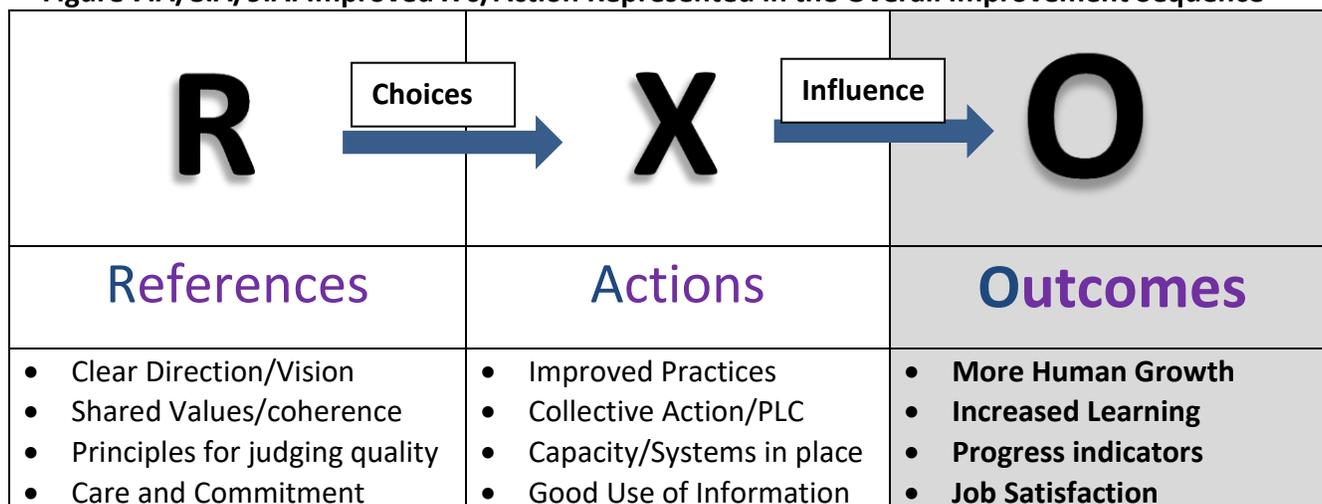


## Chapter 9 – Examining O’s/Outcomes , Evidence-Based Decision Making and Vision-Based Strategic Planning

In this chapter we will explore the variable that we are calling outcomes or O’s. Outcomes range from things we can count like scores to how people feel and everything else that results from what we do at our school. O’s are in essence the “evidence” of the previous seeds that we have sown. So since everything at the school is connected, every outcome is evidence of the cumulative references/R’s and actions/X’s that have occurred before it. Therefore to engage in effective evidence-based practice, we need to keep sight of our vision, and use outcomes to help us understand where we are on our journey toward our desired destination.

**Figure 7.A/8.A/9.A. Improved X’s/Action Represented in the Overall Improvement Sequence**



As one in the role of leader, it is difficult not to place a great deal of attention on the O’s – test scores, behavior, faculty morale, public perception of the school, the knowledge skills and dispositions of the graduates, as well as all sorts of things that we consider as accomplishments to be celebrated, and/or problems that need to be addressed. It is how we are judged by others to a great degree. But as a leader of a team, we need to emphasize that winning will be more likely if we focus on the process than the product. In other words, we need to discourage our own and others’ human tendency to put too much emphasis on the O’s and devote our attention to raising the level of the R’s and the X’s.

As mentioned earlier, if any member of our team at ASSC are given one of three pieces of data – 1) student achievement scores, 2) SCAI climate survey ratings, or 3) observations of the practices at the school, we are able to then predict with great accuracy the other two variables. How can we do this? Because everything is related - all three sources of evidence are informed by the same collectively held R’s at the school. All R’s and X’s indicate a place on the roadmap. Your school is somewhere on the roadmap and the essence of any point on the roadmap will imply certain qualities and phenomena.

Cultivating the qualities of trust and vision will encourage patience within the process. Looking for instant results is highly detrimental to your success. It is important to keep in mind that changes in the O’s for any school that is moving up (and/or down for that matter) the school function pathway will lag behind the changes in the R’s and X’s. A new target destination and a quality vision will lead to better choices of actions and that will then influence outcomes

eventually, yet we will still have to live through the influence of all the X's of the past working their way through the system. We could call that our karma or that we are reaping what we have sown, but it just part of the change process. Most notably, we will see this in the effects of the past in teachers and students struggling to adjust to higher quality instructional and management practices as they represent the need to adjust to new R's.

So we need to be persistent and focus on the process, and for now, we need to think about how we want to keep outcome data in perspective and use it to promote our growth and movement up. Here are a few principles to apply when it comes to O's/outcomes:

### **Principles to Apply in the Area of O's/Outcomes**

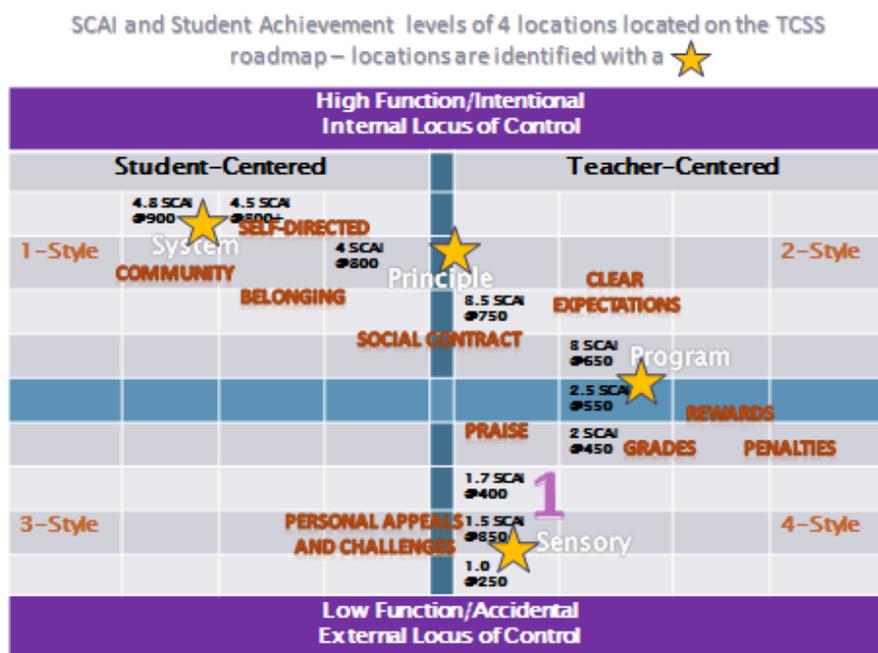
- Everything is connected so all O's are related (e.g., in our research we see between a 0.7 and 0.9 correlation in each of the climate areas to one another and to achievement).
- O's are evidence (lagging indicators) of the aggregate R's and X's at the school and will reflect them – eventually. O's usually take care of themselves when high functioning R's and X's are consistently implemented.
- O's (like R's and X's) can be located onto the TCSS roadmap. So we can assume that there are typical O's that fit into each of the 1, 2, 3 and 4 school and classroom paradigms (see Figure 10.1 and 10.2)
- Placing value on processes (X's) will encourage growth more effectively than placing emphasis on outcomes (O's). Process values tend to encourage shared learning and fit neatly into a PLC spirit, they imply a value for quality over expediency, and they are consistent with development of a psychology of success. Outcome values tend to encourage a focus on the ends, imply at least a little competition, encourage doing “whatever works” to achieve the goal, and promote an anxious climate (See Figure 6.x).
- Some outcome data represent symptoms of the real problem, while some outcome data can represent evidence of the real problem. It is important to make the distinction. Moreover, addressing outcomes directly is discouraged. It typically leads to a focus on trying to solve symptoms and usually misses the real cause and/or the real problem (See Figure 9.x).
- Comparisons internally or externally are almost always an unhealthy and detrimental ingredient. Be careful not to let attainment of a certain level of any outcome make us either complacent or dejected. A high score does not necessarily mean you are succeeding and a low score does not mean you are failing.

**Reflection 9.a:** It might be useful to think about Outcomes in schools like those in the health care world. We could characterize our O's as the symptoms and levels of health. The R's and the X's are the lifestyle variables that produce the level of health. So when we start looking for solutions, we need to ask whether we want to try to treat symptoms, or to fix the real problems. Reflect on how your school has approached its outcome data to date within the medical analogy. What has been the focus?

### Locating O's onto the Roadmap

As with R's and X's, discussed in the previous two chapters, we can locate the O's of a school on the effectiveness roadmap (See Figure 9.x). Our O's (scores, rates, student experiences, perceptions, defining qualities, etc) typically correspond to theoretical roadmap locations. The R's, X's and O's at a school will be inter-related and as a result most often fit a combined location profile. The R's and X's at a school that has a climate of 1.5 out of 5 will be very different than those at a school where there is a 4.5/5. Likewise when we find a 1.5/5 climate and function level we almost always see a corresponding low level of student achievement and other outcomes. In the same way, when we see a SCAI climate rating above 4 out of 5, we can be fairly certain that the achievement is going to be at a matching high level. Figure 9.x below highlights four theoretical locations on the roadmap.

**Figure 9.x Locating Four Theoretical School Performance Levels on the School Effectiveness Roadmap**



Each of the four locations in Figure 9.x implies a corresponding series of R's, X's and ultimately O's. The nature of these four locations is outlined briefly in Figure 9.x. We could also characterize them fairly accurately by their dominant quality – system (highest), principle, program, reactive (lowest), or the relative amount of psychology of success (POS) or failure (POF) practiced (See Appendix X). So if we have a solid sense of any one of the essential qualities of a school – the R's, X's or the O's, we would be able to pretty confidently infer the level of the other two qualities.

**Reflection** – Check in with your emotional state after reading that last paragraph. Are you feeling a sense of being judged? or of being superior to other schools? or of wanting to find the flaws in the roadmap theory? It is difficult not to want to go to the personal when we are forced to self-evaluate. It is natural. But it will help to think of your situation objectively and give ourselves a little distance from it. And as always engage the process with a growth mindset.

**Figure 9.x. Descriptions of R's, X's and O's at schools at Four School Effectiveness Roadmap Locations**

<b>Climate/Function Location on the Roadmap</b>	<b>Common R's</b>	<b>Common X's</b>	<b>Common O's</b>
<b>1.5 Climate Location</b>	R's defined by POF – external LOC, fragmentation, fixed ability orientation. Coping. Lots of excuses about the students and parents and conditions (the context). Competitive survival. Sensory/Survival LOP	3- and 4-Style teaching. Lots of lecture and test. Worksheets and low critical thinking. Routine and homework driven. Either dominant or passive classroom management. Effort to domesticate students.	Below 30%tile test scores. Low student motivation. High discipline referrals. Low teacher morale. Low collaboration. Low trust and hope that things can improve. Students main goal is self-preservation.
<b>2.5 Climate Location</b>	POS is mixed with lots of POF define R's. Cleverness, coping and making it through the day is the goal. The value is control and responding to problem situations. Orderly management and institutional coherence is the goal. Program and Sensory LOP	Programs are implemented to improve function and coherence. 2-Style management and Direct Instruction used by the model teachers. Upper track students get lots of attention.	30- 50%tile test scores. Students in the upper tracks feel served, but most others feel like they are just passing time. Students look to meet basic needs for power, fun and belonging outside the system. Teachers are cordial to other another. Sense that this is the best that can be done.
<b>3.5 Climate Location</b>	R's are defined by more POS with some POF. Goal of helping students be successful is norm. Mostly attitude of competence and shared expectations and faith in best practices. Vision of effectiveness is present. Principle and Program LOP	Some 1-Style teaching, but mostly effective 2-Style. More cooperative learning and inquiry. But mostly still rely on well executed D.I. Many programs are used faithfully to coordinate X's. Teachers share X's.	50 - 80%tile test scores. Sense that the school is functioning adequately. Most students feel like they are able to find a path to success if they apply themselves. Teachers are more cohesive than not. Trust level is good.
<b>4.5 Climate Location</b>	R's are very intentionally about POS. Principles drive how macro and micro choices are made. The school has a clear vision of excellence and empowerment. Principle and System LOP	More 1-Style teaching than 2-Style. High amounts of inquiry, project based learning and student ownership and self-reflection in daily activities. Teachers collaborate on how to do better with 1-Style and leadership supports that effort.	80-100%tile test scores or highly recognized performance. Sense that school provides the best route to life-time success. Teachers trust one another and leadership. Students trust what they are doing at school is meaningful and will lead to their growth.

**How does My Context Influence My O's?**

Many readers are likely questioning how the school's context factors into one's ability to move up the roadmap. You may be asking "what about where my school is located, the demographics and socio-economic issues with my students and parents, as well as the influence of all the schooling that has come before?" All of these realities are important to consider in our work in

general and our efforts to move up the pathway. Who we are teaching – their needs, their knowledge, skills and dispositions, their cultural backgrounds, what we can and cannot count on from parents at this point are all useful information. So it is true that what we need to do to move up the pathway will depend to some degree on those things. But that being said, the R's that will keep us in the low quadrants of the roadmap are going to be the same no matter who are students are, and those that are going elevate us to the higher quadrants are the same no matter who our students are.

So our current circumstances are simply part of what constitutes “the job” at any particular school - whether our job is to run a school, teach a class, coach a team, coordinate parent involvement, advise other teachers, or counsel students. All students have needs and characteristics – because of their age, gender, circumstances, learning style, home lives, previous experiences of schooling, etc. Our job is, take all of that into account find the best way to help that student learn and grow. Their individual and collective characteristics are good to know, consider, and use to influence the choices we make in our work, but they are not determining. They may influence our current (and probably historical) roadmap location but they do not present finite limits to where we can go, only the challenge level of the task. For the most part, our context factors will influence us in three basic ways.

1. Where we are today and our starting location on the pathway.
2. How quickly we are able to move up.
3. The type and quantity of effort that it will take to move up.

The most important implication of our context factors is that it may require us to help our students become accustomed to different (higher function) X's (and by extension that we are using higher level R's). For example transitioning a group of students who have been used to being taught in a 4-style into becoming a functioning 1-style class will take much longer, require much more skill, and represent many more challenges than inheriting students who are used to say a high function 2-Style and moving them up to becoming a 1-style self-directed community of learners. In the situation where we are faced with moving from a 4-paradigm location, is it a bit more work? Yes. A bit more complicated task? Yes. Will it require more school-wide coherence in the effort? Yes. But the persistent question is always “do we want to do what it takes to move up, or not?” It is possible. The pathway is clear, but we do have to know what we have signed on for.

Chapters 11 and 12 will go into more detail in explaining how to move from specific locations. Chapter 11 outlines the path starting from the lower quadrants, and chapter 12 explains the pathway from middle to high functioning. Yet no matter our location it will be critical for the leader to support a healthy and sane mindset. If we are going to promote R's defined by a 100% internal locus of control and an attitude of responsibility, we also need to shift the emphasis from the O's (especially those related to students current levels of knowledge, current levels of parent and community support). That starts with us not sending mixed messages. We cannot say in one breath that the school needs do whatever it takes to improve test scores and with the other to say trust the process of movement up the pathway. The dominant message that will register will be the fear-based outcome message. When we do this we inadvertently cause people to lose faith in the process of growing in their use of quality X's and to revert to lower level X's with which they have been safe (i.e., agreements with mediocrity), familiar and perceive as having “worked.”

### **Examining Some of the Critical O's/Outcomes that We Care About**

Why do any of us care about certain O's? Sometimes it is because others use them to judge our performance or worth. Sometimes it is because they attract attention to us or our school.

Sometimes we find that they provide us with useful data related to our progress. All of these reasons to attend to our outcomes have some validity. Let's examine a few of the O's that will be the most essential to attend to as we facilitate our school's growth process. For each, we will examine how it would evidence as a 1-Paradigm phenomenon (effect), and the most essential R's and X's (causes) that would contribute to its demonstration.

<b>O's of Interest</b>	<b>Target Appearance as 1-Paradigm Evidence</b>	<b>Primary Contributing R's and X's</b>
<b>Overall Learning Level</b>	In the 1-Paradigm location – learning is viewed from the perspective of the whole student, and whole community. So evidence of knowledge, skills and dispositions are important. Students are self-reflective and self-directed, they can work in teams and solve problems. They feel empowered to have a voice and be given ownership over their learning.	1-Paradigm X's that are motivated by 1-Paradigm R's. Teachers commit to promoting high functioning classrooms and moving their students to more self-direction and community building as fast as is possible. Increasingly more inquiry and project based learning is used. Assessment promotes clarity of the skills and dispositions necessary to accomplish being a student in a POS class.
<b>Test Scores</b>	Test scores are a lagging indicator of school growth. But because they indicate a lot of actual skill and knowledge development, they should improve as the school moves up the pathway. They are not a perfect indicator, but they offer some information.	Test scores can be temporarily improved by teaching to the test, but this strategy will result in a plateau and ultimately limit the ability to improve. The majority of what achievement scores measure will be the median overall X quality (see roadmap) at the school. So every R and X at the school will contribute to the eventual test scores.
<b>School's Perception</b>	Others' perception of the school is also a lagging indicator of movement up the pathway. This is an example of an O that will affect our happiness in our job. It will be helpful to the effort to encourage a perception (based in reality and an emerging vision) that the school is moving toward excellence, then it results in more pride and community self-esteem. Winning breeds winning. So perceptions are important.	Actual improvement in R's and X's will be the best way to improve perceptions within and without. But the leader X's related to PR are important too. Communicating success and improvement is valuable. And do not focus just on scores, also work to re-make or reinforce an excellence narrative with stories, testimonials, innovative X's, and putting your vision out there. But smoke and mirrors will collapse eventually, so job one is the true R's and X's.
<b>Student Interactions</b>	Students view one another as co-learners. They trust that in school open spaces that students are kind and respectful of one another. Students learn to interact with all students – there is little cliquishness. Students are highly involved in after school teams and clubs and side projects. Students learn to trust peer mediators and conflict leaders and to take on this role themselves. Students expect to solve their	High quality student interactions start with the consistent use of X's in the classroom that create the habits of collaboration, a culture of listening and respect, and solving problems in teams. This starts with excellent technical management skills. Assessment is used to clarify what quality looks like and student regularly self-evaluate the quality of their cooperation, team work, process, and participation skills. Students are

	own problems and expect adults to act with integrity when it comes to enforcing policy.	trained to be peer mediators. Class meetings are common. Adults act with integrity and hold students accountable to their commitments.
<b>Motivation Level of Students.</b>	The trajectory is always toward more intrinsic motivation and self-responsibility. This is true for both staff and students. We can see it as we give more and more responsibility to students and we see them putting quality first and becoming less interested in grades and more in quality and creativity. Students run with being empowered as do teachers, and we see new grassroots initiatives. Students are free to put their energy into being creative and taking risks as opposed to using it to resist again a repressive structure.	Leadership is deliberate and conspicuous about empowering teachers and encouraging innovation and new initiatives. Classrooms commit to 1-Paradigm with self-direction as a goal. Students are trained to focus on the process and taught how to self-assess based on rubrics for quality. And remnant of 4-Paradigm X's are eliminated. Students take ownership of their progress, growth, and assessment including leading their parent conferences.
<b>Habits of Students</b>	Students become accustomed to 1-Paradigm ways of being. So they have replaced finding ways to meet their basic needs on their own and trust that the planning curriculum is needs satisfying. The students get used to listening and being listened to. Teachers get used to a class of students who are all attentive and ready to engage in meaningful work. Students get used to correcting peers who act in ways that is detrimental to the school. Pride becomes a bigger value than social Darwinism.	X's used in the classes promote the satisfaction of basic needs. Classroom management is characterized by POS X's and the principles of high functioning behavior, and creating a culture of listening and respect. Work is meaningful. The qualities of excellence, creativity and inquiry are clarified and included in assessment criteria. Problems are viewed through the lens of basic needs issues first (see Figure 9.x below). Adults project a unified message that students need to be self-directed and responsible to their agreements and apply consequences when they are not, while refraining POF promoting X's.
<b>Incidence of Wanted and Unwanted Outcomes</b>	Referrals, dropout rate bullying, verbal or physical violence rates, attendance rates, tardy rates, parent complaints, number of students in after school activities, club membership, between class competition enthusiasm levels, sports team success, litter, graffiti, and others.	Every X will related to every O. As the school moves up the roadmap and their X's are defined by improved R's and X's all of these O's will be indirectly affected. In most cases, shifting all classroom management X's to 1-Paradigm will be much more effective reducing Bullying than a formal Bullying program. Programs can be positive, but they are often dealing with the symptom (see below). A culture of care and respect shown to all by all reduces the need to displace aggression or passively resist an unloving institution. But at the same time the school (students and adults) takes on less and less tolerance for casual abuse, meanness, and acts of destruction.

**Reflection 9.x:** Do we view our current state through a growth or fixed-ability orientation? Since our O's/outcomes are just information, then depending on how we choose to perceive it, we are in a position

to use either a growth or fixed ability lens to process it. The growth orientation asks “what can we learn about our X’s from this data? And “How do my X’s need to improve if I want to see improved O’s in this area?” The fixed-ability orientation asks “How does this data compare to others? And “How does my ego feel about what this data implies about how our school rates?”

### **Envisioning the Outcomes of Our Desired Roadmap Location**

There will be great value to envisioning and operationalizing the outcomes that define where we are going on our journeys. As Muhammad Ali once stated, “If my mind can conceive it, and my heart can believe it, then I can achieve it.” Fully conceiving the outcomes of our desired location will be invaluable, but it will involve more than just aiming for higher test scores, it will mean really getting to know the kinds of things that are normal and assumed at that location. A good way to get at the practical reality of that location will be to ask ourselves “what do we want our students’ normal experience of school to be?” (Procedural Note: It is more effective to conceive this world as a present reality rather than a future wish in our conception process). In this desired location –

- What defines the students’ classroom learning experience and why do they appreciate it?
- Why do people like working here?
- How do people talk to each other?
- How do they talk about the school?
- What changes have you seen in the various pieces of school data?

Expect there to be some debate about what is normal at your desired location. That is healthy and keeps those who are most entrusted with the role of guiding the vision in touch and grounded. But as we examine the areas of data-driven decision making, and a vision-based strategic planning process, you will see that the success of these efforts will depend on our ability to operationalize in great detail what we want the new normal to look and feel like.

In the formal vision-based strategic planning process described below, our success will depend to a great degree on our ability to define both where we want to go as well as where we are now. The better you can operationalize both the practical reality of where you want to go, including the micro level outcomes, as well as a clear-sighted assessment of your current practical reality, the more effectively you will be able to engage in planning. But before we discuss strategic planning, we need to make better explore the distinction between solving symptoms vs real problems or we can easily fall into that pitfall.

### **Outcomes that Point to Problems – Solving Problems not Just Symptoms**

Frequently, when we examine a particular outcome at the school, it implies to us some sort of problem condition. What any of us defines as problems is relative to the school and its priorities. But we might broadly define a problem here as the cause of something that is happening or continues to happen that we consider to be unacceptable, and/or that is leading us in the wrong direction or away from our vision. For any problem, we need to either act on it immediately, accept it for now, or intend future action to remedy it. Problems can be as small as why there is a bit too much litter today, or as large as why there is a high dropout rate, or a lack of trust among the faculty.

As we engage in the process of identifying the kinds of key areas for change that we refer to as “priorities” and/or “problems,” we need to distinguish between the real problem and the symptoms of those real problems. Symptoms are most often outcomes/O’s (effects) and real problems are most often our R’s and X’s (causes). And we can add that we should be cautious about letting others define our problems, especially those without a clear sense of our vision.

A simple way to get at whether a problem is the root problem or just a symptom is to ask ourselves the following question, “So why is this the way it is, and what are we currently doing to contribute to it?” That question can be asked in a faculty meeting, retreat, a committee meeting, and/or as a self-reflection. We might need to keep asking the question, and unpeeling the onion, until we get to something that is operational and that we can control. At that point we will have something that we can work with. Attempting to solve symptoms will inherently keep us stuck in our location on the roadmap. Solving real problems may require a little more thought, but they will lead to real movement.

**Case Study** – Mr. Smith was a Social Studies teacher in an urban High School. His personality could be described as friendly and supportive but understated and business-like. But he would be classified as a 1-Paradigm teacher with his heavy use of cooperative learning, projects, and inquiry. The school as a whole had a daily attendance rate of 75%, and constant issues with discipline. The fact that on average one student in 4 was missing each period could be defined as a “problem” at the school. In Mr. Smith’s class the attendance was commonly 100% and on average well over 90%, and he had no problems with discipline in fact the students were cooperative with one another and focused from the beginning of the period until the end. Examining this case, we could say that the school had an O of low attendance, and poor discipline. So what would conventional wisdom say to do? They could potentially address these symptoms with a lot of approaches. They could also take a fixed-ability view of their context and adopt the R that assumed “this is the best you can do with “these” students.” However Mr. Smith’s class showed that the students would show up if they felt like it was worth it to them. The school could implement an attendance incentive program as an added X to try to address their “problem” directly. But it would have little effect if the typical X’s did not improve. As the lesson from Mr. Smith’s class showed, the “real problems” at this school were the X’s, and the poor attendance was just a symptom. And those X’s were the result of mis-guiding R’s – which included “these kids don’t show up to class and when they do they are unruly.” Mr Smith used the R “these students want to be here and learn if there is something worth learning and they will act like self-responsible adults if they are treated like it.” So he used X’s consistent with those R’s, and his O’s were almost all students who were present, engaged and learning almost all of the time.

How many schools are trying to find a clever add on to address these kinds of symptoms, rather than looking at the real problems which is the quality of the common R’s and X’s at the school?

**Reflection:** Have you seen something similar take place at a school with which you are familiar?

### **The “Real Problem” with Trying to Solve “Symptoms.”**

When our assessment of an unwanted condition leads us to the conclusion that the symptom is the problem, we tend to try to fix the symptom directly or miss the opportunity to address the “real problem” (which is in the form of an under-examined problematic X). The results are (no pun intended) problematic. When we try to treat a symptom too often it leads to an effort to make a direct, external and/or controlling intervention – or what we often term a “band-aid”. These can take the form of bribing, coercing, begging, manipulating, and/or conning students and/or our peers and ourselves into either doing more or less of something. Adding a new isolated X into an existing system will require a great deal of effort to implement, but because in most cases it does not change the R’s, the result will be eventual regression to the mean X’s. Neither our levels of capacity nor coherence are positively influenced. If we need any proof of this just ask a teacher who has been teaching for more than 15 years about all the programs and professional development ideas that have been introduced into their school and how much impact they have had in the long term.

Here is a list of the main problems with adding a new X to the current situation in an attempt to address a problematic condition.

1. We have not gotten to the real problem. If the real problem does not change in the form of fundamentally better R's and X's, in the long-term the symptom will not change. We use the phrase "rearranging the deck chairs on the titanic" to refer to situations in which there is a new X added into the overall situation to fix an isolated O that does not address the real problem. The meaning of the phrase is that superficial changes will not have much overall effect when the fundamentals (R's and X's) have not changed. Capacity is not improved.
2. These interventions do not work very well to change behavior at the whole school or classroom level. "Implementing" programs (i.e., program level X's) into a school or classroom can make a positive difference (or a negative difference for that matter) but only if it indirectly leads to changes in the R's toward higher quality and level. And only if it the program reflects coherence and congruence with the guiding R's.
3. Addressing symptoms keeps us mired in the lower quality thinking. They are driven more by "complicated" and programmatic forms of thinking, and less by principles and system thinking and an appreciation for the inherent complexity of meaningful change.
4. When a leader adds a new intervention into the system which is not driven by a shared reference/R and/or has been agreed to by the group, they send a message to the members of the community that their concerns do not matter, and that in essence the one in charge cares more about their own convenience than the growth needs of the collective as learners and as an entity that is evolving in a particular direction.
5. They not only do not solve the "real problems" but more often create a new set of real problems. Even if a new isolated X is relatively helpful it will take effort to implement. But very often the X we select to deal with the symptom is a step in the wrong direction. Consider the case of Mr. Smith above, if instead of changing the real problem (i.e., the quality of the teaching), we might simply try to bribe, coerce, gimmick, control, con, and/or threaten the students into being in attendance. These kinds of interventions create unhealthy byproducts and will in many ways affect the direction of the school down the pathway to greater levels of dysfunction. They are like trying to make a flower be taller by pulling on it and stretching it. They will do little to make the flowers taller, but will leave the damage that will make encouraging the growth process more difficult.

When we look around a school we see several of these direct interventions. They are as confusing and troubling as anything that we observe in schools. There are those that will endorse pulling on the flowers to make them taller – i.e., the use of manipulation strategies, public comparisons, bribes, reward systems, names on the board or colored card systems, etc. After examining climate data from schools that elect to use these types of "positive behavior" interventions, and compared them to those that don't, what we have found is that their use tends to lead the school or classroom down the pathway and limits its growth potential (Shindler, 2018).

**Example of an X that deals directly with a symptom O - Colored card charts and names on the board systems.**

The idea of these systems is the each student can see a visual representation on a wall or board or where they stand for the day. If their behavior is at the "adequate" level their card is on green or their name is off the board. But if they do something the teacher decides has crossed a line, their name goes on the board, or they are asked to move their card to the yellow level. If more problems occur check marks are added to the name or cards are moved down to lower levels.

These systems are really good examples of trying to pull the flower up – which is pretty logical. They add the X of public shame and do get temporary changes in O's from the students who are affected by shame and comparison. But as we examine all the real "problems" in the

situation (i.e., un-engaging instruction, poor relationship between teacher and students, basic needs not being met, etc.) none of them are addressed by this gimmick.

These programs take a lot of time and effort to maintain, but they do not make the behavior in the class better, so there is no real change in the O in the long-term, and they have added all sorts of unhealthy R's and X's to the class.

The destructive effects of these kinds of gimmick systems are discussed at:

[www.transformativeclassroom.com](http://www.transformativeclassroom.com)

### Demining these Mistaken X's from What We Do

I would encourage you to explore the current state of your common X's to locate where these band-aide, direct symptom interventions have become systematized into regular and ongoing practices. We could compare it to de-mining a mine field. First, we need to agree to the R that we do not want to have mines i.e., these low quality X, and then we need to create a plan for removing them one by one. Like demining, we will need to be patient and purposeful. It is likely that people have gotten rather attached to their gimmicks. And sometimes it is difficult to know whether we have located a hubcap or a mine – an unhealthy manipulative strategy or just a clever strategy for doing getting something done more efficiently. The way that we can check is to ask ourselves the following questions:

1. What was the reason that we added this X into our school or classroom?
2. Was that reason related to a real problem or a symptom?
3. Was the new X intended to solve a real problem or a symptom?
4. How has the new X influenced the overall school or classroom? Would we say that it is moving us up to higher levels of function and effectiveness, or is it keeping us stuck?

**Figure 9.x. A Closer look at what is at the heart of real problems and the symptoms they manifest: Exploring basic needs and psychology of success (POS) or failure (POF).**

Symptoms (O's)	Corresponding Possible "Real Problems" (X's)
Low Student Achievement Levels Low Levels of School Climate	Low climate/function producing practices
Resultant behaviors when basic needs are not being met.	Basic needs are not met in or out of the classroom, and therefore the student is forced to meet those needs in less healthy and functional ways.
Power struggles, bullying, gaining attention, not doing work, helplessness, undermining the class, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Power – Students are not given sufficient opportunities for choice, voice, self-direction.</li> </ul>
Need to make excuses, hyper-comparison, fear of failure, bragging, put downs, need to win, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Competence – Students are not encouraged to see their strengths and progress. Students are compared.</li> </ul>
Acting out, clowning, need to socialize, competitiveness, need for praise, isolation, low self-esteem, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Belonging – Students don't feel safe. They don't work as functional teams. They feel in competition with others. They don't feel listened to or valued.</li> </ul>
Resistance, trying to get around rules and expectations, questioning the teacher or the lesson, looking for opportunities to break free and express, tagging, and graffiti, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Freedom – Student are not given increased responsibility when they show they can handle it. They are not given opportunities to take things in creative directions.</li> </ul>
Daydreaming, socializing, going off task, looking for weaknesses in the teacher, silliness, looking bored, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fun – Classes to not provide enough places where students win in teams, and are able to immerse</li> </ul>

	themselves in tasks that they find pleasurable. Not feeling safe emotionally.
<b>Byproducts of a POF (symptom behavior)</b>	<b>Psychology of Failure (POF) is promoted by the practices, values and policies at the school</b> <b>Causal teacher behaviors that promote POF</b>
Low motivation, looking for the easy path, not doing work without a reward, not taking responsibility for actions, blaming others, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>External Locus of Control (see Appendix X for POS promoting X's)</li> </ul>
Feeling disconnected from peers and adults, gang activity, cliques, low self-esteem, reckless behavior, drug use, low pride in self or school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Worthlessness and Alienation</li> </ul>
Fear of failure, quitting quickly and low persistence, Accepting low performance in some subjects, short-term focus and lack of trust in self and/or the process, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fixed vs. Growth Orientation</li> </ul>

**Strategic Planning and Aligning Our Data Use with Our Vision**

In most cases, schools engage in the process of formal strategic planning because it has been required or expected of them. And too often it represents a somewhat disparate effort disconnected from the more organic business of becoming a more effective school. The byproduct is a lot of work that results in a process that is not as meaningful as it could and a product that is less impactful than it should. However, the process has the potential to be powerful and highly useful to you overall improvement process.

Our goal should be to align the processes and guiding references of our large scale ongoing processes – strategic planning, vision development, teacher and staff evaluation, professional development, school promotion and school improvement generally. This starts with the expectation that coherence and alignment are priority R's. The next step will be to determine where these large processes are currently misaligned. Our guiding question might be “Does the way this process is being done today encourage the growth of the school as reflected in our vision and mission.” Our ability to move up the roadmap will be related to our level of process *coherence* - the integrity of the fundamental school mechanism, and our level of *capacity* – the way that these mechanisms function to promote our desired results, and expand our ability to be successful, as we have defined it.

Our strategic planning process should be both integrated with the other organizational processes, and should have the explicit purpose of moving our school up the roadmap to where we want to go. So in the end, we will want to assess its efficacy by how well it meets these five standards:

1. It is aligned and integrated into our other essential processes and data-driven decision making.
2. It acts to solve real problems in a meaningful way rather than just addressing symptoms.
3. It acts to cultivate a deeper sense of our mission and vision.
4. It promotes a more meaningful use of data, and understanding of what is actually happening at the school.
5. It supports our process of moving closer to our desired location on the school effectiveness roadmap.

There are several systems for developing strategic plans. They all have their benefits, but they can produce vastly different results. I recommend the four stage R-X-O process. It is the only

process that I have seen that satisfies all five of the criteria above. Below it is contrasted to a more traditional model, and then explained in detail.

### **Contrasting Two Different Approaches to Strategic Planning**

We could contrast an R-X-O roadmap destination based process with a more traditional O-X approach. The traditional and commonly used approach to strategic planning begins with outcomes and in many cases is heavily focused on symptoms. The starting point is the current outcome data for such things as scores, rates, survey results, etc. Then target or priority areas are selected based on data evidence that suggests a less than desirable condition. Finally goals are set for each and action steps are outlined. SMART goals are usually recommended – this acronym stands for Specific, Measurable, Accountable, Resources, and Timeline Specific.

This approach is sensible and potentially effective, but has a few fundamental problems. First, it does tend to lend itself to solving symptoms rather than real problems as there is no mechanism to put data into a context that would differentiate the two ideas. Second, it does not imply a broader vision or “meta” destination for the process. Third, it is by nature reactive rather than proactive. And finally, it can lead to disconnected and incoherent solutions as a result of seeing problems in isolation and solutions out of a larger context. This model is a good way to generate improvement work, but not an effective means of encouraging meaningful change.

I would recommend instead that your school consider using the Vision-driven R-X-O four stage strategic planning process outlined in Figure 9.x. This process solves the four problems that are inherent in the traditional model, and satisfies the five criteria for an effective process listed above. By its nature it brings an increased level of clarity and depth to the effort. The R-X-O process consists of four stages:

1. Articulate the desired roadmap location, using a wide range of data points representing a series of R's, X's and O's.
2. Assess the current roadmap location using a parallel set of data points
3. Determine the gap between the desired and current location that reflects the school's real problem areas, the priorities areas of focus, and key indicators in the data that would imply growth.
4. Select a manageable number of the priority growth areas and translate them into macro goals. Then for each macro goal develop as many micro operational objectives as necessary to represent the actions that would be necessary to bridge the gap in this area. Write micro objectives in SMART goal format.

### **Step One: Articulate the Desired School Effectiveness Roadmap Location**

The place to start in our strategic planning process is to bring together a team of individuals who represent a broad set of perspectives and job descriptions, but all share a commitment to the schools vision, possess an interest in exploring data and accept their role as influencers. It is all right if all or some of the members are also engaged with the vision, climate, or site governance processes. If it is possible you will want a team that is able to take the effort from beginning to the end – brainstorming, data analysis, goal setting, facilitating the action plan, and then ultimately translating it into professional development. Done properly, it represents a good deal of work and dedication. So if possible you will want a few of the best teachers at the school on the team and they should be compensated in some way. A critical frame of mind for the team is to recognize the scale and importance of the task, and not assume it can be done quickly or with short-cuts. So the Chair of the committee needs to keep the team on task and on pace. A fine balance needs to be struck between a need for depth of analysis and respecting all perspectives and along with the need to come to some consensus and produce tangible results.

The first task in the process will likely be the most time-consuming and challenging, but it will set the tone and define the capacity of the remaining steps. At this first stage, the team needs to articulate the desired school destination. This means the members of the team will need to be versed in the basics of the school effectiveness roadmap logic. The more concrete and operational this destination can be developed the better. Like the teacher planning for all the aspects of a class that has not happened yet, the more that this destination can be conceptualized and explained in specific, measurable, behavioral and practical terms the more likely it will be actualized. To facilitate the process of operationalizing our desired location, it will be useful to identify target qualities for each of the three levels of school phenomenon – R's, X's and O's. So let's examine key considerations and guiding questions for each of these areas.

**R's/References.** This activity will likely take the most amount of imagination. But it should be an energizing process. The group will want to inhabit the minds of those in the school when it has attained its goal location on the roadmap. The job will be to articulate the operating references at the school when it gets to this destination. It will work best to conceive and state these in the present tense – as if they have already occurred and are happening now. Be sure all members of the group are familiar with what you are talking about when the term R/reference is used. You can substitute values and beliefs if need be, but the domain of references will include values, narratives, beliefs, conditioned patterns, mindsets, fears, desires, biases, and all other internal processes. So try to stick with references to capture it all. Here are a series of guiding questions to support your process of brainstorming:

- ✓ What are the guiding values at the school?
- ✓ What are the three main guiding internal questions that focus the actions at the school?
- ✓ What does it feel like to work at the school?
- ✓ What are the narratives (Ch. 7) for and pervasive perceptions of the school?
- ✓ What can you say about the existence of the qualities of trust (ch.6) at the school?
- ✓ What positive attitudes that will exist that you are able to take for granted?

Brainstorm as many ideas as you can for this area. Then pair your list down to 4-6 primary qualities. Next, include any evidence sources for how one would know these internal processes are happening. Your evidence list for R's will likely be shorter than your list for X's and O's and will likely include what a perceptive person could infer, but can also include R related items on surveys, the internal thoughts that are communicated in various forms by the adults at the school and other sources. Place your lists of qualities and evidence into the Destination R's section of the plan.

**X's/Actions.** This will be the most important section in your entire plan. Here you will outline the kinds of X's - practices, policies, routines, activities, strategies, programs, processes, personal interactive patterns, etc. that will be common and normal in your desired destination. This will be a great time to incorporate your "things you will see/things we do here" and "things you should not see/things we don't do here" lists (and/or the POS promoting practices or undermining practice list, Ch. 7). The emphasis should be on what happens in the classrooms, but also include all other areas of the school as well as leadership and decision-making practices. Review Ch. 8 for all areas related to the X domain. Here are a few guiding questions to spur your brainstorming process for this area.

- ✓ What will students and visitors see when they walk into the school?
- ✓ What is the norm related to instructional methods?
- ✓ What is the norm related to assessment methods?
- ✓ What is the norm as far as classroom management and discipline?
- ✓ What kinds of pedagogy will be virtually absent from the school?
- ✓ How will faculty and staff be using the professional development process?

- ✓ What policies will have been deemed no longer necessary? And which ones will replace them?
- ✓ What is happening in the area of student life, leadership, service learning, peer mediation, etc.?
- ✓ What is the school doing to promote social and emotional health at the school and why has it been embraced and appreciated?

Again, brainstorm as many ideas as you can here. The list will be long but that is good. Then, synthesize the list down to 5 to 7 items that best represent the desired X's at the new location. It is fine to refer to other reference documents. Next, list the sources of evidence that could be used to assess whether your desired X's are being demonstrated. There should be a substantial list of sources including, surveys, observations, self-report, formal evaluation data, student feedback, and your own anecdotal assessment. Place your lists of actions and evidence into the Destination X's section of the plan.

**O's/Outcomes.** In the final section of step one of the process, the team will outline the outcomes that one would ideally see at the desired roadmap location. This section should be much easier than the two sections for the R's and X's. You will want to include quantitative measures like test scores, but it will be good to focus on the day to day experience of students, teachers, staff and leaders -what does it feel like in the school at this location? What do people experience (that they may not be experiencing currently)? Here are a series of questions to guide the exercise.

- ✓ What is the emotional state of a typical student on a typical day?
- ✓ What do students learn?
- ✓ What is the climate and culture like in the school?
- ✓ What is the public reputation of the school?
- ✓ How do students grow over their years at the school? and Why do they?
- ✓ What are the indicators of achievement and that you are being successful?
- ✓ What don't you see at the school now as a result of your efforts?
- ✓ What makes you proud to work at this school?

Include all the outcome data measures that you see as meaningful indicators of your progress to this destination. What those are is up to you. You may want to focus on quantitative indicators, or you may want to use mostly qualitative evidence of success. But try to generate as much solid reliable evidence as you can. The SCAL is a very reliable way to judge progress and roadmap location for example. Then, as before, synthesize your list of desired location quality outcome indicators into 4-6, and list all sound and meaningful sources of evidence you could use to assess those indicators (unless the evidence is the indicator itself, as it might be with test score levels for example).

### **Step Two: Articulate Your Current School Effectiveness Roadmap Location**

In this stage of the process we articulate the current state of the school. The work product should be a side-by-side representation of what was created in stage one – outlining R, X and O indicators but for the current school reality. As with the first step related to conceiving the desired roadmap location, in this step, the team will identify indicators and support their assessment as much as possible with evidence in the form of multiple sources of data. This step can be done after or concurrently with the first step, depending on what makes the most sense for the team.

When the first two steps are complete, the team should have developed a parallel set of key-indicators for both the desired state and the current state at the school. Some variation is fine, but the goal is to represent a picture of before and after. The R, X, and O related questions offered in the previous section to spur the brainstorming process can be used for articulating the current

state of the school as well. Also, it will likely be that members of the team will recognize items that they feel should be represented on one side when exploring the other side.

As with step one, open discussion and brainstorming should be encouraged early, but eventually the team will need to reduce the list of indicators down to a few, about 4-6 for each domain – R's, X's and O's. The before and after indicators should be reflective of one another but they do not need to be exact. Likewise the data sources should be similar as well. But you may determine that you want to work with a data source in the future that is currently not something you collect, or that you want to cease collecting a source of data in the future. This process will be an excellent opportunity to reevaluate your data collection process and sources. The more meaningful your data use process becomes, the more discerning you will become related to the different advantages and disadvantages of various data sources – especially surveys.

Step two is complete when you have a side-by-side picture of where you are currently and what your school would be like at your desired destination – the R's, X's, and O's with evidence for each. Assume that coming to consensus will require commitment to a process of democratic consensus. Yet, ultimately the most ambitious vision and destination conception should take precedence over ideas that do not represent that same level of meaningful progress. And assume the process will require a high degree of EQ, encouragement, boundary setting, and process facilitation. The best ideas should be elevated, not just those of the most senior members or those with the biggest personalities. And it is more than likely that you will need to encourage members to persist in the effort when they do not get fully what they want – managing egos is just part of the process. But in the end these two stages should have produced a lot of energy and excitement about the growth possibilities for the school. The content created in these steps can be recycled with necessary modifications from year to year, and will position the team well for the work of the next stage of the strategic planning process.

### **Step Three: Assessing the Gap Between the Desires and Current Roadmap Location**

In this stage of the process, the team will systematically assess the gap between the desired and current roadmap location indicators and evidence that were articulated in steps one and two. The job of the team here is to identify the disparity related to the indicators for where they are and where they want to be, and reduce them to a manageable set of priority goals. The number of goals will vary from school to school depending on the current capacity for making improvements and other factors. And it should be noted that the work done in steps one, two and three will be useful generally in the various improvement initiatives the school is undertaking. But for this specific exercise in strategic planning, goals should reflect 1) priority values and areas of focus, 2) real problems as well as symptoms, and 3) highlight points of substantive disparity between the two columns – representing areas of critical concern.

**Priorities.** The team should focus on what is most essential for becoming the school that they have conceived in step one. The data will likely reflect similar needs, but in the end, most times, putting energy into what is most important and evokes the most passion will translate into the best results. Recall our earlier discussion, the goal of this process is to be vision driven, meaningful and to translate into a document that inspires and spurs action.

**Real Problems.** There can be a tendency to focus on data disparity as the primary take away from the gap analysis. Yet, the result of that can to place too much attention on outcomes and symptoms of problems. So first, be steadfast in your effort to try to recognize the “real problems” implied by the gap. We might simply ask “Why is there a gap?” and then “Why is that?” repeatedly, as many times as necessary until we get to the root cause. One strategy for avoiding reductionism and too much attention on symptoms will be to select

target goals from each domain list – R's, X's, O's. And the domain that should be given the most attention is your articulation of the desired location X indicators.

**Substantive Disparity.** The likelihood is that not much about your lists from steps one and two will come as a great surprise, but it will clarify both the conceptual picture as well as the realities at the school gleaned from the data. You will likely see some areas of disparity that are glaring. Use these insights as you identify priority goals.

From this process of gap analysis, you will want to identify a series of macro goal areas. Every element of the gap you have identified is meaningful and should be carried forward in your individual and collective work as leaders, teachers, committee members, PLC members, community partners, etc., but for the purpose of this exercise (and document) you will need to select a few to operationalize more fully and formally. It is okay if they are more general (i.e., we create student centered classrooms), or more specific or quantifiable (i.e., we have a 95% attendance rate). In either case, we will need to operationalize them further.

#### **Step Four: Setting Goals and SMART Objectives to Operationalize Our Action Planning**

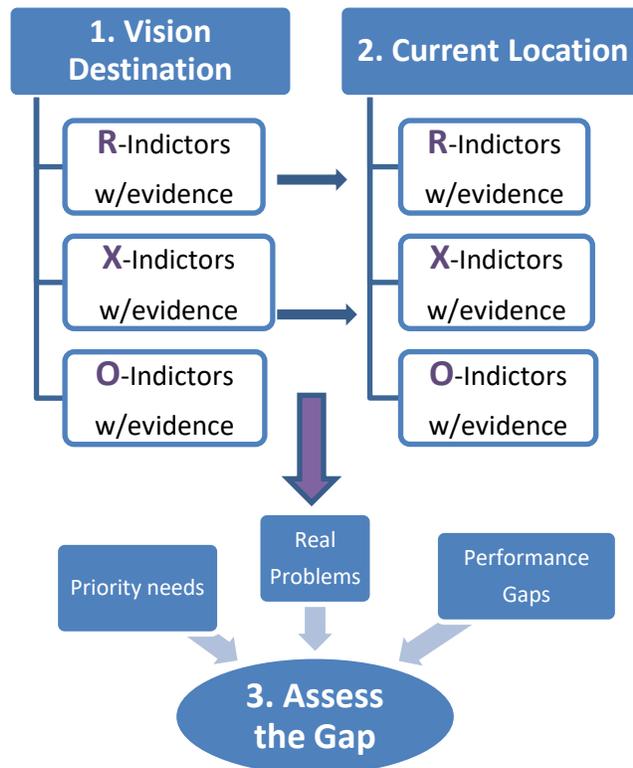
The final step of the process will be to operationalize our priority goals into actionable objectives, responsibilities and evidence we've been successful. After identifying a few broad areas for improvement in our gap analysis we will want to translate the essence of those ideas into a set of macro goals. These goals should be stated as present tense outcomes, and can be general and include abstract terms.

Then for each of these macro goals, we will want to identify sub micro objectives that imply what would be required for the goal to be actualized. We can create as many of these micro objectives as necessary. The goal here is to operationalize our growth process and make our movement toward desired location specific, practical and actionable. Making a parallel to effective classroom planning is instructive here. For any lesson or unit a teacher will have broad goals, but will be most successful if they are able to write a list of concrete, observable behavioral objectives that define what it will look like when students have been successful in their learning. In the same way we will want to write our objectives in concrete, observable and behavioral terms (i.e., what will people do? what will it look like?) Using strong action verbs is effective here – just like it is in the classroom. For each of the objectives you will want to use the SMART goal logic.

- **Specific** – Uses strong behavioral verbs and operationalize the task.
- **Measurable** – What can we use to know if the quality or the quantity has changed?
- **Assessment Evidence** – What sources of data can we use to determine progress?
- **Responsible person and Resource** – Who owns this objective? And what will they need to support their facilitation?
- **Timeline** - What are the expected increments of progress and what kind of results should we see at each increment?

It is important to focus on observable evidence in these objectives, but a broad range of types of evidence can qualify as reliable, valid and sound. Choose “meaningful” sources even if they may be less tangible (i.e., the way that teachers perceive faculty meetings, or students deal with conflict, etc.) over less meaningful sources that are easy to count.

**Figure 9.x: Four-Stage Vision-Driven R-X-O Strategic Planning Process Template**



**4. Action Planning with SMART Goals**

Macro Goals/ Micro Objectives	Description w/Evidence	Person(s) Responsible	Timeline	Resources & Roadblocks	Target Change Data/ Evidence
A Coherence issue Goal 1					
Micro Action Objective A1					
Micro Action Objective A2					
B Capacity Issue Goal 1					
Micro Action Objective B1					
C Reference Change Goal 1					
Micro Action Objective C1					
Micro Action Objective C2					
D Real Problem Goal 1					
Micro X Reduction Objective D1					
Micro X Increase Objective D2					
Micro X Increase Objective D3					

## **Implementing Our Strategic Plan**

Thoughtful Completion of the four-step R-X-O strategic planning process will represent both a process as well as a product accomplishment. On the one hand, the process will represent an act of being, functioning as, and gaining comfort with (intellectually and experientially) a 1-Paradigm institution. We will grow from the process itself – so have already moved closer to our desired roadmap location. On the other hand, the work product will represent a valuable articulation of what our journey will ultimately entail. The components and the thinking done in process can be used for multiple other purposes from refining current systems, to clarifying our public relations messages.

Our success in executing the plan will be dependent on the commitment of others. So why does anyone buy in and care about the contents of a plan? We might reflect on our own experience here. What we would probably conclude is that we commit to the extent that 1) the vision that guides that actions steps in the plan are aligned with our own, 2) we trust the leadership and their ability to effect results, 3) the work implied in the plan feels meaningful, valuable and coherent with the rest of my job duties, and 4) we trust that others will do their job too.

The document and the execution process will become more alive when the ownership for its realization is disseminated to the many hands. Those who are in the position to lead aspects of the process should be given that responsibility. Opportunities of progress updates should be built in to the meeting schedule. Positive recognitions should be frequent – with the focus on effort not just results. And in general applying the principles of cultivating trust and vision discussed previously. But we will always need to keep the focus on the big picture, any formal process in which we engage is an opportunity to embody the R's and X's of our desired location, so projecting a pervasive dissatisfaction and impatience with results that are not meeting our expectation will be counter-productive. Demanding can be empowering if the message is – we are better than we are showing (i.e., implying greater potential and a growth orientation), but not so empowering if the message is that we are not acting or achieving adequately (i.e., implies personal criticism, comparison and that we are our results).

## **Using Data Broadly to Encourage Growth**

Outside of the strategic planning process, it will be effective to use data to ground our understanding of our needs and progress. First, it is useful to keep in mind that data is everything. So on one hand, data is all around us. If we are perceptive, we can see where we are and areas in which we need to grow. On the other hand, we can have biases to our perceptions, or miss attending to important things. So finding high quality sources of data can ground our perceptions and make them more sound and reliable.

So as a school we need to get in the habit of using data, sharing it and discussing it. It will make the process more effective and less formidable if we view data as neutral and intended to give us benefit. We can learn to fear what the data may say – especially about us personally. Years of high-stakes data use has fueled a lot of this trepidation. So, one of the R's that we need to cultivate is a growth vs. fixed ability orientation toward data – i.e., facing reality. In a fixed ability approach to data we fear it as it will lead to a potential unfavorable comparison – promoting a lot of self-defense and self-denial. In a growth-orientation we see all information as a source of learning, and so we welcome it as useful to our growth. From top to bottom in the school/district organizational chart, we need to ask ourselves how we can promote the conditions in which individuals are comfortable taking on more of a growth orientation toward data of any kind.

**Caution: Beware the term “evidence based,”** as in an “evidence based program.” In practical terms this is almost no guarantee that the program in question would provide value to your process of becoming more functional or moving up the higher levels on the effectiveness roadmap. What the phrase “evidence based” literally means is that in some cases there were schools that showed an overall statistical difference on some variable when the program was implemented. But in many cases what that means was that a school which was functioning in the lower quadrants added the program and as a result got an increased amount of some outcome, such as a short-term bump in test scores, or less of an unwanted outcome such as disruptive behavior. But in some cases, what will support a movement from a 2/10 level of function to a 4/10 temporarily will not necessarily (or even very likely) get a school at a 6/10 level to a 9/10 level. In many cases there are programs, especially in the area of classroom management that will move all schools toward a mediocre 5/10 level of function and performance, whether those schools were originally at 3/10 or 7/10 previously. A good analogy would be that there is evidence that eating at McDonalds hamburgers will reliably make a starving person feel better and more functional, but if a healthy person eats them all the time the result will not be more function and can even lead to poorer health (see the movie Super-size Me). This same analysis applies to the phrases “best practice” and “research based.” (See Shindler, 2018).

### **What Can Data Tell Us?**

When judging the value of data we need to look at it in terms of its soundness and its relevancy. All data will have value, and our job is to find the most meaningful sources. Data is sound to the extent it is valid and reliable. Valid meaning that it answers the right question, and leads us into investigating the essential phenomenon. Reliable meaning that it is accurate can be confirmed by other sources. Data can take many forms. Let’s examine some of the main sources here, as well as how we can use each of them to better understand our school and to grow.

**What do the numbers tell us?** Test scores, pass rates, attendance rates, incidence of wanted or unwanted behaviors, student demographic data, etc. are good to know. They are informative. As discussed we over-emphasize norm referenced measures where our performance is compared to others. These kinds of numbers are lagging indicators of what we have done previously as well as countless other variables that we do not control. So it is best to pull these data apart and make them available in isolation to the groups for which they would provide the most relevant information. For example, providing standardized math scores to the math teachers, or the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading scores to the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teachers. PLC meetings are a great time to process data. But there should be an objective for doing it, and the data should related to a current initiative of the group.

**Case example: Test Score gains** – In CA and many other states schools were compared to one another by their API – Academic Performance Index. Once this comparison process became public and schools were given incentives and penalties to improve their API’s what happened was very natural. In most cases what schools tried to do was to deal with the test scores directly – they added the X’s of teaching to the test and providing tutoring on the test subject matter. Referring to our discussion above, these X’s could best be characterized as clever direct attempts to address a symptom of a perceived problem. The result in the short-term was slightly higher test scores, but like pulling on a plant, it could only affect the scores so far. So after a few years, these schools saw their API’s plateauing or dropping back down. If the R’s and common X’s at the schools never changed, the improvement in the numbers was, in the big picture, only superficial. But during this era there were also schools saw improvement in their scores by making meaningful changes in what they did and incorporated more effective R’s and X’s. A couple of take-away lessons might be 1) we need time to see if any change is substantial or superficial, and 2) assessing what is done (i.e., the X’s) in a school is a more reliable predictor of their performance over time than changes in numbers from year to year.

### What do surveys tell us?

Surveys are useful in telling us what common perceptions are among the group we surveyed in the areas related to the items that we included on the survey. But with surveys it is often difficult to interpret why or when the perception was formed. If 80% of the students are satisfied with their education at the school, what does that mean? Why or why not, and what are they satisfied with? And are our students just easier or more difficult to satisfy than the students in the next school? So our effort should be to collect survey data that asks the questions that we need to know to answer our question and solve our problems. And it is almost always necessary to combine survey data with at least a little focus group data to contextualize it.

Not all surveys are designed the same way. And different surveys about the same topic can include very different content. So shop and compare. The SCAI is designed in a way that supports reliability and interpretability by using a rubric structure and with a focus on identifying R's, X's and O's not just perception O's like most surveys. The result is its favorable predictive validity and more meaningful data. The item below is from dimension five related to classroom management and provides insight into both the X's at the school as well as the underlying R's related to empowerment and student voice.

5.e-----○-----○-----○-----○-----○-----○-----		
I have had some say in making the rules in my class.	The teachers make the rules, but consider our feelings.	The teachers resent it when we question why a rule exists.

This item is very predictive of overall climate, function and student achievement at the school. The data obtained from this item would not only help one see if they were moving toward a 1-paradigm location, but also be very predictive of the current location of the school on the roadmap.

### What do interviews, focus groups, town halls, and informal conversations tell us?

Because survey percentages, scores, rates, and incident levels cannot tell us very much about causality, we will want to find efficient ways to get at the “why” and “the full story.” I am always a little surprised that as educators we often feel hesitate to ask why, but if we are to embrace our growth orientation mindset, and apply it to our data-driven decision making we should be looking for many ways to find out from students and parents what they are thinking.

Moreover, when we engage in focus groups, town halls, informal conversations with the goal of listening it sends a message to everyone that our guiding R includes *wanting to know*. Sometimes there is nothing that we can do to satisfy a request from a stakeholder, but letting them know that we care is a concrete action and has value in and of itself. But so often, when we ask, we learn so much. We can learn a lot of little things like a how a minor policy is making parents either really happy or really unhappy. Or we can learn something big like how a majority of the students are afraid of telling the faculty that \_\_\_\_, but did not know how to bring it up.

On a practical level these can be done rather efficiently. We just need to be sure to find a representative sample of the population of focus. We can invite certain students to a meeting where we provide lunch, or give a few teachers a list of questions to ask their students during an appropriate time in the day. And we can just students about how things are going when the opportunity arises organically. Being able to say that “We hear you” and “We are sincerely interested in doing something about it” is a powerful X that will lead any school up. It projects a trust, growth and improvement oriented R.

**Reflection** – what would you say is your schools general approach to asking what people think? What R is that sending in your opinion?

**Conclusion**

The use of data should have an important place in our process of actualizing the potential of our school. Outcomes tell us where we are in our journey, and provide evidence of the seeds we have sown to this point. But we need to be sure to use data in meaningful ways and always in the service of our vision. In the next chapter, we will examine the eight areas of school climate and function, and explore each for how it can inform our overall process of school improvement.

**References**

TCM  
Shindler, PBIS, 2018

**Exercise 9.1:**

As a group examine the Chart below. Which of the 2 columns best characterizes your attitude toward your context?

<b>Healthy R/Neutral Approach to Our Context</b>	<b>Unhealthy (toxic R) Approach to Our Context</b>
<p><b>INFORMATION</b> I have knowledge of many of my students' home situations, I understand the challenges that they face every day. I use that information as I relate to them and conceive how I will teach.</p>	<p><b>EXCUSES</b> The more I learn about how my students live, the more I see that many of them will never be able to learn or meet high expectations. So I lower my expectations for myself and them.</p>
<p><b>UNDERSTANDING</b> I realize that there are limits to how fast I can move from where they were to where I want to get. But those limits imply that things will take longer and require more skill and commitment.</p>	<p><b>VICTIM MENTALITY</b> It seems like no matter what I try, others always resist growth because it is new and scary, so I have learned to give up and see things as unfair, and the deck is stacked against me.</p>
<p><b>KNOWING HISTORY</b> I understand how my students were taught in the past and how that would create certain expectations, habits and comfort zones. I understand how the teachers at this school have been used to doing things. It all goes in the general category of people doing the best they can, given their level of understanding and their situation.</p>	<p><b>FIXED ABILITY</b> My students are so used to being told what to do, being given negative recognitions to stop misbehaving, only trying when when they get something, or when thing are going to be on the test, and/or doing the minimum that I do not see how I am supposed to change that. The other teachers tell me that they try to do 1-style teaching and it is too unfamiliar to students so it does not work.</p>
<p><b>COMPASSION</b> I do have empathy for my students. I try to be understanding and work with their challenges to find ways that they can succeed, especially eliminating needless policies that penalize students because of things they cannot control.</p>	<p><b>LABELING/LIMITING</b> At this school "these students" are not ready for what the students at school X are. That stuff won't work with "these students." "Let me tell you a story about one of them that I heard the other day..."</p>
<p><b>RECOGNITION</b> Teaching students who do not bring in all the cultural capital presents an added burden to the job of teaching. But all students represent challenges. And our job is to teach the students we are given the best we can.</p>	<p><b>LOSING ATTITUDES</b> How can the teachers here succeed with the students here. I cannot blame them for their apathy and cynical attitude. It is a miracle when any of us just gets through the day. We all have to do whatever it takes to survive and cope.</p>