A successful journey requires more than a destination; it also requires a direction. You can determine a direction only when you know where you are relative to where you want to be. The same is true of organizations, departments, teams, and individuals. Developing a strategic agenda or planning for change is most successful when you first understand the existing conditions.

Assessing Your Operations

Self-Assessment

If you have a problem or opportunity in your area, you can use the following tools to help you and your team get a better understanding of the present situation, and as a result, determine the best direction for moving forward.

1. Define the issue

Problems reveal themselves through their symptoms. In an attempt to solve a problem, we often look for solutions that focus on the symptoms and then wonder why the problem keeps coming back. Have you ever been in a situation where the answer to a problem always seemed to be work harder? And, the harder you worked, the more the problem persisted? Effective change requires looking beyond the simple solutions to find the problem's cause or source.
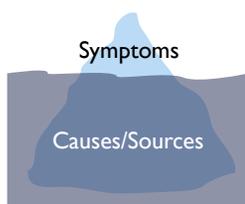
Think of a problem as if it were an iceberg. What we can easily see is a large mass floating on the water. What we don't see is the 60% to 70% of the iceberg's mass

Solving Problems

A problem that is located and identified is already half solved!

- Bror R. Carlson, I M&C Co.

that is under the water and out of view. If we focus our efforts only on what we see without further investigation, we may be missing the bulk of the problem. How can we expect to solve problems if our view is so limited?

Using any or all of the following tools can help you to expand your view and discover what's beneath the water line:

Who-What-When-Where-Why-How—Ask these questions to get a more comprehensive understanding of an issue. For example:

Expand your view

- Who does this problem involve? Who does it affect?
- What is the problem? What makes it worse? What makes it better?
- When does the problem occur?
- Where in our process does the problem occur?
- Why are we having this problem?
- How does this problem manifest itself? How are we going to resolve the issue?

Ask Why – A problem solving approach frequently used in Japanese industry is to ask why until the root problem is exposed. Begin by stating the problem. Then ask why. State the answer. Then ask why. Continue this until you are satisfied that you have exposed the root or source of the problem. It may take some time to discover the root but you will realize very quickly that there is a lot more behind the issue than you may have initially thought.

Why?

We're getting complaints on our speed of service.
Why?

Because we are unable to prepare our food quickly.
Why?

Because we're constantly having to go look for supplies.
Why?

Gather Multiple Perspectives – Consider the viewpoints of all the stakeholders. Who are they and how does this issue affect them? Does looking at the issue from their point of view help us to see something we missed?

Draw It – Draw diagrams that show the problem or opportunity in terms of relationships, events or over time. Go back far enough and use sufficient detail to find the source.

2. Determine what you still need to know

Once you have worked through the above activities you will have a better understanding of what your problem is and how to solve it. With more complex problems, you may need additional information to help you understand the problem and give you direction for moving forward. This requires planning and data gathering.

With your team, brainstorm all of the information you think you may still need to gather to understand your problem. Then, rank the data in order of significance and relevance. Take the top few that will offer you meaningful information. It is possible to collect too much information and get bogged down in data so try to stick to the main issues.

3. Gather data

Before you undertake an involved study, take advantage of data that may already be available to you or simple to gather. Here are some approaches that you may find useful:

- Talk with students, employees, and customers to get a personal sense of the strengths, challenges and traditions that exist within your organization.
- Establish credibility by using the data you already have to make improvements. People will be more likely to give you meaningful feedback if they see you acting on information you currently have.
- Look at existing data available to University personnel at http://assess.byu.edu or review data that has already been gathered in your organization.

BYU Planning and Assessment

When you have exhausted your options and you still need more information, consider approaching the BYU Planning and Assessment team. BYU Planning and Assessment gathers and analyzes data for organizations within BYU that need to solve problems or take advantage of opportunities. Planning and Assessment has the intellectual resources and technical capability to carry out large-scale data gathering efforts. However, they are limited in the amount of projects they can accept each year.

If you get involved in the formal data gathering effort with BYU Planning and Assessment, they will lead you through a seven-step process.

1. Determine what questions need answering
2. Decide how the data will be used
3. Select a method for data collection
4. Formulate questions
5. Collect the data

Ask why

BYU Manager's Toolbox

6. Analyze the data
7. Present the conclusions

Once you receive the final data, you will be much better equipped to establish a direction for improvement in your organization. Please refer to the Planning and Assessment web site at http://assess.byu.edu for further information.

To Do List:

- Identify problems or opportunities in your organization.

- Use some or all of the exercises attached to this document to get to the root of the issue. Include all relevant team members in your brainstorming session so you get a broad and complete perspective.

- If you need more information, look for data that already exists in your organization or on the web at http://assess.byu.edu. Consider gathering data on your own or contact BYU Planning and Assessment.

The Bottom Line

Your success at managing problems and opportunities in your organization depends on your ability to identify issues, understand them, create a strategic plan, and execute the plan effectively. It all begins with a thorough and accurate assessment of your organization.

Execute the plan

BYU Manager's Toolbox

Type	Works best with:	Process
Focus Groups	• Groups of 6-12 • Open-ended questions	• Determine what information you want to gather. • Gather participants who have experience with your product or operation. • Ask questions and allow group to answer. Be careful not to influence group opinion. • Keep detailed notes on responses.
Interviews	• Individuals • Open-ended questions	• Determine what information you want to gather. • Ask open-ended questions. • Ask follow-up questions to get more information when desired.
Nominal Group Technique	• Medium to large groups • One question or problem requiring creativity and innovation	• Select participants based on diversity of thought and experience • Ask each participant to generate ideas individually. Without allowing any criticism, ask each person to share one idea until all ideas are exhausted. • Write all ideas on a flip chart. • In an anonymous vote, have people rate their top choice for a solution.
Surveys	• Large groups • Questions narrow in scope	• Determine what information you want to gather. • Formulate simple questions. • You may include ranking, rating, agree/disagree, or specific open-ended questions. • Ensure anonymity. • Get as many survey participants as possible or use a random sample. Shorter surveys have more respondents. • Tabulate and share results.