol stated (2016) the impact of empowering leadership on a team aggregates effective relationship and increases team collaboration. In essence, a leader must implement imperative steps needed to create a successful work team, continue to motivate them

to develop a passion for their assignment. The work team will be motivated if they are accountable for their performance, and leadership implement an effect of teamwork, select key people, Delegate, Analyze their progress, and Praise their continued success. In fact, it is paramount to promote a constructive environment to enhance productivity and develop a culture that impels quality work. Romero (2016) stated that only through constant teamwork, synergy and opportunities could be achieved. The environment must be conducive to the group's productivity and allow work teams' to meet all project deadlines. Building cohesiveness and acknowledging the staff's progress motivates the work team to perform effectively and allows the standard of unity to be essential when working together.

### **Types of Work Teams**

Work teams are an intricate part of an organizations' success. It is imperative that leaders empower their work teams to progress and excel as an organization. Leaders may have to challenge themselves by attending leadership retreats and conferences that impact effective leadership. In fact, Woullard (2016) mentioned the world rapidly changes and leaders should adapt to modify their leadership style in line with the current climate for enhancing the teams' performance. Five work teams are listed in the institution's financial department that play a major role in their growth and set the stage for success. The work teams are Unit, Problem-Solving, Online Program, Building, and Self- Empowerment teams.

Unit teams. Unit teams are a group of individuals who get together to fulfill tasks that provide opportunities for students (Broward College, 2016). Work teams are perpetual and focus on projects that help the organization progress (Broward College, 2016).

**Problem-solving teams.** This team focuses on solving a specific issue and must meet a project's deadline (Broward College, 2016). Once the plans are formulated and set in place, the task forces and committees were moving on to a new project (Broward College, 2016). Work



unit (2017) stated that work teams must always implement ways to solve problems to work cohesively.

**Building teams.** Departments within institutions collaborate with other departments to tackle certain to improve enrollment, retention, and the graduation rate (Broward College, 2016). In these instances, communication between departments is important when addressing the career goals that impact the students (Broward College, 2016). Team building allows leaders motivate and formulate a strong team of excellent members.

**Self-Empowerment teams.** This team makes power decisions. Each team member is experienced and provides thorough and up-to-date decisions that impact the growth of the organization (Broward College, 2016). Institutions should embrace self-managed teams for work teams to take ownership of the project. It is crucial to the organization to tackle challenges early on that could lead to dysfunctional teams down the road (Broward College, 2016).

### **Steps Needed to have a Successful Work Team**

Teamwork requires a group of people to come together and fulfill one vision. Hill and Bartol stated (2016) discovered that empowering leadership challenges a team's performance, and propels team members to gain more interest in their careers. In essence, a leader must implement crucial steps needed to create a successful work team. The steps are to embrace the effect of teamwork, select key people, Delegate, Analyze their progress, and Praise their success.

**Embrace the effect of teamwork.** The institutions' Financial Services clasps the power of teamwork and how it can be utilized (Broward College, 2016). Institutions embrace the skills to the tasks of the project, but also identify match personalities that complement the team (Broward College, 2016). In essence, the intent is for the team to be successful working together and meeting deadlines effectively.

**Select key people.** The institution is adamant about having key people come together to

formulate a successful team (Broward College, 2016). The institution seeks to gather experienced and seasoned members from different departments to come up with a new way to track student (Broward College, 2016).

**Delegate.** After selecting a team, the expectations should be outlined. Institutions typically delegate teams to set forth guidelines, meet students in need, accommodate students at orientations, and make necessary adjustments for students to begin their classes by the start date (Broward College, 2016). It is important to tell teams how to do it and work with them to achieve their goals, instead of what to do.

**Analyze their progress.** The institutions' financial services are very adamant of verifying that the team is working well together and that the project is on the right track (Broward College, 2016). It is paramount to create a forum where the team can share ideas, progress, and updates. Upon sharing ideas, the leader can analyze the teams' growth and implement areas for improvement.

**Praise their success.** The institution is prodigious with recognizing teams' accomplishments and praising their efforts on the website (Broward College, 2016). In fact, the institution schedules teamwork events on their website to thank the team publically, and on the institutions' social media sites (Broward College, 2016). The institution praises their accomplishments and professes the impact the team has had in the college and its progress. In essence, Haas and Mortenson (2016) discovered that teamwork is more imperative to today's organization because we are in a digital and diverse time. In essence, teamwork is prevalent because there is always someone within who can relate to the needs of consumers or students.

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## Chapter 3

# Lessons From Students

### Critical Thinking in the Classroom



by:  
Stacie-Jo Howard

## **Behavior Intervention Plan**

Leaders rely on educators diffusing the problem instead of depending mainly on the administrators. Moreover, this is a bottom-up approach to making decisions that affect the students. In other words, the problem is attempted to be solved on the lower level so that it will not reach the higher end of the chain of command (Leach & Crisp, 2016). According to Banks (2014), before educators seek the administrative assistance they should come up with a Behavior Intervention Plan or a plan to change a student's behavior through positive reinforcements. They should first identify or describe that behavior as accurately as possible otherwise known as the background assessment. The second thing they should do is to identify the effects of this behavior and choose an appropriate strategy to reduce or eliminate the frequency of the behavior. The final step is to take action or implement and analyze the results of the implementation if adjustments have to be made to achieve the desired outcome. Other underlying factors you should think of includes asking yourself the question, what do you want to accomplish from working with the child? Another factor is that we should be prepared for the chance that the behavior may not change immediately and so follow-ups and reinforcements may need to be worked into your plan. Lastly, who will be involved in this plan, can it remain between teacher and student or does it need to go further and involve parents, other teacher and or the administrators (Manning & Bucher, 2013).

### **Case Study I: After School Care Dilemma**

**Step 1: Background Assessment.** Ms. Higgins was an After School Counselor for a group of third graders for 7 months out of the 10-month school year. She was later promoted to another position in the program, and Ms. Howell was hired to take over the group. The students were used to Ms. Higgins' way of doing things. However, some of the strategies that Ms. Higgins had used was ineffective and needed to be changed. Furthermore, the program

guidelines could not be altered. How does Ms. Howell go about making these changes without upsetting the children and still fall within the guidelines of the program?

First off, what were the specific behaviors that Ms. Howell was trying to correct?

According to Manning and Bucher (2013), most problem behaviors are to a lesser degree, which is known as small disruptions. In a typical elementary or secondary classroom, 80% of disruptions are talking to neighbors and 15% account for students being out of their seats (Manning & Bucher, 2013). Subsequently, this is exactly what Ms. Howell was trying to reduce; excessive talking during quiet activities and having the students transition from one activity to another smoothly and quietly.

Ms. Howell needed a management strategy that was simple and would not interfere with the student's routine too much. The strategy should be able to adjust to the challenges she faced. Such as the fact that there were many restrictions including not being able to change the room arrangement. She also had to manage the numerous transitions, the uncertainty of the attendance of the group, interruptions for dismissal or special requests from the director over the communication radio she carried.

**Step 2: Choosing a Strategy.** Ms. Howell's management strategy mirrored the Positive Classroom Management theory by Manning and Bucher (2013). The foundational principle of this model is teaching children how to discipline themselves which ties into Ms. Howell's personal philosophy of self-discipline. The first component of the model suggests that effective classroom structures consist of rules, routines, and standards. He goes on further to describe the two types of rules one of which is 'general rules' outlining the teacher's goals and objectives. These rules must be enforced at all times such as walking in the hallways. Specific rules consist of what the teacher would like the students to do such as how to line up.

The second component is limit setting. Limit setting is using body language rather than

verbal language to correct a behavior. Examples of this are making eye contact with the student who is misbehaving or standing near the student. The third component is comprised of responsibility training where learners are taught to be responsible for their actions. He encourages having students be responsible for a resource, and he recommends the resource of time to be used. He describes this as the Preferred Activity Time (PAT) system. PAT is increased or reduced according to their behavior as a group. PAT should not be used for students to idle but instead, they are given a choice as to how they spend their earned time, for example, they could use the time to play their favorite game (Manning & Bucher, 2013).

The last component is that positive classrooms should include backup systems for behaviors. The consequences increase according to student responses whereby the students are said to be digging a deeper hole for themselves. For example, if they continue to misbehave it can lead up to the parents being called in for a conference

**Step 3: Implementation and Results.** The students were not lining up properly, and so this made transitioning from one area to another very time-consuming. Snack time was often chaotic, and students were often impatient. The last problem she faced was that they would not remain quiet during homework time. She decided to go over the rules and routines that were already in place with the students to reinforce it while pointing out to them the slight changes that she would be making.

The major cause for the noise level was that they could sit and stand anywhere and so friends would congregate and talk excessively. To solve this problem, she implemented the number system. At the appropriate time, Ms. Howell would go around the room and verbally assign each child to a number. Then she would ask all the ones to line up then the two's and so forth. The groups were now chosen at random which reduced the noise level. The students now lined up more quietly and instructions for the transition could be heard and followed. Not only

was this applied to lining up, but to seating as well as picking teams. For snack, she was able to set it up before student's arrival, and so the students would come in, get the snack and have a seat immediately. Therefore, this would help to eliminate the constant walking around and them becoming impatient (Fink, 2016).

Ms. Howell started to use more non-verbal signals such as turning the light on and off to quiet the group down. Furthermore, this helped her with the issue of having people assume she was yelling at the students. She also implemented her version of the PAT system. Seeing that homework time was where the most problems occurred, she told the students that homework time is 40 minutes no matter what. If you wasted 10 minutes to get settled down, then homework will continue for an extra 10 minutes to make up for it, and the other activity that follows is shortened accordingly. Moreover, this also worked in reverse if they finished their homework early. Lastly, the backup systems were already stipulated by the program so when a child would continue to misbehave it would lead up to her writing an incident report for the director to talk it over with the parents. Ms. Howell, therefore, received positive results from implementing the PAT model and will continue to enforce the new system with her aftercare group (Manning & Bucher, 2013).

## **Case Study II: The Hyperactive Student**

**Step 1: Background Assessment.** A student from Kindergarten was chosen for a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA). He had a problem with disrupting the class, bothering other classmates sometimes hitting them and bombarding the teacher with questions whenever she was trying to reprimand him. The lesson would often be hindered by this behavior, and as a result, some strategy had to be implemented to correct this behavior.

The initial reaction from the teacher was to stop the behavior by punishing. The true cause of the behavior was not first identified (Smart & Igo, 2010). The child was instead put in



time out, sent to the principal's office and was suspended on more than one occasion.

Additionally, this did not change the child's behavior, and so the parents were contacted for assistance. According to Smith (2011), parent involvement can help the teacher to make better decisions regarding that particular student before administrative intervention. The ineffectiveness of punishment was clearest when the parents responded to the teacher by telling her that "he loves to be suspended because he wants to stay home and not go to school." The teacher then began to seek out the cause of his disruptive behavior. She soon discovered that the behavior was most often displayed when some lesson or class work was in session. It was most rarely displayed when fun activities were in progress. The student would always be the first one to finish his work and occupy his time by disturbing others. She also noticed that when he wanted attention from other students, he would sometimes hit them and not think anything of it. Also, when you would speak to the child about his behavior, it was very difficult to get through to him because he had an intelligent response to every statement you made which is often viewed as talking back to the teacher. With this being said it seems as if the basic psychological need of this student is that he needed to be engaged in something that grabs his attention at all times. He also wanted attention when he requested it, and he was looking for an answer to his questions and was not trying to be disrespectful.

**Step 2: Choosing a Strategy.** One strategy that was implemented was that he was given an opportunity to take a walk whenever he felt he was getting upset and would disturb the class. Subsequently, this worked to some extent, but the teacher continued to search for a more practical strategy. The teachers were out of ideas, and it got to the point where doctors diagnosed him as having Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and given medication. The side effects of the medication were unbearable, and once again the parents requested that another alternative strategy is implemented. According to Coles, Sarno Owens, Serrano, Slavec, and

Evans (2015), effective classroom management strategies can be effective in improving negative behavior from ADHD students. At first, the punishment was used to mask the problem, then medicine but both methods were ineffective in this case. After observing the child again, the teacher noticed that the student's cognitive development mainly his reading skills were far above the rest of the students. He loved to read to others and did it so well. So the teachers agreed to have him read to the classes at story time. This strategy focused on positive reinforcement which proved to be a more effective strategy (Banks, 2014; Fink, 2016).

**Step 3: Implementation and Results.** The student was acting out because he had nothing interesting to look forward to and to occupy his time. His school work was easy to him, and he needed to be challenged. Once the teachers recognized this, the student moved on to receive several awards, and he completely changed his behavior around. The implementation of these changes simply reduced problem behaviors and did not significantly disturb the systems that were already set in place. As educators, it is easier sometimes because of our demanding schedules and lack of training to put a Band-Aid on the problem (Smart & Igo, 2010). However, spending the time to find out the cause of the inappropriate behavior during downtime such as recess is much more effective than simply trying to stop it at that moment (Howard, 2017). The long-term change in behavior is more easily achieved if you can identify why a student is misbehaving inappropriately (Fink, 2016).

## **Conclusion**

As noted in the case studies presented, issues within the classroom were solved using the three-step approach of assessing the background, choosing a strategy and implementing and monitoring the results. This lead to decision-making on the student-teacher level which will reduce the pressure on administrators. School improvement plans should adopt a bottom-up approach where teachers are active in the decision-making process (Leach & Crisp, 2016).

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## Chapter 4

# Enhanced Communication

The Key to Academic Achievement



by:  
**Jamez Williams**

## **Enhanced Communication for Academic Achievement**

### **Rationale and Background**

Since our inception, this institution has been at the forefront of creating academic solutions that result in the creation and cultivation of *intellectual capital* among our students, educators and external stakeholders. Wee and Chua (2015) presented that intellectual capital is based on knowledge, creativity, and experiences that tie directly into combined skills and attained discipline. Gioacasi (2014) promoted intellectual capital as a value creator, not just in capacity but also in the discipline of economic provision and financial facility. As such, understanding *intellectual capital* as an institutional resource should be *the* prime focus for any institution looking to increase or promote the knowledge of the enterprise partaking into the concept (Gioacasi, 2014; Wee & Chua, 2015). Understanding that focus is just one of the many initiatives that this institution believes in communicating to all of our stakeholders.

Academic achievement is what we promote at this fine institution. Having all of our students, not only succeed, but advance on a continuous path where academic success is a lifestyle that will transfer over to every part of their lives is our life's work. The goal is to engage students in a way that projects mastery. Vrugt and Oort (2008) inferred that achievement is a process in which students engage in self-regulation and attainment goals. As such, the process of goal attainment and corresponding self-regulation, students enhance their achievement by enacting principles that garner results (Gioacasi, 2014; Vrugt & Oort, 2008).

As such, this handbook is promoting a structured component of enhancing communication for academic achievement. With the importance of intellectual capital, and our *raison d'être*, which is to provide the *best education through collaboration, commitment, and progressive elaboration*, our institution is ready for the challenge; those now, and in the future. As such, this handbook module will address how our organization initiates and continues to

enhance communication for academic achievement.

Communication is the lynchpin here at Palm Trees School. We are successful because we undertook the promise of *communicating ideas translate into creating reality*. That phrase has been around since our founding, and it is one that we are proud to have as one of our pillars.

This module focuses on translating the pillars into actionable items; to make them living and breathing attributes to continue our promise. We will continue to do this by doing what we have done since the beginning of our institution: *communicating*. Communication of ideas, visions and the competitive nature of excellence is the voice in which speaks.

Communication is a dual-mode mechanism that operates with the understanding that to channel the behavior that promotes outcomes; one must use effective communication as the primary channel (Mohr & Nevin, 1990). Many think communication to be an activity where something spoken and then subsequently heard, but it goes beyond that notion as it happens in conjunction with the other and not separate (Mohr & Nevin, 1990). Singh and Singh (2005) interpreted communication as a social function and not a mechanical one. In the classroom, that understanding of social interaction is profound; students must acquire the meaning of thoughts and ideas in the same vein in which the instructor meant it (Singh & Singh, 2005) or the effectiveness. As such there has to be a direct transfer of concept to meaning and meaning to concept to establish enhanced communication (Mohr & Nevin, 1990; Singh & Singh, 2005).

This institution is enhancing the communication between students, faculty and all internal and external stakeholders. As student achievement is at the foundation of our goals, ensuring that we continue to innovate ideas that promote continuous learning is the focal point of this module: *Enhancing Communication for Academic Achievement*.

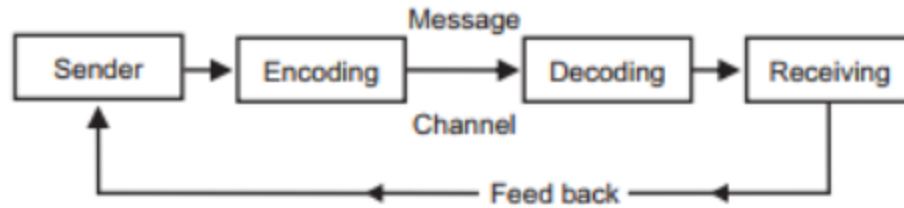
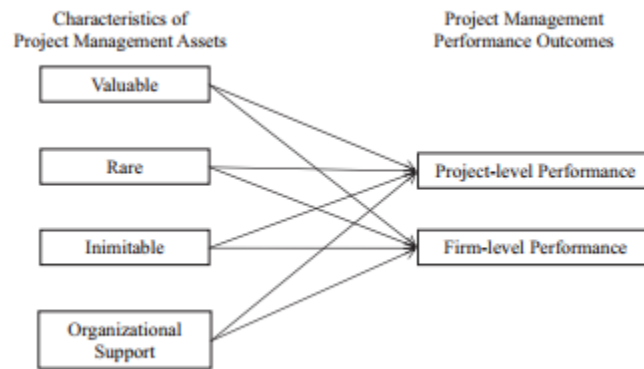


Figure 1: Communication pathway

Lisak, Erez, Sui, and Lee (2016) reported that innovation is the impetus of achievement. The premise of their study, Lisak et al. (2016) focused on diversity, leadership, and innovation and how it heightened functional accomplishments within teams and their goals. The enhancement of communication in the study reported having increased synthesis in knowledge points, which subsequently led to higher achievement and decision-making within the diverse groups contained within the study. Similarly, Hills (2013) spoke to the point that developing a robust communication strategy is necessary for an organization to create the space for the achievement to take place, and increase strategic decision-making abilities. Also, enhanced communication must have three (3) elements to ensure a continuous process: *regular communication, transparency, and communication-related to goals* (Hills, 2013). According to Lee (2015), enhance communication that organizations are looking for to promote innovation, and subsequent change is complex and obtainable; that is where leadership comes into focus.

To address the needs of stakeholders, particularly the brain-trust; our students, we formulated an enhanced communication model to strengthen areas identified as not being adequate and poised for revision. The present model exists as an outdated practice and does not address the requirements of the institution's current and future student body; thus by design, it now limits achievement. According to Mathur, Jugdev, and Fung (2007), creating competitive advantage utilizing intangible assets and project management principles will assist in changing the current paradigm. In a related study, Mathur, Jugdev, and Fung (2014) purported that goal

attainment and performance outcomes, based on characteristics, engage the competitive advantage, promote achievement and increase decision-making ability (see Figure 2). This understanding is the reason behind this handbook module.



*Figure 2: Project management flow chart.*

### **Goals, Strategies, Objectives, and Tactics**

The project to enhance communication for academic achievement involves eliminating deficits and creating a culture where all stakeholders are interacting with the institution in real-time using social media like applications, such as Canvas, Blackboard, and or Remind. The institutional project is primarily designed to connect internal and external stakeholders in a uniformed, consistent manner. The application usage is cross-platform and accessed through a variety of devices, such as mobile phones, tablets, and computers (both mobile and home-based). This component is the communication implementation.

The plan provides real-time access to information, textbooks and archived work in the increased communication/access aspect of the plan. As a supplemental, and equally as important, the communication process will include all stakeholders in the creation and maintenance of positive media points for social-media associated utilization (such as pictorial/video events, promotions, student projects, etcetera.). This process is done to include, on a deeper level, internal and external stakeholders in a venue where they can view, comment and collaborate



virtually. The intention is to change the “touchpoints” of the institution by promoting stakeholder immersion in a way that brings deeper involvement from the community. This component is the marketing implementation.

Tactically, the application process will include no additional effort that is detrimental to the staff’s workload. Each inclusion will manage to add to the process without creating a workload drain. Integrating the utilization of the software only amounts to being an active collaborator with the technology tools already in class. Thus, the limitation and the barriers to entry lessened.

The implementation team will monitor each educational participant for troubleshooting and adherence monitoring to counter any unforeseen issues. This effort is to ensure that any restrictions, whether technology or member-driven, are managed. Management will exist throughout the implementation process and beyond. Also, each participant will have access to express found solutions, efficiencies, suggestions to broaden the scope of utilization.

### **Communication**

In communicating the plan for full implementation, the process began with all stakeholders and their roles defined. Top tier dissemination and initiation belongs to the Administration team, which consists of the Principal and the Assistant Principal. Their role is as the project approvers and imitators. Although governance belongs to the Project Manager, the Administration team has full authority of the implementation.

Second tier communication belongs to the Project Manager (role is in conjunction with Administration team, but segmented due to hierarchy). All project aspects disseminated and administered through the Project Manager. The component includes all progression, issues, changes, and proposed modifications. Upon review, the Project Manager will distribute updates to the Administration team for progress notification and change order requests.

Secondary communication belongs to the third tier group, which consists of the Co-Coordinator (Team Lead), Team Member(s) and Implementation Participants. Their roles are to govern and journal the processes during implementation and report to the Project Manager. The section includes all areas regarding progress, issue, and requests for modifications or changes.

Relatable, and ancillary communication belongs to extended stakeholders, which is composed of parents, guardians and community persons of interest. The roles assigned to this team is working beyond beta testing and becoming the UAT component (User Acceptance Tester). The responsibility is to utilize the communication tools to a great measure to appropriate any changes or modifications needed to enhance two-way exchange efficiency.

With all components in place, the initial and continuous set up of communication promotes an ongoing dialogue with all stakeholders, and by default, increase academic rigor for the students. This discussion is informational, problem-solving and social to re-shift the focus of the school into one where all parties poised for success. The success of the exchanges lends to find a means of constant, and elaborative communication focused on creating a positive culture of academic achievement with the institution and participating stakeholders.

Audience	Communication Type	Low/Mid/High tech	Rationale
Internal Stakeholders (Staff)	Paper Based (Handout)	Low-tech	Introduction of accountability practice for delivery model
Internal Stakeholders (Staff)	Email	High-tech	High volume contact with trackable data
Internal Stakeholders (Staff)	Video Conference	High-tech	High volume connection for minimal/vast audience
Internal Stakeholders (Staff)	Online Development	High-tech	High volume accountability model
Internal Stakeholders (Staff)	Seminar	Low-tech	Mid volume real time information delivery
Internal Stakeholders (Staff)	Conference	Low-tech	High volume real time information delivery
External Stakeholders (Parents)	Paper Based	Low-tech	Individual, high accountability delivery mode
External Stakeholders (Parents)	Email	High-tech	High volume contact with trackable data
External Stakeholders (Parents)	Phone Contact	Mid-tech	Information accountability with individual data collection
External Stakeholders (Parents)	Seminar	Low-tech	Mid volume real time information delivery
External Stakeholders (Parents)	Parental Conference	Low-tech	Individual/group accountability with trackable data
Internal Stakeholders (Students)	Paper Based (Handout)	Low-tech	Individual, low level accountability delivery mode
Internal Stakeholders (Students)	Online Communication	High-tech	Individual/group, high accountability with trackable data
Internal Stakeholders (Students)	Student Conference	Low-tech	Individual/group accountability for important messaging
Administrative Stakeholders (District)	Email	High-tech	High level information delivery for administrative decision assistance
Administrative Stakeholders	Online Communication (Stats)	High-tech	High level information delivery for administrative decision assistance
Institution Partners	Phone Contact	Mid-tech	Personal/business initiative model for relationship building
Institution Partners	Email	High-tech	Personal/business initiative model for introductory/continued relationship building
Community	Paper Based (Handout)	Low-tech	Low level information for relationship building
Community	Website	High-tech	Constant information availability for relationship building and information
Community	Conference	Low-tech	High volume information delivery for real time information and Q&A

*Figure 3: Communication Plan*

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## Summary

This guide has been developed to help decision making under stress when working with a team, and providing effective leadership. Furthermore, it may be a challenge for leaders to lead teams effectively when working within a stressful environment. This guide provides critical tools to assist leaders from various organizations and empower teams to work cohesively and successfully.

Bateman and Snell (2012) stated that leaders must be able to strengthen an organization by diversifying the work team. In fact, diverse work teams warrant impeccable strategic management that effectively guided the work team towards success. Essentially, when a work team is stress-free, they have the propensity to effectively communicate and work in excellence (Bateman & Snell, 2012).

Teamwork requires a group of people to come together and fulfill one vision. Hill and Bartol (2016) stated that the impact of an empowering leadership on a work team aggregates effective collaboration on team performance, and increases at higher levels of organization spreading. Subsequently, organizations are to consider bottoms up decision making under stress, pressure as an effective leader, and effectively communicate as a work team.

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