Prioritizing Solutions

Prioritize activities to address program challenges

PATH

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As organizations and projects begin to uncover problems and develop solutions, there is a need to prioritize necessary actions to address the identified problems and solutions. In an ideal situation, all problems could be addressed. However, resources are limited and that is not always possible. Personnel, time, funding, capacity, etc. all play a role in a team's ability to address a problem or solution. This tool will help teams prioritize which solutions and problems to address to maximize chance for continued program success.

Strategizing solutions

Before getting started with the prioritization matrix, it is important to take time to reflect on your program's progress. You can utilize the SWOT approach or a root cause analysis to identify problem areas within your program and potential solutions to address those problems. This matrix will help to prioritize which solutions to take on and which problems to address.

Prioritization matrix[1]

One way to prioritize is by using a four-quadrant matrix. Some factors to take into account when prioritizing your issues and solutions are:

(1) **Urgency:** Tasks that require immediate attention are urgent. Keep in mind that urgent tasks can sometimes be reactive, hurried, short-term, or narrow in focus. The negative consequences of not completing these tasks are immediate.

(2) **Impact/Importance:** Tasks that contribute to our long-term mission, values, and goals are important. Important activities are proactive and lead to long-term benefits. The negative consequences of not completing them tend to accumulate over a longer period and can then become a crisis.

(3) **Feasibility:** Tasks that are within your control to do or within your sphere of influence to get others to do are feasible. Resource limitations and constraints often play a large role in feasibility.

Once solutions are mapped on this matrix, we can take the necessary steps to figure out logistics such as assigning tasks and timelines.

How to facilitate a prioritization matrix

🕐 1 hour

👥 3-6 people: Key decision makers, influencers and financial contributors for addressing a specific problem.

Process:

1. It is important to get everyone in the right mindset. List a shared goal at the top of the matrix and state it at the beginning of the meeting. Be sure everyone agrees before trying to prioritize next steps.

2. Next, set up the matrix as shown below. Label the X-axis "Urgency" with "Sooner" on the far left and "Later" on the far right. Label the Y-axis "Impact" with "Low" at the bottom and "high" on the top. It is best to do this so everyone can see and contribute.

Goal: this is what your team is trying to address

3. Once the matrix is set up, start adding all potential solutions. It is natural for everything to go in the top left—most urgent and most important.

4. This next step is crucial. Select a moderator to guide a discussion on how to distribute the solutions across the whole matrix. It is important to reiterate the goal and be

[1] https://www.atlassian.com/team-playbook/plays/prioritization-matrix

realistic in what is possible, keeping in mind the available data related to costs, timing implications, impact, etc. Utilize dashboards, national information systems, and other data sources to inform your decisions and prioritize urgency, impact, and feasibility.

The moderator should ensure that all voices are heard. Agreeing on what the group proposed to delay or simply not do can lead to some uncomfortable moments. Keeping the group laser-focused on the goal helps take the edge off.

5. Not all of the solutions placed on the matrix are possible to complete. With your solutions mapped, now draw the feasibility lines. These lines will define which activities to address first and which will be prioritized another time if resources permit. It is recommended to limit solutions in the crisis area to 40% of your team's capacity.[2]

    Crisis: Must do- Anything in the top left quadrant are guaranteed to be addressed as those are most urgent and impactful. These are usually activities that were unexpected or that have been put on hold until the last minute and have reached a crisis point.

    Plans: Will do- Located towards the top right of the matrix. These are activities that will help you reach your long-term goal.

    Interruptions: Try to avoid- Located towards the bottom left of the matrix. These are activities that drain time and resources and contribute little to the longer-term goal. They keep the team busy with no real value.

    Distractions: Won't do- Located in the bottom right quadrant. These activities are neither important nor add value to achieving the goal.

Goal: this is what your team is trying to address

6. Now that you have your solutions prioritized, take this opportunity to develop an action plan. Delegate solutions to different people or sub-groups. Have them map out logistics for activities to implement the solutions. Things to consider:

    a. Who will be responsible for activities?

    b. What is the expected timeline?

    c. Who will hold the group accountable for the action plan?

    d. Who will monitor progress?

    e. How will the solution be executed?

How and when this can be used in the context of DMPA-SC Scale up?

Introduction and scale-up of DMPA-SC means many moving pieces. National plans include numerous activities related to demand generation, partner coordination, monitoring and evaluation, supply chain management, advocacy, etc. The key stakeholders, usually a smaller group than a full coordination committee, should decide on sequencing and prioritization of these activities at the start of a new strategy, and reassess routinely using the all data available, challenges arise and solutions identified.

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[2] https://www.groupmap.com/map-templates/urgent-important-matrix/, October 2019.