

Three Circles of Decision Makers: A Tool for Analyzing Alignment and Misalignment Across Levels of Decision Makers

The purpose of the tool is to help groups identify where there is good communication among relevant decision makers and where those decision makers are aligned – or misaligned – in terms of what constitutes quality in arts learning experiences. It is meant to provoke thought and dialogue, and it can be used by multiple constituencies within a particular setting, including any of the stakeholders in the work of the program. It may make sense to start with relatively small groups within a setting that share both significant knowledge of the workings of the program and a deep concern for its vitality and strength. This tool can be used as a relatively quick part of a meeting or conversation or as the focus of a much longer, dedicated examination of decision making processes and outcomes. Like the other tools accompanying this report, it is intended to be used as a step in a process that could easily take a series of conversations. In some settings, considering issues of communication and alignment in this way could well become a long-term and regular process.

In the process of using this tool, participants are asked to consider:

Who: Who are the relevant decision makers and where do they fit in the diagram?

Communication: Among these many decision makers, what are the patterns and formats for communication about substantive aspects of those decisions and their impact? Where might the communication be inadequate?

Critical Decisions: Which decisions are having most impact – positive or negative – on the quality of students' arts learning experiences?

Ideas about Quality: Are there significant differences in ideas about what constitutes a high quality arts learning experience among any of these decision makers? How do you know? Have these been discussed explicitly?

Steps in the Use of the Three Circles of Decision Makers Tool:

Facilitator's introduction: Welcome participants and frame the session.

- Welcome the participants and ask everyone to introduce themselves.
- Introduce the purposes of the session and the rationale for using it at this time.
- Introduce the basic steps of the protocol for using the tool. Explain the time frame for the session.
- Ask for any questions or concerns before beginning.

Step 1. Toward identifying 'who,' 'lines of communication,' and 'alignment/ misalignment.'

- Alone or with a colleague: Mark on your diagram who you think are key decision makers in each circle in your setting?
- Draw lines between those people who you believe are in regular or adequate communication within and across these circles when making decisions that affect the quality of students' learning experiences. Strong, thick lines might indicate good lines of communication, while broken lines may suggest weaker lines of communication.
- Consider which of these decision makers are aligned on beliefs about what constitutes quality learning experiences in your setting. Use one color (green, for example) to indicate significant alignment and another color (red) to indicate significant misalignment. A third color (yellow) could represent inadequate information for determining degrees of alignment. Any red lines should be keyed to a note in the margins about what the differences are.

Step 2: Working toward a common analysis.

- In small groups: Share your diagrams with one or two others. Consider where you see potentially significant differences in your assessments of *who*, *communication*, and *alignment*. There aren't absolute answers to these questions. It is most important to see where there is consensus or significant differences in the diagrams and then to listen as each person explains what informs her determinations.

- As a whole group: Report from small groups to the larger group. Identify areas of agreement and disagreement. Again, explore the reasons why people see the situation in the ways they do. Encourage specificity in responses. (“I was thinking about the monthly coordinators meetings, where I think the area coordinators discuss issues of professional development.”)
- Leave room for different and contradictory perspectives, but always ground opinions in some specific evidence. It should not be adequate to simply declare that someone or some groups never listen or don’t respect the opinions of others. (e.g., a claim that principals never listen to teachers or vice versa.) The purpose here is to raise questions about communication and ideas about what constitutes quality and to surface specific areas for further inquiry.
- Draw one large version of the diagram on chart paper and fill it in with everything related to *who*, *communication*, and *alignment*.

Step 3: Identifying puzzles of communication and beliefs about quality.

- Noting all items and areas with a lack of consensus, try to articulate the nature of the differences in perspective expressed and note them as a puzzle in need of further consideration.

Step 4: Steps toward solving the puzzles.

- Identify ways of exploring the puzzles just named. This could involve conversations with people who are not present about their perspectives on any aspect of this analysis, including the premise that there may be cause for concern about the decisions that impact quality in this setting. Name specific tasks and people responsible for them.
- Plan the next conversation in which the group will reconvene to share findings from these efforts to get more information toward understanding the puzzles.

Step 5: Think ahead

- As a group, decide what action plans or follow-up conversations should be pursued, if any, as a result of this experience.

Identifying Decision Makers Who Impact The Quality of Arts Learning Experiences

Who are decision makers? Who works together to make decisions?

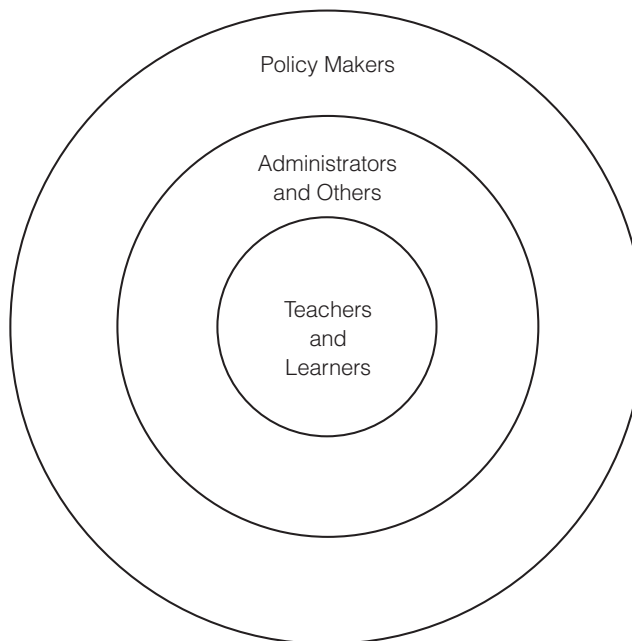


Diagram 4: Identifying Decision Makers Who Impact the Quality of Arts Learning Experiences