

Susan A. Pcola-Davis  
Board of Education  
April 20, 2023  
GBM Testimony

## **I. \*Public Testimony on Board of Education (“Board”) Agenda Items**

### **II. Approval of Meeting Minutes**

#### **A. March 23, 2023 Special Meeting Minutes Comments:**

**Update on Hawaii Public Education 2023-2029 Strategic Plan (Phase II), Implementation Plan: Key Performance Indicators and stakeholder engagement update.**

Aloha Board:

I left the last meeting perplexed and frankly disappointed in the progress that did not meet the expectations of the agenda. I asked myself how did we get to this point.

First, Tami was reporting on the results of the feedback she got on the KPI’s and the strategies.

She asked Board members if they had looked at the feedback request, some nodded. She talked about the Executive Summary also. She compiled the results for information. However, if a Board Member didn’t even look at the Executive Summary, one would not understand the reported results.

The Board members expressed their desire to know what the change would be, how it would be done, and how we would know if the change produced improvement. But it was more than that.

Then it diverted into “what the public is going to think” if something doesn’t work. Almost like a fear of the plan.

Since I am an analyst, I tried to ask myself what happened and developed some theories.

Theories:

1. Is there a difference of understanding between terminology?
2. Is there a difference between what the board’s role is and the DOE’s role?
3. Or is it simply the meeting?

4. Are members not reading the minutes?
5. Are members unprepared for the agenda because the attachments weren't reviewed before the meeting?
6. I won't even get into whether the public testimonies are considered.

#### **Exhibit A: The Road to the Strategic Plan; a backwards look at the process**

#### **Exhibit B: Abeline Paradox [Harvey Abilene Paradox.pdf](#)**

Board Chairperson Voss asked for an explanation of the differences between KPIs and performance measures.

DS Chun replied that strategies do not rise to the same level as activities, but the Department would report on Goal 1.1 to ensure all the details are represented.

BM Fallin/Voss that the Board needs to be able to determine the progress being made towards a desired outcome.

BM Arakaki: the schools need to show what they are doing and what is working or not working going forward.

BM Moriarty stated that the following four changes are needed:

- (1) using ***the base year of COVID-19 pandemic data is not acceptable***, since this data can could be unreliable;
- (2) a student who is ***near reading proficiency should not be considered proficient***;
- (3) an understanding needs to be provided on the ***effectiveness of teachers who are qualified***; and,
- (4) the three civic engagement opportunities ***need to be civic***.

BM Moriarty also asked that the Department ***add a strategy for math proficiency*** because what is currently being done has not gotten the proficiency results that the state needs.

She also suggested ***adding a measure to track growth of students and their proficiency or growth with a transition matrix model*** or something similar to track whether students are progressing.

BM Moriarty also stated that there needs to be an understanding on ***what changes are needed, what strategies would be used to make changes, and what progress is being made***.

DS Chun stated that this is one component of the plan and ***in the draft on the website there are proposed statewide strategies***.

## **B. March 23, 2023 General Business Meeting Minutes Comments**

### **1. Board Action on Human Resources Committee recommendation concerning Committee Action on amendment of Department of Education (“Department”) Leadership Salary Structure.**

Some of the dialogue:

Board Vice Chairperson and Human Resources Chairperson Barcarse stated that the committee also recommends that ***the approval of the new salary range be subject to the Department providing the Board with a detailed plan that contains a methodology to provide current CAS with compensation salary adjustments.*** He stated that, originally, the superintendent asked that the Board set the salaries for all CAS at \$175,000, but the Board declined to adopt this proposal and asked that the Department come back

Board Vice Chairperson and Human Resources Chairperson Barcarse stated that the Department presented its proposal at the meeting today, but ***it did not meet committee expectations, so the committee is recommending that the Department come back with a detailed plan.***

**Expectation:** Provided that the salary range increase is subject to a detailed plan that contains a methodology to provide current CAS with compensation salary adjustments,

**A system that would allow the superintendent to establish differentiated salaries for individual CAS based on clear criteria.**

### **EXHIBIT C: 2023 FEDERAL GENERAL SCHEDULE PAY SCALE COMPARED TO DIE REQUEST FOR CAS**

I have also submitted the 2023 Federal General Schedule Salary table along with the higher scale for Senior Executive Service (SES) for you to compare what the department is asking for in salary increase for Complex Area Superintendents.

As you review this document consider the comparable salaries to your federal counterparts.

March 23, 2023 Public written testimonies should be re-read by all the Board Members. I think you can visualize the oral testimonies from several speech pathologists.

### **EXHIBIT D: DECISION MATRIX TO ASSIST WITH SALARY ADJUSTMENT METHODOLOGY**

I submitted a Decision Making Matrix with 4 criteria as an example. American Society for Quality (ASQ)

My source: [What is a Decision Matrix? Pugh, Problem, or Selection Grid | ASQ](#)

Please feel free to use it.

## **EXHIBIT E: WHAT IS A DECISION MATRIX?**

Did you know that in their functional statement (which you can find on the DOE website) it contains many bullets. However, it's outcomes that matter.

Assists individual schools and school complexes;

- Meet the Hawaii Content and Performance Standards,
- Hawaii Goals for Education, and
- The educational renewal initiatives of the state and federal government.

### **School Based Support Services:**

#### **Occupational and Physical Therapy (OT/PT) Program**

- ★ Administers the OT/PT program
- ★ Coordinates with schools to identify health problems and occupational and/or physical Therapy needs as related to the student's educational programs in the district.
- ★ Assures appropriate resources to the schools to provide occupational and/or physical therapy services to support the educational program of identified students.
- ★ Consults with school personnel, families and others to assure that there is integration of educationally related OT/PT strategies into the school curriculum and home.
- ★ Collects appropriate data to assure compliance of timelines and that eligible students are receiving the necessary occupational and/or physical therapy services.
- ★ Collaborates and coordinates with the state office to assure that there is conformance with program standards and established procedural guidelines. □
- ★ Coordinates with the state office for orientation of new occupational and/or physical therapists.
- ★ Coordinates with the schools to assure appropriate office space for the therapy staff within the district.
- ★

### **All other CAS:**

- **Reviews each school's strategic and academic/financial plans for, and progress towards, attaining effective school status.**
- Provides consultation and professional assistance to schools and complexes to ensure sound planning, effective implementation, and efficient use of available school resources for curriculum, instruction, and student services reform aspects of school renewal.

- Facilitates, monitors, and assesses the effectiveness and responsiveness of fiscal, facilities, personnel, information and telecommunications, and other administrative support services that are centrally administered by DOE state offices and other state agencies; maintains liaison between schools and the central services agencies to assure that services meet current operational and projected school renewal requirements.
- Coordinates schools' requests for assignment of school renewal specialists from Office of Curriculum and Instructional Design and/or Office of Student Support Services or from other complex areas or complexes to assist a particular school or complex in its restructuring efforts; exercises field supervision over school renewal specialists who are assigned to assist the schools and complexes.
- Promotes collaboration among schools in each complex to articulate their educational programs and student performance expectations, coordinate school renewal and improvement efforts, and share resources.
- Coordinates sharing of resources among complexes in the area, and cooperative support arrangements between complex areas.
- Develops and maintains collaborative partnerships with the University of Hawaii and other institutions of higher learning to support school renewal efforts of the complex area schools.
- Maintains liaison with government, community, and business organizations and officials on matters of mutual interest involving the complex area's schools. Conducts meetings and hearings to ensure administrative due process for students and employees of the complex area in accordance with law and department rules and regulations.
- Public schools assigned to the complex areas include elementary, intermediate and middle schools, high schools, special schools for qualified students with disabilities, and institutionalized juvenile delinquents, offering instruction in grades K-12; and community schools for adults.

### **More CAS**

#### **Complex Learning Support Centers**

Complex learning support centers facilitate sharing of curriculum and instructional resources among schools of a school complex, which consists of a high school and its feeder elementary and intermediate or middle schools. The complex learning support centers provide technical support to schools in the complex. In addition, there is much collaboration between and among support centers.



## EXHIBIT A

### The Road to the Strategic Plan

Going all the way back to November 17, 2022 Here's a reminder from short takes from the minutes. **I spent hours on this to try to understand why I felt the way I did when I left the April 6 meeting.**

The beginning of the Road to the Strategic Plan began around here:

#### Nov 17, 2022

Hull reviewed three suggested goals for Priority 1.

- *Goal 1: All students will have equitable access to a high-quality learning experience resulting in equality of outcomes for all learners.*
- *Goal 2: All students will learn in a safe, nurturing, and culturally responsive environment.*
- *Goal 3: All students will graduate high school prepared for college, career, civic engagement, and community involvement.*

Hull then reviewed three examples of objectives for Priority 1, Goal 1, but asked Board members to **focus on the goal**. He clarified that **objectives** must be things that can be measured and monitored.

Hull reviewed three suggested goals for Priority 2.

- *Goal 1: All students will be taught by highly-qualified teachers and all schools will be led by highly-qualified principals.*
- *Goal 2: Complex area and state offices will be comprised of highly qualified staff whose work is aligned to support student learning.*
- *Goal 3: All schools will be fully staffed by competent and caring support staff committed to providing quality services to support students.*

**BM Fallin** asked whether the objectives, under the goals, are what the Department would include it in its implementation plan. Hull stated that **the implementation plan is the how; the Board needs to tell the Department what it wants to see and the Department will tell the Board how it will do it.**

**He stated that the Department's implementation plan would explain how it would reach those objectives.** Hull stated the objective examples he provided are primarily to show the hierarchy of work and clarified that there would be no more than two to three objectives, not seven.

Hull reviewed suggested goals for Priority 3.

- *Goal 1: All school facilities will be safe, well-maintained, compliant, clean, and attractive to provide a positive and inviting learning environment for students and staff.*
- *Goal 2: All operational and management processes, including resource allocation, will be implemented in an equitable, transparent, and efficient manner.*
- *Goal 3: Families, stakeholders, and staff are informed of and engaged in planning and decision-making affecting students in a meaningful and timely manner.*

**S Hayashi** stated that he is fine with the goals but asked for clarification. He asked once the Board adopts goals, whether the Department would be responsible for describing how it would address these goals. Hull explained that the Board would also be establishing objectives. He provided an example of a process where the Department audits its processes in the first year then works on changing them.

### **Dec. 15, 2022**

Hull outlined Goal 1.1. and stated that he suggested some changes to the goals and multiple changes to the desired outcomes. He stated that the desired outcomes are not ranked by priority because the outcomes are all equal and the Department will prioritize them in the implementation plan. Hull stated that there is sequencing logic, but not priority order.

So how does the Board and Department reconcile the aspirational language with reality. Hull explained that the language reflects what is desired. He stated that there are huge challenges and during the implementation planning the Department would develop metrics and work on closing the gaps shown by these metrics. Hull stated that the implementation plan would show what has to be accomplished each year to reach the desired outcomes.

**BM Kuraya** stated that it is fine as long as the desired outcome explains what the Board is working toward and noted that success depends on the Department's work. He emphasized that the goal and desired outcomes are the end product and is not the working plan to get there.

Hull shared the comments from Board members and explained that the term "safe" is not referring to buildings, but rather about the emotional safety of students. He also shared that building safety is covered in Priority 3.

**Board Chairperson Voss** asked Hull to provide clarification on the schedule to develop the implementation plan. Hull stated that both the Board and Department would have an implementation plan. He explained that the Board implementation plan would clarify



what the Board would do and that the Department's development of the implementation plan would be iterative because the Board needs to approve the implementation plan. Hull stated it is not the Board's role to get involved in operations.

Hull stated that the power of the strategic plan is that when the Board meets, the agenda shows a direct link to the strategic plan for each agenda item. He emphasized that if an agenda item does not tie directly to the strategic plan, it detracts from the strategic plan. Hull suggested that unless an agenda item was statutorily required, it was not going on the agenda if it is not directly tied to the strategic plan; this would ensure fidelity. Hull stated that the Board can go back to the strategic plan and make changes and that there should be an annual opportunity for the Board to review the plan.

**S Hayashi** asked Chun to explain how the Department has been envisioning the Department implementation plan. Chun stated that schools are operating and planning for next school year. She stated that at its general business meeting this afternoon, the Board would review a budget with improvements recommending alignment with the emerging strategic plan. Chun also stated that there would be sequencing issues and plan priorities, but the timeline is driven in part by the superintendent's evaluation for the Department. Chun explained that the Department would provide a draft of the implementation plan in spring and have it approved by May 2023. She expressed hope that when the Board approves the implementation plan, the Board would be serving in its policy role and not just delaying setting priorities. Chun also stated that the Board is moving a lot to the implementation plan and noted that there would need to be future discussions about choices going forward and possibly putting some things aside.

**DS Chun** stated that the Department is looking to align more processes and data collecting around the strategic plan and anticipates that in the future a budget request would align to strategic priorities and goals.

**Board Chairperson Voss** stated that the desired outcomes would be time bound and the Board would not dictate priority, but that the Board needs to ensure that priorities are set. Chun stated that in terms of sequencing to make sure the Board is comfortable that it is in alignment with its priorities, the Department expects to talk about what would happen in the first couple of years. She stated there are some things in the biennium budget request we're asking for resources that would advance the plan and would use that to determine how to sequence and what is newly started versus what is scaled up. Chun stated there would be regular reports.

**BM Moriarty** acknowledged that it gave her some level of comfort.

**BM Moriarty** noted that these desired outcomes do not provide direction to the Department regarding what to focus on first and just asks them to fix the Department's entire workforce.

Hull stated that the goals are listed in this specific sequence because it expands outward from the classroom. He detailed that it starts with the classroom and students, teachers, support staff, then moves to administrators, complex area, and then state office. He explained that this is based on the expanding community concept, which starts with students.

**Board Chairperson Voss** stated that the desired outcomes use general terms like “effective” and asked Hayashi whether this provides enough guidance for the Department to develop an implementation plan. Hayashi stated that he would look at current data and based on that information would identify areas.

**Board Chairperson Voss** stated that facilities are an enormous problem and asked if the aspirational language captures the enormity of the problem and the need for immediate change and action. Hull stated that it depends if one of the systems is a complete triage of the problems, but that comes in at the implementation plan level. Hull reminded Board members that facilities were one of the primary comments shared at Board strategic plan community meetings.

**Board Chairperson Voss** stated that schools and complex areas share ideas and asked if this concept is something that can live in a desired outcome. Hull stated that this could, but his only hesitation is to ask whether this is the Board’s role and that if the Board’s role is policy, then this is a function of the Department and not the Board. Hull stated that this may be encroaching on the Department’s role and asked whether this is the best way to leverage its role.

Hull stated that it is his understanding and thought that reporting would be captured in the implementation plan.

**Board Chairperson Voss** stated that the Board’s role is policy and that reporting is a part of the implementation plan, but the question is whether as a matter of policy, do we want the appropriate data reported to the Board. He stated that he shared Board Member Fallin’s concern. Hull distinguished between reporting to the Board and reporting to the public. Hull stated that there should be at least an annual report reporting on what progress should be made and he added that the Board also has a reporting role.

**BM Fallin** acknowledged that she has been concerned about schools providing timely and meaningful information to parents whose children are not doing well in school and asked for clarification.

**BM Fallin** asked for clarification that this kind of communication is included in Desired Outcome 3.3.2 and that she wants to make sure that this piece is included somewhere in the implementation plan.

**BM Fallin** stated that if it is not clear and if some feel it is in there and others do not, then it should be modified for clarity. She noted for record and that it can be done in the

future and that if this language is going out to the public for feedback, it is important to be clear about this.

**DS Heidi Armstrong**, shared that Goal 3.3, does not clearly infer that timely and meaningful information to parents on how students are doing in schools should take place and suggested a language change to incorporate this concept.

**DS Chun** stated that Desired Outcome 3.3.2 is designed to focus on family communication on how a child is doing in school, that would be clearer, because right now it focuses on participating in school level or policy level type decision-making. She stated that communication with families on how their children are doing is one of the most important kinds of communication that schools have with families.

Hull stated that it is important for families to be able to provide feedback, but not necessarily make decisions. He also noted that communication about academics is not something that arose anywhere in the Board's community engagement.

**S Hayashi** shared that while committed to the effort, the enormity of the Department and challenges moving forward, understand the urgency, but ask for the Board's understanding that would move as quickly as can, but moving a large Department takes at least a year. Board Chairperson Voss stated that redesigning a plan while it is in flight is hard and the Board recognizes the enormity of the task.

### **Jan. 19, 2023**

## STATE OF HAWAII PUBLIC EDUCATION 2023-2029 IMPLEMENTATION PLAN I. IMPLEMENTATION PLAN STRUCTURE AND AUTHORITY

### **Implementation Plan Components.**

This Board of Education (the "Board") and Department of Education (the "Department") designed this implementation plan (the "Implementation Plan") to make meaningful progress toward achieving the goals and desired outcomes in the State of Hawaii Public Education 2023-2029 Strategic Plan (the "Strategic Plan"). The Implementation Plan contains the following components:

- Evaluation and accountability (key performance indicators and processes for monitoring progress, evaluating success, and reporting results);
- Communication plan;
- Alignment of agenda setting, budgeting, and advocacy;
- Strategies and measures;
- Process for revising the Implementation Plan; and
- Process for initiating the next strategic plan.

The Implementation Plan does not include specific actions, work timelines, projected costs, risk assessments, risk management plans, or roles and

responsibilities for executing strategies and achieving goals. The Board and Department’s respective internal work plans may contain these components.

**B. Structure and Definitions.**

The Strategic Plan is structured around priorities, goals, and desired outcomes. The Implementation Plan builds on this structure by adding key performance indicators, strategies, and measures.

These key terms are defined below and the hierarchy and relationships are depicted in Figure 1.

**A “strategy”** represents a theory of action developed to make progress toward achieving a goal in the Strategic Plan. Each strategy in the Implementation Plan is associated with a single goal in the Strategic Plan, and each strategy is associated with at least one or more desired outcomes from the Strategic Plan. A goal may have more than one strategy to achieve it, and a strategy may lead to more than one desired outcome.

**A “key performance indicator”** (or “KPI”) is a primary measure of success for a goal within the Strategic Plan. Each goal has at least one KPI, and every KPI has a target that the Board and Department will strive to reach during the duration of the Strategic Plan. A KPI target is specific, measurable, achievable, relevant to the associated goal, and time-bound.

**A “performance measure”** is a quantitative or qualitative measure that helps the Board, Department, and stakeholders track progress toward and/or attainment of a desired outcome in the Strategic Plan. Each desired outcome has an associated performance measure. Typically, performance measures have targets. A performance measure target is specific, measurable, achievable, relevant to the associated desired outcome, and time-bound and may be based on deliverables or milestones



**Authority.** The Board and Department collaborated on the Implementation Plan with the Board having final approval authority over the Implementation Plan and any revisions to it.

- The superintendent maintains the authority to determine the Department's strategies in the Implementation Plan to achieve the goals and desired outcomes in the Strategic Plan.
- The superintendent will consider the Board's input when determining the Department's strategies.
- Internal work plans with detailed information on how to execute the Implementation Plan do not require Board approval.

**BM Moriarty** suggested adding to the existing desired outcomes, "all students show continued academic growth," and asked whether academic growth should be included in desired outcomes or the key performance indicators ("KPI").

**BM Moriarty** replied that her personal goal is that every single student knows that they have achieved individual academic growth. She stated that the Board needs to review group proficiency and that it needs to evaluate median growth to determine whether median growth is increasing.

**DS Chun** stated that the question is whether growth needs to be in the strategic plan and noted that individual student growth is tracked at the classroom level. She explained that the challenge is having consistent measures and a standardized way to measure and track at the state level. Chun suggested that the Department provide the Board with information on how it tracks student growth for statewide assessments. She explained that if a student is far from proficiency, then the Department focuses on growth and for students that are already proficient, where the commitment is to ensure these students continue to grow.

**Board Chairperson Voss** asked Hull to provide clarification on the schedule to develop the implementation plan. suggested "all students show continued academic growth." Chun replied that language would work for the Department.

He asked if Chun is able to gather the data for growth. Chun replied that the Strive HI Performance System ("Strive HI") data at the school level may not be as useful at the statewide level because it is limited to tested grades and tested subjects.

**Board Chairperson Voss** asked if the data can show growth by student groups. Chun confirmed that this data is available.

**BM Moriarty** expressed appreciation for those at the school level and recognized that data may not be available at all levels. She stated that Goal 1.1, Desired Outcome 4 captures the growth idea and measurements at the group level instead of at the school

level. She stated that she understands the data is not collected at all levels and is confident that something workable would come out of this conversation.

**BM Fallin** asked if outcomes and other measures of the HMTSS can be shifted and engaged in some manner to put supports in place when more students fall into Tier 1.

**DS Heidi Armstrong**, stated that, currently, there is no way for the Department to capture movement between tiers, but it is looking into this. She stated that the Department needs to analyze whether interventions are working and if adjustments need to be made.

Hull outlined Figure 1 on Page 2 depicting the structure of the implementation plan and reviewed definitions of key terms, like strategy, KPI, and performance measure. He noted the difference between KPIs and performance measures and provided an example illustrating this difference. Hull stated that chronic absenteeism is a possible KPI that is measured at the end of the year because a student is chronically absent if not in school for more than 15 days in a school year. The goal, however, is to eliminate chronic absenteeism, so throughout the year, the Department could track daily attendance as a performance measure.

**Board Chairperson Voss** asked Hull to provide clarification on the schedule to develop the implementation plan. clarified that priorities, goals, and desired outcomes are the first part of the strategic plan and that the implementation plan with strategies and measures are part two and that together they could make up the overall strategic plan. Hull confirmed that the strategic plan is Phase I and the implementation plan will be Phase 2.

Hull stated that the implementation plan answers how the strategic plan will get done and how to measure success with some goals for the Board and other goals for the Department. He stated that this is the implementation plan, it is not a work plan which is internal.

**Board Chairperson Voss** asked Hull to provide clarification on the schedule to develop the implementation plan. stated that it is not the Board's role to approving the Department's internal work plans, but as the committee does its reviews, then it would want to know more about the work the Department is doing to determine whether the plan is effective. He stated that the Board has to focus on policies and clarified that for some of the goals the Board will take the lead and establish the strategies.

**DS Chun** stated that under the section on authority there is some conflict between the superintendent's authority and Board's authority and she requested clarification. She expressed her concern that Board members view the implementation plan as a place for everything Board members think is a good idea and that all Board member ideas would be included in the implementation plan. Chun referenced Board member discussions about things like financial literacy, civic education, art, music, and physical education and stated that it is not realistic for all students to excel in all of these areas. Chun

stated that clarifying the roles of the Board and the Department is important so there are clear expectations.

**BM Fallin** returned to the meeting at 12:30 p.m.

**Board Chairperson Voss** asked Hull to provide clarification on the schedule to develop the implementation plan. asked how additional issues that arise would be accounted for in the strategic plan. Chun stated that the legislature creates mandates that the Department needs to address in addition to the strategic plan. She clarified that her concern is that Board members are offering a lot of ideas and the response is that the idea fits better in the implementation plan and that creates the expectation that all of these ideas would be in the implementation plan. She expressed hope that the Board gives superintendent the latitude to set strategies and that the Board provide input, but not with the expectation that all Board member input is reflected in the implementation plan if the superintendent determines it is not the best strategy available.

**Board Chairperson Voss** asked Hull to provide clarification on the schedule to develop the implementation plan. expressed agreement with Chun's concern and noted that the draft implementation plan template specifically states that the superintendent has authority over strategy, which should address Chun's concerns. He also stated that the Board is not going to get into wordsmithing strategies.

**DS Chun** stated that format-wise, the Department was looking at a separate implementation plan, not one integrated into this template. Board Chairperson Voss stated that the plan was always to have one implementation plan in one place and all part of the strategic plan.

**BM Fallin** stated that with Hull's assistance, the Board can now create a systematic framework with roles and responsibilities. She stated that the Board should now be able to link the budget to the strategic plan and get data about impact to determine if the Department is making progress. Board Member Fallin stated that it is the Board's purview to ask about strategies because this is the nature of the decision-making process.

**Board Chairperson Voss** asked Hull to provide clarification on the schedule to develop the implementation plan. stated that the Board has an oversight role.

**S Hayashi** expressed understanding that the Board would focus on strategic plan goals.

**Board Chairperson Voss** asked Hull to provide clarification on the schedule to develop the implementation plan. stated that there are an infinite number of things, but the ones that most significantly move progress on the goals are the ones that should be on Board agendas. Hull stated that the Board has limited bandwidth and needs to use that to achieve the strategic plan goals or else there is no point in having a strategic plan.

He also noted that the implementation plan should be broken down by year. He stated that the Board has told the Department what the goals are and the Department is responsible for sequencing its work to figure out how to reach the goals.

**BM Moriarty** stated that it is not so much timing, but that some things are more important than others. She acknowledged that the Department is more knowledgeable about strategies, and referenced an example of Grade 3 literacy as being more important than other goals.

Hull stated that it is not the Board's role to determine what comes first and second when establishing how to meet the goals of the strategic plan.

### **Feb. 2, 2023**

#### DISCUSSION CHARTER SCHOOLS

**S Hayashi** asked if the strategic plan applies to all public schools, including charter schools. Board Chairperson Voss explained that the Board does not have direct jurisdiction over charter schools, although the basic principles would apply.

**BM Namau'u** stated that the next phase or implementation plan does not include the charter schools, so the strategic plan only applies to the Department.

**Board Chairperson Voss** asked Hull to provide clarification on the schedule to develop the implementation plan. stated that he is hopeful that charter schools would embrace the concepts in the strategic plan and invited Hayashi to share his thoughts. Hayashi replied that his interpretation is that the strategic plan will include charter schools as the Board oversees education statewide.

**DS Chun**, Deputy Superintendent of Strategy, stated that the comments relating to the Board's role are correct in relation to charter schools because the Board appoints commissioners who authorize charter schools and the Board handles charter school appeals. She stated that if the strategic plan covers all schools, including charter schools, then the Department would be looking at different implementation steps relating to reporting on statewide progress. Chun noted that the Department shares the results of the Strive HI Performance System ("Strive HI") for all schools, including charter schools. Chun explained that the federal government views the Department as a single statewide education system and federal reporting requirements, which is what Strive HI is, would impact charter schools irrespective of the strategic plan.

**Board Vice Chairperson Barcarse** stated that if the strategic plan applied to charter schools, it would have been created so everyone valued and understood that charter schools operate differently. He also expressed support that charter schools receive appropriate resources.



**DS Chun** stated that charter school funding is tied to the Department and that additional resources are provided to charter schools for key initiatives. She asked what the Board's expectation would be in terms of strategies for the implementation plan to determine resource needs.

**Board Vice Chairperson Barcarse** stated that although charter schools receive a portion of funds for their schools it is not enough to accomplish everything necessary. He stated that if the Board was holding the charter schools to the strategic plan then the Board would have invited charter schools to discussions during the development of the strategic plan.

**Board Chairperson Voss** asked Hull to provide clarification on the schedule to develop the implementation plan. stated that the Board does not want to dictate anything for charter schools and noted that this is a question of balance. He asked if it is the Department's expectation that Priority 1, should apply to charter schools. Chun confirmed that, in principle, Priority 1 should apply to charter schools, but in terms of implementation some areas need to be considered because charter schools do not collect data in the same way.

**Board Chairperson Voss** asked Hull to provide clarification on the schedule to develop the implementation plan. asked if charter schools would have the same KPIs for Priority 1. Chun replied that the Department would like the KPIs to be the same, but in some cases charter schools have not been included so there is a data collection burden that would be placed on the schools. She suggested that the Department come back to the Board when discussing KPIs to include potential impacts if charter schools are included.

**Board Chairperson Voss** asked Hull to provide clarification on the schedule to develop the implementation plan. noted that several of the goals in Priority 2 and Priority 3 do not apply to the charter schools. Chun replied that the current wording for some of the priorities does not apply to charter schools since it refers to the Department and School Community Councils. She also noted that there may be a different set of measures that would apply to charter schools for these priorities in the same routines.

**Board Chairperson Voss** asked Hull to provide clarification on the schedule to develop the implementation plan. stated that a lot is determined by the implementation plan and the Board will not micromanage the specifics. He echoed comments from Board Vice Chairperson Barcarse regarding discussions with charter schools for a shared understanding. Chun replied that it is important to be explicit in terms of the expectation because this determines the amount of engagement in the planning process. She noted that if the Board would like charter schools involved, this would determine engagement relating to KPIs but the Department would not develop strategies for charter schools.

**Board Chairperson Voss** asked Hull to provide clarification on the schedule to develop the implementation plan. stated that it is not the Board's role to dictate to charter

schools and this topic deserves further discussion throughout the implementation process. He reiterated comments from Board Vice Chairperson Barcarse that the charter schools should be involved if charter schools were going to be held to the KPIs in some way.

**BM Moriarty** expressed support to involve charter schools in the appropriate places to provide feedback to the Board. She noted that discussions relating to Priority 2 and Priority 3 should be addressed appropriately.

ACTION: Motion to (1) adopt the Hawaii Public Education 2023-2029 Strategic Plan, attached as Exhibit A to Board Chairperson Voss's memorandum dated February 2, 2023, with an amendment to remove the last 'Ōlelo No'eau from the core values, effectively immediately, and (2) authorize the Board chairperson to make non-substantive changes to the format, including finalizing the design. The motion carried unanimously with all members present voting aye.

**BM Moriarty** stated that the Department needs to diagnose problems accurately, review the research, do an analysis, and tell the Board what is happening and why the Department is suggesting a KPI or strategy. She noted that the Department would need to broadly track each understanding the theory of change behind each outcome so that if something changes in the problem, the Department can adjust its strategy or KPI.

which requires that all Board policies and decisions advance the strategic plan. He stated that as part of this work, the Board would need to review its policies to ensure alignment with the strategic plan and ensure all agenda items advance the strategic plan.

**Board Chairperson Voss** asked Hull to provide clarification on the schedule to develop the implementation plan. noted that Hayashi would determine strategies for Department-specific goals, but that the Board needs to see these proposed strategies early in the development process. He asked when the Department intends to present strategies to the Board and asked whether the Department would deliver this information in a phased manner. Chun replied that the Department is working on a timeline where the Department would present a proposed draft in April followed by approval in May. She stated that she would expect to provide the Board with KPIs first, then desired outcomes with metrics, and then strategies in a full draft by April.

**Board Chairperson Voss** asked Hull to provide clarification on the schedule to develop the implementation plan. noted the sequencing of KPIs, outcomes and metrics, then strategies. Chun stated that she would like to share information with the Board relating to the measures to show the growth measures being looked at in the implementation plan.

**DS Chun** stated that the Department would like to have the opportunity to come to the Board a couple of times to discuss the KPIs. She asked if the Board would like a shorter targeted list or longer list of efforts.

**BM Fallin** asked whether metrics include relevant learning for the classroom teacher and the system. Chun replied that when looking at the system, the Department would look at schools making progress in teaching students to read and would measure effects using end of the school year assessments.

**DS Chun** stated that teachers can be informed by statewide assessments, but the expectation is that teachers are doing academic assessments throughout the school year.

**DS Chun** stated that one of the presentations the Department would like to provide to the Board is on the academic planning process to demonstrate what that process looks like and how the complex area superintendents interact with the process.

### **Feb. 16, 2023**

**DS Chun** stated that the Department is moving into the second phase of the implementation plan and explained that the purpose of the presentation is to provide a roadmap of timelines and engagement. She stated that the Department is aiming to present the final draft of the implementation plan to the Board during the first week of May 2023. Chun shared that the Department has started the process to meet with various stakeholders and that the engagement timeline is short, as referenced in Hayashi's memo, so there is a greater focus on engaging internal stakeholders.

**Board Vice Chairperson Barcarse** emphasized that when the Department proposes strategies, they need to describe how they are research-based and evidence-based in order to support the Department's selection of the strategies. He stated that the Department needs to explain how the strategies would work to help reach the strategic plan goals.

**DS Chun** stated that student learning strategies need to be evidence-based, but goals for Priority 2 or Priority 3 might be more efficiency-based.

**DS Chun** replied that how the Department implements the implementation plan depends on key metrics and key strategies shared across schools statewide. She also stated that schools' academic and financial plans would need to be aligned with the strategic plan so schools would look at data, Chun stated that statewide strategies would determine school plans and how schools would use resources. Chun explained that the state offices would also determine processes that would happen at the state, complex, and school levels.

**S Hayashi** asked for consideration to have the implementation plan approved at the second meeting of May 2023. Board Chairperson Voss noted that the implementation plan is one of the deliverables of the superintendent's evaluation and that the superintendent's evaluation is scheduled for the second meeting of May 2023, so it is possible, but the Board would need to ensure there is sufficient time for Hayashi's evaluation.

## **Mar. 2, 2023**

**DS Chun** updated the Board on the second phase of the Hawaii Public Education 2023-2029 Strategic Plan, the implementation plan. She stated that the Department has requested that all principals provide an in-person opportunity for staff to provide feedback on the implementation plan, which would happen during the two-week period after spring break. Chun stated that the Department is developing the feedback forms and it would not be a small lift to gather feedback. She stated that the draft implementation plan template referenced in previous materials for Board meetings is already lengthy without strategies and indicators.

He asked what Chun is providing to people when asking for feedback. Chun replied that the Department plans to provide a short video that introduces the structure of the plan and describes the kind of feedback the Department is looking for. She stated that the Department is including an executive summary with a link to the full draft.

**DS Chun** stated that some feedback she has received is that there are a lot of measures to produce and track. She stated that each school would be held accountable for ten measures and 28 desired outcomes, which may require more than one measure. Chun stated that strategic plans are effective when focused. She also stated that different meetings produce different feedback and that she has not seen a consensus on priorities.

## **MAR. 23, 2023**

**DS Chun** explained that the draft template of the implementation plan identifies the KPIs that would measure goals annually, identifies targets for improvement, and would be used to track targets overall at the state level. She shared that Hayashi's memorandum describes the process and that the Department anticipates changes to the draft KPIs, because there are 10 goals and 18 performance indicators which were selected for feedback.

**Board Chairperson Voss** asked Hull to provide clarification on the schedule to develop the implementation plan. asked for an explanation of the differences between KPIs and performance measures.

**DS Chun** stated that a strategic plan desired outcome is reading proficiency by Grade 3. She noted that it is important to have KPIs and target setting, but expressed concern that all performance measures need to be approved by the Board with targets for each item. She asked that the Board consider delegating authority to the Department for these performance measures.

**BM Fallin** stated that a desired outcome regarding early learning was added to the strategic plan, Priority 1, because of the financial investment in the Kindergarten Entry Assessment ("KEA"), but the performance measure focuses on being assessed and not proficiency. She shared that she thought that this KEA desired outcome was the Board

was making a bold policy statement about investing in students early and asked how the Board would ensure that students get necessary and timely support.

**DS Chun** asked if Board Member Fallin is referring to assessments prior to kindergarten or after students enter kindergarten. Board Member Fallin replied that there is no explanation of how performance on the KEA would be monitored. Chun stated that the Board identified the KEA the Department would administer, but it was not chosen to be a KPI because there is no data system available to track this information.

**BM Fallin** stated that if students are assessed at Kindergarten there would be baseline data but there is no way to know what the baseline is and what the students are missing. Chun replied that strategies do not rise to the same level as activities but the Department would report on Goal 1.1 to ensure all the details are represented.

**BM Fallin** emphasized that the investment in early learning is an opportunity and that it is the Board's role to guide this data. She reiterated that the Board has made a policy investment, so there needs to be an understanding of how to keep monitor KEA assessment data.

**DS Chun** replied that the Department is in discussions on whether to use the formative or summative assessments for reporting to the Board, she noted that schools all need to use the formative assessments but can select assessments on their own. She explained that the Department is not advocating having schools use the same formative assessments.

Board Member Namau'u expressed appreciation for the evaluation process, but asked if there is a measure that can capture the effectiveness of teachers so that the Board can see this information. Chun stated that the most appropriate metric would be relating to the percent of teachers that have been found to be rated as effective through the Educator Effectiveness Evaluation system and suggested that the Department provide a presentation on this system and the various components to measure this information from a metrics point of view.

She also suggested adding a measure to track growth of students and their proficiency or growth with a transition matrix model or something similar to track whether students are progressing.

**BM Moriarty** also stated that there needs to be an understanding on what changes are needed, what strategies would be used to make changes, and what progress is being made.

My thoughts:

We've all left meetings feeling good about what we discussed only to later wonder why so little happened as a result. Where did the momentum go?

There are a number of reasons why the productive conversations in a meeting seemingly go nowhere. Attendees are often immediately running to another meeting where their attention shifts to a new set of issues. Or people leave the meeting without clarity about what was agreed upon.

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**Lack of mutual respect looks like:**

- Extraverts ignoring or shutting out the Introverts. Hogging the airwaves, interrupting, finishing their sentences for them, ignoring body language, and believing that the best way to influence others is to transmit your position until the others submit. I
- Ignoring the human component. Meetings jump straight into the detail, without recognising that human beings have come together either remotely or in the same room to share opinions, build out ideas, reach consensus, but above all to share and collaborate as people.
- Competitive behaviours, often dressed up as banter or through hidden agendas and cloak and daggery of various kinds. People saying they agree but moaning afterwards. Using a vote to force through a decision where sensible balanced debate should have been allowed for. The meetings chairperson who pretends to have an open mind but is in fact leading the discussion towards what has already been decided.
- Not even attempting to get buy in. Jumping into the detail without positioning the topic and addressing the "why should I care about this?" question which is always on everyone's mind. Assuming it is obvious and expecting everyone to be as motivated to discuss it as the topic sponsor.

**Solution.** Recognizing

# *The Abilene Paradox: The Management of Agreement*

## **Jerry B. Harvey**

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A member of the International Consultant's Foundation, a Diplomat of the American Board of Professional Psychology, and a member of the O.D. Network, he has served as a consultant to a wide variety of industrial, governmental, religious, and voluntary organizations. He has written a number of articles in the fields of organizational behavior and education and currently is involved in the exploration of moral, ethical, and spiritual issues of work. In the pursuit of that interest, his book, *The Abilene Paradox and Other Meditations on Management*, was published by Lexington Books in 1988.

The July afternoon in Coleman, Texas (population 5,607) was particularly hot—104 degrees as measured by the Walgreen's Rexall Ex-Lax temperature gauge. In addition, the wind was blowing fine-gained West Texas topsoil through the house. But the afternoon was still tolerable—even potentially enjoyable. There was a fan going on the back porch; there was cold lemonade; and finally, there was entertainment. Dominoes. Perfect for the conditions. The game required little more physical exertion than an occasional mumbled comment, "Shuffle 'em," and an unhurried movement of the arm to place the spots in the appropriate perspective on the table. All in all, it had the makings of an agreeable Sunday afternoon in Coleman—this is, it was until my

father-in-law suddenly said, "Let's get in the car and go to Abilene and have dinner at the cafeteria."

I thought, "What, go to Abilene? Fifty-three miles? In this dust storm and heat? And in an unairconditioned 1958 Buick?"

But my wife chimed in with, "Sounds like a great idea. I'd like to go. How about you, Jerry?" Since my own preferences were obviously out of step with the rest I replied, "Sounds good to me," and added, "I just hope your mother wants to go."

"Of course I want to go," said my mother-in-law. "I haven't been to Abilene in a long time."

So into the car and off to Abilene we went. My predictions were fulfilled. The heat was brutal. We were coated with a fine layer of dust that was cemented with perspiration by the time we arrived. The food at the cafeteria provided first-rate testimonial material for antacid commercials.

Some four hours and 106 miles later we returned to Coleman, hot and exhausted. We sat in front of the fan for a long time in silence. Then, both to be sociable and to break the silence, I said, "It was a great trip, wasn't it?"

No one spoke. Finally my mother-in-law said, with some irritation, "Well, to tell the truth, I really didn't enjoy it much and would rather have stayed here. I just went along because the three of you were so enthusiastic about going. I wouldn't have gone if you all hadn't pressured me into it."

I couldn't believe it. "What do you mean 'you all'?" I said. "Don't put me in the 'you all' group. I was delighted to be doing what we were doing. I didn't want to go. I only

went to satisfy the rest of you. You're the culprits."

My wife looked shocked. "Don't call me a culprit. You and Daddy and Mama were the ones who wanted to go. I just went along to be sociable and to keep you happy. I would have had to be crazy to want to go out in heat like that."

Her father entered the conversation abruptly. "Hell!" he said.

He proceeded to expand on what was already absolutely clear. "Listen, I never wanted to go to Abilene. I just thought you might be bored. You visit so seldom I wanted to be sure you enjoyed it. I would have preferred to play another game of dominoes and eat the leftovers in the icebox."

After the outburst of recrimination we all sat back in silence. Here we were, four reasonably sensible people who, of our own volition, had just taken a 106-mile trip across a godforsaken desert in a furnace-like temperature through a cloud-like dust storm to eat unpalatable food at a hole-in-the-wall cafeteria in Abilene, when none of us had really wanted to go. In fact, to be more accurate, we'd done just the opposite of what we wanted to do. The whole situation simply didn't make sense.

At least it didn't make sense at the time. But since that day in Coleman, I have observed, consulted with, and been a part of more than one organization that has been caught in the same situation. As a result, they have either taken a side-trip, or, occasionally, a terminal journey to Abilene, when Dallas or Houston or Tokyo was where they really wanted to go. And for most of those organizations, the negative consequences of such trips, measured in terms of both human misery and economic loss, have been much greater than for our little Abilene group.

This article is concerned with that paradox—the Abilene Paradox. Stated simply, it is as follows: Organizations frequently take actions in contradiction to what they really want to do and therefore defeat the very purposes they are trying to achieve. It also deals with a major corollary of the paradox, which is that *the inability to manage agreement is a major source of organization dysfunction*. Last, the article is designed to help members of organizations cope more effectively with the paradox's pernicious influence.

As a means of accomplishing the above, I shall: (1) describe the symptoms exhibited by organizations caught in the paradox; (2) de-

scribe, in summarized case-study examples, how they occur in a variety of organizations; (3) discuss the underlying causal dynamics; (4) indicate some of the implications of accepting this model for describing organizational behavior; (5) make recommendations for coping with the paradox; and, in conclusion, (6) relate the paradox to a broader existential issue.

## SYMPTOMS OF THE PARADOX

The inability to manage agreement, not the inability to manage conflict, is the essential symptom that defines organizations caught in the web of the Abilene Paradox. That inability to manage agreement effectively is expressed by six specific subsymptoms, all of which were present in our family Abilene group.

1. Organization members agree privately, as individuals, as to the nature of the situation or problem facing the organization. For example, members of the Abilene group agreed that they were enjoying themselves sitting in front of the fan, sipping lemonade, and playing dominoes.

2. Organization members agree privately, as individuals, as to the steps that would be required to cope with the situation or problem they face. For members of the Abilene group "more of the same" was a solution that would have adequately satisfied their individual and collective desires.

3. Organization members fail to accurately communicate their desires and/or beliefs to one another. In fact, they do just the opposite and thereby lead one another into misperceiving the collective reality. Each member of the Abilene group, for example, communicated inaccurate data to other members of the organization. The data, in effect, said, "Yeah, it's a great idea. Let's go to Abilene," when in reality members of the organization individually and collectively preferred to stay in Coleman.

4. With such invalid and inaccurate information, organization members make collective decisions that lead them to take actions contrary to what they want to do, and thereby arrive at results that are counterproductive to the organization's intent and purposes. Thus, the Abilene group went to Abilene when it preferred to do something else.

5. As a result of taking actions that are counterproductive, organization members experience frustration, anger, irritation, and dissatisfaction with their organization. Consequently, they form subgroups with trusted ac-



quaintances and blame other subgroups for the organization's dilemma. Frequently, they also blame authority figures and one another. Such phenomena were illustrated in the Abilene group by the "culprit" argument that occurred when we had returned to the comfort of the fan.

6. Finally, if organization members do not deal with the generic issue—the inability to manage agreement—the cycle repeats itself with greater intensity. The Abilene group, for a variety of reasons, the most important of which was that it became conscious of the process, did not reach that point.

To repeat, the Abilene Paradox reflects a failure to manage agreement. In fact, it is my contention that the inability to cope with (manage) agreement, rather than the inability to cope with (manage) conflict, is the single most pressing issue of modern organizations.

#### OTHER TRIPS TO ABILENE

The Abilene Paradox is no respecter of individuals, organizations, or institutions. Following are descriptions of two other trips to Abilene that illustrate both the pervasiveness of the paradox and its underlying dynamics.

##### *Case No. 1: The Boardroom.*

The Ozyx Corporation is a relatively small industrial company that has embarked on a trip to Abilene. The president of Ozyx has hired a consultant to help discover the reasons for the poor profit picture of the company in general and the low morale and productivity of the R&D division in particular. During the process of investigation, the consultant becomes interested in a research project in which the company has invested a sizable proportion of its R&D budget.

When asked about the project by the consultant in the privacy of their offices, the president, the vice-president for research, and the research manager each describes it as an idea that looked great on paper but will ultimately fail because of the unavailability of the technology required to make it work. Each of them also acknowledges that continued support of the project will create cash flow problems that will jeopardize the very existence of the total organization.

Furthermore, each individual indicates he has not told the others about his reservations. When asked why, the president says he can't reveal his "true" feelings because abandoning the project, which has been widely publicized,

would make the company look bad in the press and, in addition, would probably cause his vice-president's ulcer to kick up or perhaps even cause him to quit, "because he has staked his professional reputation on the project's success."

Similarly, the vice-president for research says he can't let the president or the research manager know of his reservations because the president is so committed to it that "I would probably get fired for insubordination if I questioned the project."

Finally, the research manager says he can't let the president or vice-president know of his doubts about the project because of their extreme commitment to the project's success.

All indicate that, in meetings with one another, they try to maintain an optimistic facade so the others won't worry unduly about the project. The research director, in particular, admits to writing ambiguous progress reports so the president and the vice-president can "interpret them to suit themselves." In fact, he says he tends to slant them to the "positive" side, "given how committed the brass are."

The scent of the Abilene trail wafts from a paneled conference room where the project research budget is being considered for the following fiscal year. In the meeting itself, praises are heaped on the questionable project and a unanimous decision is made to continue it for yet another year. Symbolically, the organization has boarded a bus to Abilene.

In fact, although the real issue of agreement was confronted approximately eight months after the bus departed, it was nearly too late. The organization failed to meet a payroll and underwent a two-year period of personnel cutbacks, retrenchments, and austerity. Morale suffered, the most competent technical personnel resigned, and the organization's prestige in the industry declined.

##### *Case No. 2: The Watergate.*

Apart from the grave question of who did what, Watergate presents America with the profound puzzle of why. What is it that led such a wide assortment of men, many of them high public officials, possibly including the President himself, either to instigate or to go along with and later try to hide a pattern of behavior that by now appears not only reprehensible, but stupid? (*The Washington Star and Daily News*, editorial, May 27, 1973.)

One possible answer to the editorial writer's question can be found by probing into the dynamics of the Abilene Paradox. I

shall let the reader reach his own conclusions, though, on the basis of the following excerpts from testimony before the Senate investigating committee on "The Watergate Affair."

In one exchange, Senator Howard Baker asked Herbert Porter, then a member of the White House staff, why he (Porter) found himself "in charge of or deeply involved in a dirty tricks operation of the campaign." In response, Porter indicated that he had had qualms about what he was doing, but that he "... was not one to stand up in a meeting and say that this should be stopped. ... I kind of drifted along."

And when asked by Baker why he had "drifted along," Porter replied, "In all honesty, because of the fear of the group pressure that would ensue, of not being a team player," and "... I felt a deep sense of loyalty to him [the President] or was appealed to on that basis." (*The Washington Post*, June 8, 1973, p. 20.)

Jeb Magruder gave a similar response to a question posed by committee counsel Dash. Specifically, when asked about his, Mr. Dean's, and Mr. Mitchell's reactions to Mr. Liddy's proposal, which included bugging the Watergate, Mr. Magruder replied, "I think all three of us were appalled. The scope and size of the project were something that at least in my mind were not envisioned. I do not think it was in Mr. Mitchell's mind or Mr. Dean's, although I can't comment on their states of mind at that time."

Mr. Mitchell, in an understated way, which was his way of dealing with difficult problems like this, indicated that this was not an "acceptable project." (*The Washington Post*, June 15, 1973, p. A14.)

Later in his testimony Mr. Magruder said, "... I think I can honestly say that no one was particularly overwhelmed with the project. But I think we felt that this information could be useful, and Mr. Mitchell agreed to approve the project, and I then notified the parties of Mr. Mitchell's approval." (*The Washington Post*, June 15, 1973, p. A14.)

Although I obviously was not privy to the private conversations of the principal characters, the data seem to reflect the essential elements of the Abilene Paradox. First, they indicate agreement. Evidently, Mitchell, Porter, Dean, and Magruder agreed that the plan was inappropriate. ("I think I can honestly say that no one was particularly overwhelmed with the project.") Second, the data indicate that the principal figures then proceeded to implement the plan in contradiction to their

shared agreement. Third, the data surrounding the case clearly indicate that the plan multiplied the organization's problems rather than solved them. And finally, the organization broke into subgroups with the various principals, such as the President, Mitchell, Porter, Dean, and Magruder, blaming one another for the dilemma in which they found themselves, and internecine warfare ensued.

In summary, it is possible that because of the inability of White House staff members to cope with the fact that they agreed, the organization took a trip to Abilene.

#### ANALYZING THE PARADOX

The Abilene Paradox can be stated succinctly as follows: Organizations frequently take actions in contradiction to the data they have for dealing with problems and, as a result, compound their problems rather than solve them. Like all paradoxes, the Abilene Paradox deals with absurdity. On the surface, it makes little sense for organizations, whether they are couples or companies, bureaucracies or governments, to take actions that are diametrically opposed to the data they possess for solving crucial organizational problems. Such actions are particularly absurd since they tend to compound the very problems they are designed to solve and thereby defeat the purposes the organization is trying to achieve. However, as Robert Rapaport and others have so cogently expressed it, paradoxes are generally paradoxes only because they are based on a logic or rationale different from what we understand or expect.

Discovering that different logic not only destroys the paradoxical quality but also offers alternative ways for coping with similar situations. Therefore, part of the dilemma facing an Abilene-bound organization may be the lack of a map—a theory or model—that provides rationality to the paradox. The purpose of the following discussion is to provide such a map.

The map will be developed by examining the underlying psychological themes of the profit-making organization and the bureaucracy and it will include the following landmarks: (1) Action Anxiety; (2) Negative Fantasies; (3) Real Risk; (4) Separation Anxiety; and (5) the Psychological Reversal of Risk and Certainty. I hope that the discussion of such landmarks will provide harried organization travelers with a new map that will assist them in arriving at where they really want to go and, in addition, will help

them in assessing the risks that are an inevitable part of the journey.

#### ACTION ANXIETY

Action anxiety provides the first landmark for locating roadways that bypass Abilene. The concept of action anxiety says that the reasons organization members take actions in contradiction to their understanding of the organization's problems lies in the intense anxiety that is created as they think about acting in accordance with what they believe needs to be done. As a result, they opt to endure the professional and economic degradation of pursuing an unworkable research project or the consequences of participating in an illegal activity rather than act in a manner congruent with their beliefs. It is not that organization members do not know what needs to be done—they do know. For example, the various principals in the research organization cited *knew* they were working on a research project that had no real possibility of succeeding. And the central figures of the Watergate episode apparently *knew* that, for a variety of reasons, the plan to bug the Watergate did not make sense.

Such action anxiety experienced by the various protagonists may not make sense, but the dilemma is not a new one. In fact, it is very similar to the anxiety experienced by Hamlet, who expressed it most eloquently in the opening lines of his famous soliloquy:

To be or not to be; that is the question:  
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune  
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles  
And by opposing, end them? . . .  
(*Hamlet*, Act III, Scene II)

It is easy to translate Hamlet's anxious lament into that of the research manager of our R&D organization as he contemplates his report to the meeting of the budget committee. It might go something like this:

To maintain my sense of integrity and self-worth or compromise it, that is the question. Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the ignominy that comes from managing a nonsensical research project, or the fear and anxiety that come from making a report the president and V.P. may not like to hear.

So, the anguish, procrastination, and counterproductive behavior of the research manager or members of the White House staff are not much different from those of Hamlet; all

might ask with equal justification Hamlet's subsequent searching question of what it is that

makes us rather bear those ills we have than fly to others we know not of. (*Hamlet*, Act III, Scene II)

In short, like the various Abilene protagonists, we are faced with a deeper question: Why does action anxiety occur?

#### NEGATIVE FANTASIES

Part of the answer to that question may be found in the negative fantasies organization members have about acting in congruence with what they believe should be done. Hamlet experienced such fantasies.

Specifically, Hamlet's fantasies of the alternatives to the current evils were more evils, and he didn't entertain the possibility that any action he might take could lead to an improvement in the situation. Hamlet's was not an unusual case, though. In fact, the "Hamlet syndrome" clearly occurred in both organizations previously described. All of the organization protagonists had negative fantasies about what would happen if they acted in accordance with what they believed needed to be done.

The various managers in the R&D organization foresaw loss of face, prestige, position, and even health as the outcome of confronting the issues about which they believed, incorrectly, that they disagreed. Similarly, members of the White House staff feared being made scapegoats, branded as disloyal, or ostracized as non-team players if they acted in accordance with their understanding of reality.

To sum up, action anxiety is supported by the negative fantasies that organization members have about what will happen as a consequence of their acting in accordance with their understanding of what is sensible. The negative fantasies, in turn, serve an important function for the persons who have them. Specifically, they provide the individual with an excuse that releases him psychologically, both in his own eyes and frequently in the eyes of others, from the responsibility of having to act to solve organization problems.

It is not sufficient, though, to stop with the explanation of negative fantasies as the basis for the inability of organizations to cope with agreement. We must look deeper and ask still

other questions: What is the source of the negative fantasies? Why do they occur?

### REAL RISK

Risk is a reality of life, a condition of existence. John Kennedy articulated it in another way when he said at a news conference, "Life is unfair." By that I believe he meant we do not know, nor can we predict or control with certainty, either the events that impinge upon us or the outcomes of actions we undertake in response to those events.

Consequently, in the business environment, the research manager might find that confronting the president and the vice-president with the fact that the project was a "turkey" might result in his being fired. And Mr. Porter's saying that an illegal plan of surveillance should not be carried out could have caused his ostracism as a non-team player. There are too many cases when confrontation of this sort has resulted in such consequences. The real question, though, is not, Are such fantasized consequences possible? but, Are such fantasized consequences likely?

Thus real risk is an existential condition, and all actions do have consequences that, to paraphrase Hamlet, may be worse than the evils of the present. As a result of their unwillingness to accept existential risk as one of life's givens, however, people may opt to take their organizations to Abilene rather than run the risk, no matter how small, of ending up somewhere worse.

Again, though, one must ask, What is the real risk that underlies the decision to opt for Abilene? What is at the core of the paradox?

### FEAR OF SEPARATION

One is tempted to say that the core of the paradox lies in the individual's fear of the unknown. Actually, we do not fear what is unknown, but we are afraid of things we do know about. What do we know about that frightens us into such apparently inexplicable organizational behavior?

Separation, alienation, and loneliness are things we do know about—and fear. Both research and experience indicate that ostracism is one of the most powerful punishments that can be devised. Solitary confinement does not draw its coercive strength from physical deprivation. The evidence is overwhelming that we have a fundamental need to be connected, engaged,

and related and a reciprocal need not to be separated or alone. Everyone of us, though, has experienced aloneness. From the time the umbilical cord was cut, we have experienced the real anguish of separation—broken friendships, divorces, deaths, and exclusions. C. P. Snow vividly described the tragic interplay between loneliness and connection:

Each of us is alone; sometimes we escape from our solitariness, through love and affection or perhaps creative moments, but these triumphs of life are pools of light we make for ourselves while the edge of the road is black. Each of us dies alone.

That fear of taking risks that may result in our separation from others is at the core of the paradox. It finds expression in ways of which we may be unaware, and it is ultimately the cause of the self-defeating, collective deception that leads to self-destructive decisions within organizations.

Concretely, such fear of separation leads research committees to fund projects that none of its members want and, perhaps, White House staff members to engage in illegal activities that they don't really support.

### THE PSYCHOLOGICAL REVERSAL OF RISK AND CERTAINTY

One piece of the map is still missing. It relates to the peculiar reversal that occurs in our thought processes as we try to cope with the Abilene Paradox. For example, we frequently fail to take action in an organizational setting because we fear that the actions we take may result in our separation from others, or, in the language of Mr. Porter, we are afraid of being tabbed as "disloyal" or are afraid of being ostracized as "non-team players." But therein lies a paradox within a paradox, because our very unwillingness to take such risks virtually ensures the separation and aloneness we so fear. In effect, we reverse "real existential risk" and "fantasied risk" and by doing so transform what is a probability statement into what, for all practical purposes, becomes a certainty.

Take the R&D organization described earlier. When the project fails, some people will get fired, demoted, or sentenced to the purgatory of a make-work job in an out-of-the-way office. For those who remain, the atmosphere of blame, distrust, suspicion, and backbiting that accompanies such failure will

serve only to further alienate and separate those who remain.

The Watergate situation is similar. The principals evidently feared being ostracized as disloyal non-team players. When the illegality of the act surfaced, however, it was nearly inevitable that blaming, self-protective actions, and scapegoating would result in the very emotional separation from both the President and one another that the principals feared. Thus, by reversing real and fantasied risk, they had taken effective action to ensure the outcome they least desired.

One final question remains: Why do we make this peculiar reversal? I support the general thesis of Alvin Toffler and Philip Slater, who contend that our cultural emphasis on technology, competition, individualism, temporariness, and mobility has resulted in a population that has frequently experienced the terror of loneliness and seldom the satisfaction of engagement. Consequently, though we have learned of the reality of separation, we have not had the opportunity to learn the reciprocal skills of connection, with the result that, like the ancient dinosaurs, we are breeding organizations with self-destructive decision-making proclivities.

#### A POSSIBLE ABILENE BYPASS

Existential risk is inherent in living, so it is impossible to provide a map that meets the no-risk criterion, but it may be possible to describe the route in terms that make the landmarks understandable and that will clarify the risks involved. In order to do that, however, some commonly used terms such as victim, victimizer, collusion, responsibility, conflict, conformity, courage, confrontation, reality, and knowledge have to be redefined. In addition, we need to explore the relevance of the redefined concepts for bypassing or getting out of Abilene.

- *Victim and victimizer.* Blaming and fault-finding behavior is one of the basic symptoms of organizations that have found their way to Abilene, and the target of blame generally doesn't include the one who criticizes. Stated in different terms, executives begin to assign one another to roles of victims and victimizers. Ironic as it may seem, however, this assignment of roles is both irrelevant and dysfunctional, because once a business or a government fails to manage its agreement and arrives in Abilene, all its members are victims.

Thus, arguments and accusations that identify victims and victimizers at best become symptoms of the paradox, and, at worst, drain energy from the problem-solving efforts required to redirect the organization along the route it really wants to take.

- *Collusion.* A basic implication of the Abilene Paradox is that human problems of organization are reciprocal in nature. As Robert Tannenbaum has pointed out, you can't have an autocratic boss unless subordinates are willing to collude with his autocracy, and you can't have obsequious subordinates unless the boss is willing to collude with their obsequiousness.

Thus, in plain terms, each person in a self-defeating, Abilene-bound organization *colludes* with others, including peers, superiors, and subordinates, sometimes consciously and sometimes subconsciously, to create the dilemma in which the organization finds itself. To adopt a cliché of modern organization, "It takes a real team effort to go to Abilene." In that sense each person, in his own collusive manner, shares responsibility for the trip, so searching for a locus of blame outside oneself serves no useful purpose for either the organization or the individual. It neither helps the organization handle its dilemma of unrecognized agreement nor does it provide psychological relief for the individual, because focusing on conflict when agreement is the issue is devoid of reality. In fact, it does just the opposite, for it causes the organization to focus on managing conflict when it should be focusing on managing agreement.

- *Responsibility for problem-solving action.* A second question is, Who is responsible for getting us out of this place? To that question is frequently appended a third one, generally rhetorical in nature, with "should" overtones, such as, Isn't it the boss (or the ranking government official) who is responsible for doing something about the situation?

The answer to that question is no.

The key to understanding the functionality of the no answer is the knowledge that, when the dynamics of the paradox are in operation, the authority figure—and others—are in unknowing agreement with one another concerning the organization's problems and the steps necessary to solve them. Consequently, the power to destroy the paradox's pernicious influence comes from confronting and speaking to the underlying reality of the situation, and not from one's hierarchical position within the organization. Therefore, any or-

ganization member who chooses to risk confronting that reality possesses the necessary leverage to release the organization from the paradox's grip.

In one situation, it may be a research director's saying, "I don't think this project can succeed." In another, it may be Jeb Magruder's response to this question of Senator Baker:

If you were concerned because the action was known to you to be illegal, because you thought it improper or unethical, you thought the prospects for success were very meager, and you doubted the reliability of Mr. Liddy, what on earth would it have taken to decide against the plan?

Magruder's reply was brief and to the point:

Not very much, sir. I am sure that if I had fought vigorously against it, I think any of us could have had the plan cancelled. (*Time*, June 25, 1973, p. 12.)

- *Reality, knowledge, confrontation.* Accepting the paradox as a model describing certain kinds of organizational dilemmas also requires rethinking the nature of reality and knowledge, as they are generally described in organizations. In brief, the underlying dynamics of the paradox clearly indicate that organization members generally know more about issues confronting the organization than they don't know. The various principals attending the research budget meeting, for example, knew the research project was doomed to failure. And Jeb Magruder spoke as a true Abilener when he said, "We knew it was illegal, probably, inappropriate." (*The Washington Post*, June 15, 1973, p. A16.)

Given this concept of reality and its relationship to knowledge, confrontation becomes the process of facing issues squarely, openly, and directly in an effort to discover whether the nature of the underlying collective reality is agreement or conflict. Accepting such a definition of confrontation has an important implication for change agents interested in making organizations more effective. That is, organization change and effectiveness may be facilitated as much by confronting the organization with what it knows and agrees upon as by confronting it with what it doesn't know or disagrees about.

#### REAL CONFLICT AND PHONY CONFLICT

Conflict is a part of any organization. Couples, R&D divisions, and White House staffs all engage in it. However, analysis of the Abilene paradox opens up the possibility of

two kinds of conflict—real and phony. On the surface, they look alike. But, like headaches, they have different causes and therefore require different treatment.

Real conflict occurs when people have real differences ("My reading of the research printouts says that we can make the project profitable." "I come to the opposite conclusion.") ("I suggest we 'bug' the Watergate." "I'm not in favor of it.")

Phony conflict, on the other hand, occurs when people agree on the actions they want to take, and then do the opposite. The resulting anger, frustration, and blaming behavior generally termed "conflict" are not based on real differences. Rather, they stem from the protective reactions that occur when a decision that no one believed in or was committed to in the first place goes sour. In fact, as a paradox within a paradox, such conflict is symptomatic of agreement!

#### GROUP TYRANNY AND CONFORMITY

Understanding the dynamics of the Abilene Paradox also requires a "reorientation" in thinking about concepts such as "group tyranny"—the loss of the individual's distinctiveness in a group, and the impact of conformity pressures on individual behavior in organizations. Group tyranny and its result, individual conformity, generally refer to the coercive effect of group pressures on individual behavior. Sometimes referred to as Groupthink, it has been damned as the cause for everything from the lack of creativity in organizations ("A camel is a horse designed by a committee") to antisocial behavior in juveniles ("My Johnny is a good boy. He was just pressured into shoplifting by the kids he runs around with").

However, analysis of the dynamics underlying the Abilene Paradox opens up the possibility that individuals frequently perceive and feel as if they are experiencing the coercive organization conformity pressures when, in actuality, they are responding to the dynamics of mismanaged agreement. Conceptualizing, experiencing, and responding to such experiences as reflecting the tyrannical pressures of a group again serves as an important psychological use for the individual: As was previously said, it releases him from the responsibility of taking action and thus becomes a defense against action. Thus, much behavior within an organization that heretofore has been conceptualized as reflecting the tyranny

of conformity pressures is really an expression of collective anxiety and therefore must be reconceptualized as a defense against acting.

A well-known example of such faulty conceptualization comes to mind. It involves the heroic sheriff in the classic Western movies who stands alone in the jailhouse door and singlehandedly protects a suspected (and usually innocent) horse thief or murderer from the irrational, tyrannical forces of group behavior—that is, an armed lynch mob. Generally, as a part of the ritual, he threatens to blow off the head of anyone who takes a step toward the door. Few ever take the challenge, and the reason is not the sheriff's six-shooter. What good would one pistol be against an armed mob of several hundred people who *really* want to hang somebody? Thus, the gun in fact serves as a face-saving measure for people who don't wish to participate in a hanging anyway. ("We had to back off. The sheriff threatened to blow our heads off.")

The situation is one involving agreement management, for a careful investigator canvassing the crowd under conditions in which the anonymity of the interviewees' responses could be guaranteed would probably find: (1) that few of the individuals in the crowd really wanted to take part in the hanging; (2) that each person's participation came about because he perceived, falsely, that others wanted to do so; and (3) that each person was afraid that others in the crowd would ostracize or in some other way punish him if he did not go along.

#### DIAGNOSING THE PARADOX

Most individuals like quick solutions, "clean" solutions, "no risk" solutions to organization problems. Furthermore, they tend to prefer solutions based on mechanics and technology, rather than on attitudes of "being." Unfortunately, the underlying reality of the paradox makes it impossible to provide either no-risk solutions or action technologies divorced from existential attitudes and realities. I do, however, have two sets of suggestions for dealing with these situations. One set of suggestions relates to diagnosing the situation, the other to confronting it.

When faced with the possibility that the paradox is operating, one must first make a diagnosis of the situation, and the key to diagnosis is an answer to the question, Is the organization involved in a conflict-management or an agreement-management situation? As an organization member, I have found it relatively

easy to make a preliminary diagnosis as to whether an organization is on the way to Abilene or is involved in legitimate, substantive conflict by responding to the Diagnostic Survey shown in the accompanying figure. If

## ORGANIZATION DIAGNOSTIC SURVEY

*Instructions: For each of the following statements please indicate whether it is or is not characteristic of your organization.*

1. There is conflict in the organization.
2. Organization members feel frustrated, impotent, and unhappy when trying to deal with it. Many are looking for ways to escape. They may avoid meetings at which the conflict is discussed, they may be looking for other jobs, or they may spend as much time away from the office as possible by taking unneeded trips or vacation or sick leave.
3. Organization members place much of the blame for the dilemma on the boss or other groups. In "back room" conversations among friends the boss is termed incompetent, ineffective, "out of touch," or a candidate for early retirement. To his face, nothing is said, or at best, only oblique references are made concerning his role in the organization's problems. If the boss isn't blamed, some other group, division, or unit is seen as the cause of the trouble: "We would do fine if it were not for the damn fools in Division X."
4. Small subgroups of trusted friends and associates meet informally over coffee, lunch, and so on to discuss organizational problems. There is a lot of agreement among the members of these subgroups as to the cause of the troubles and the solutions that would be effective in solving them. Such conversations are frequently punctuated with statements beginning with, "We should do . . ."
5. In meetings where those same people meet with members from other subgroups to discuss the problem they "soften their positions," state them in ambiguous language, or even reverse them to suit the apparent positions taken by others.
6. After such meetings, members complain to trusted associates that they really didn't say what they wanted to say, but also provide a list of convincing reasons why the comments, suggestions, and reactions they wanted to make would have been impossible. Trusted associates commiserate and say the same was true for them.
7. Attempts to solve the problem do not seem to work. In fact, such attempts seem to add to the problem or make it worse.
8. Outside the organization individuals seem to get along better, be happier, and operate more effectively than they do within it.

the answer to the first question is “not characteristic,” the organization is probably not in Abilene or conflict. If the answer is “characteristic,” the organization has a problem of either real or phony conflict, and the answers to the succeeding questions help to determine which it is.

In brief, for reasons that should be apparent from the theory discussed here, the more times “characteristic” is checked, the more likely the organization is on its way to Abilene. In practical terms, a process for managing agreement is called for. And finally, if the answer to the first question falls into the “characteristic” category and most of the other answers fall into the category “not characteristic,” one may be relatively sure the organization is in a real conflict situation and some sort of conflict management intervention is in order.

#### COPING WITH THE PARADOX

Assuming a preliminary diagnosis leads one to believe he and/or his organization is on the way to Abilene, the individual may choose to actively confront the situation to determine directly whether the underlying reality is one of agreement or conflict. Although there are, perhaps, a number of ways to do it, I have found one way in particular to be effective—confrontation in a group setting. The basic approach involves gathering organization members who are key figures in the problem and its solution into a group setting. Working within the context of a group is important because the dynamics of the Abilene Paradox involve collusion among group members; therefore, to try to solve the dilemma by working with individuals and small subgroups would involve further collusion with the dynamics leading up to the paradox.

The first step in the meeting is for the individual who “calls” it (that is, the confronter) to own up to his position first and be open to the feedback he gets. The owning up process lets the others know that he is concerned lest the organization may be making a decision contrary to the desires of any of its members. A statement like this demonstrates the beginning of such an approach:

I want to talk with you about the research project. Although I have previously said things to the contrary, I frankly don't think it will work, and I am very anxious about it. I suspect others may feel the same, but I

don't know. Anyway, I am concerned that I may end up misleading you and that we may end up misleading one another, and if we aren't careful, we may continue to work on a problem that none of us wants and that might even bankrupt us. That's why I need to know where the rest of you stand. I would appreciate any of your thoughts about the project. Do you think it can succeed?

What kinds of results can one expect if he decides to undertake the process of confrontation? I have found that the results can be divided into *two* categories, at the technical level and at the level of existential experience. Of the two, I have found that for the person who undertakes to initiate the process of confrontation, the existential experience takes precedence in his ultimate evaluation of the outcome of the action he takes.

- *The technical level.* If one is correct in diagnosing the presence of the paradox, I have found the solution to the technical problem may be almost absurdly quick and simple, nearly on the order of this:

“Do you mean that you and I and the rest of us have been dragging along with a research project that none of us has thought would work? It's crazy. I can't believe we would do it, but we did. Let's figure out how we can cancel it and get to doing something productive.” In fact, the simplicity and quickness of the solution frequently don't seem possible to most of us, since we have been trained to believe that the solution to conflict requires a long, arduous process of debilitating problem solving.

Also, since existential risk is always present, it is possible that one's diagnosis is incorrect, and the process of confrontation lifts to the level of public examination real, substantive conflict, which may result in heated debate about technology, personalities, and/or administrative approaches. There is evidence that such debates, properly managed, can be the basis for creativity in organizational problem solving. There is also the possibility, however, that such debates cannot be managed, and substantiating the concept of existential risk, the person who initiates the risk may get fired or ostracized. But that again leads to the necessity of evaluating the results of such confrontation at the existential level.

- *Existential results.* Evaluating the outcome of confrontation from an existential framework is quite different from evaluating it from a set of technical criteria. How do I reach this conclusion? Simply from interview-



ing a variety of people who have chosen to confront the paradox and listening to their responses. In short, for them, psychological success and failure apparently are divorced from what is traditionally accepted in organizations as criteria for success and failure.

For instance, some examples of success are described when people are asked, "What happened when you confronted the issue?" They may answer this way:

I was told we had enough boat rockers in the organization, and I got fired. It hurt at first, but in retrospect it was the greatest day of my life. I've got another job and I'm delighted. I'm a free man.

Another description of success might be this:

I said I don't think the research project can succeed and the others looked shocked and quickly agreed. The upshot of the whole deal is that I got a promotion and am now known as a "rising star." It was the high point of my career.

Similarly, those who fail to confront the paradox describe failure in terms divorced from technical results. For example, one may report:

I didn't say anything and we rocked along until the whole thing exploded and Joe got fired. There is still a lot of tension in the organization, and we are still in trouble, but I got a good performance review last time. I still feel lousy about the whole thing, though.

From a different viewpoint, an individual may describe his sense of failure in these words:

I knew I should have said something and I didn't. When the project failed, I was a convenient whipping boy. I got demoted; I still have a job, but my future here is definitely limited. In a way I deserve what I got, but it doesn't make it any easier to accept because of that.

Most important, the act of confrontation apparently provides intrinsic psychological satisfaction, regardless of the technological outcomes for those who attempt it. The real meaning of that existential experience, and its relevance to a wide variety of organizations, may lie, therefore, not in the scientific analysis of decision making but in the plight of Sisyphus. That is something the reader will have to decide for himself.

## THE ABILENE PARADOX AND THE MYTH OF SISYPHUS

In essence, this paper proposes that there is an underlying organizational reality that includes both agreement and disagreement, cooperation and conflict. However, the decision to confront the possibility of organization agreement is all too difficult and rare, and its opposite, the decision to accept the evils of the present, is all too common. Yet those two decisions may reflect the essence of both our human potential and our human imperfection. Consequently, the choice to confront reality in the family, the church, the business, or the bureaucracy, though made only occasionally, may reflect those "peak experiences" that provide meaning to the valleys.

In many ways, they may reflect the experience of Sisyphus. As you may remember, Sisyphus was condemned by Pluto to a perpetuity of pushing a large stone to the top of a mountain, only to see it return to its original position when he released it. As Camus suggested in his revision of the myth, Sisyphus's task was absurd and totally devoid of meaning. For most of us, though, the lives we lead pushing papers or hubcaps are no less absurd, and in many ways we probably spend about as much time pushing rocks in our organizations as did Sisyphus.

Camus also points out, though, that on occasion as Sisyphus released his rock and watched it return to its resting place at the bottom of the hill, he was able to recognize the absurdity of his lot and, for brief periods of time, transcend it.

So it may be with confronting the Abilene Paradox. Confronting the absurd paradox of agreement may provide, through activity, what Sisyphus gained from his passive but conscious acceptance of his fate. Thus, through the process of active confrontation with reality, we may take respite from pushing our rocks on their endless journeys and, for brief moments, experience what C. P. Snow termed "the triumphs of life we make for ourselves" within those absurdities we call organizations.

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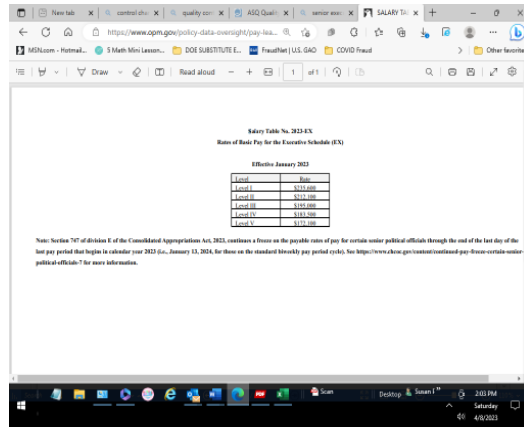
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Richard Walton in *Interpersonal Peacemaking: Confrontation and Third Party Consultation* (Addison-Wesley, 1969) describes a variety of approaches for dealing with conflict when it is real, rather than phony.





**Complex Area Superintendent Salary Increase Request by Range**  
Range (\$169,000-\$205,000)

**Federal Senior Executive Service 2023 Pay Scale**

Level	5	4	3	2	1
Rate	\$172,100	\$183,500	\$195,000	\$212,100	\$235,000

**Complex Area Superintendents Salary range (Graduated)**

	Opening		Midpoint		Ending
Salary	\$169,000	\$178,000	\$187,000	\$196,000	\$205,000

***Graduated***

# Fact Sheet: Within-Grade Increases

## Description

Each General Schedule (GS) grade has 10 steps. Within-grade increases (WGIs) or step increases are periodic increases in a GS employee's rate of basic pay from one step of the grade of his or her position to the next higher step of that grade.

## Earning Within-Grade Increases

Employees who occupy permanent positions earn WGIs upon meeting the following three requirements established by law:  
The employee's performance must be at an acceptable level of competence. To meet this requirement, an employee's most recent performance rating of record must be at least Level 3 ("Fully Successful" or equivalent).

The employee must have completed the required waiting period for advancement to the next higher step.

The employee must not have received an "equivalent increase" in pay during the waiting period. (See 5 CFR 531.407.)

## Permanent Positions

WGIs apply only to GS employees occupying permanent positions. "Permanent position" means a position filled by an employee whose appointment is not designated as temporary and does not have a definite time limitation of 1 year or less. "Permanent position" includes a position to which an employee is promoted on a temporary or term basis for at least 1 year.

## Required Waiting Periods

For employees with a scheduled tour of duty, the required waiting periods established by law for advancement to the next higher step are as follows:

Advancement from...	Requires...
step 1 to step 2	52 weeks of creditable service in step 1
step 2 to step 3	52 weeks of creditable service in step 2
step 3 to step 4	52 weeks of creditable service in step 3

step 4 to step 5	104 weeks of creditable service in step 4
step 5 to step 6	104 weeks of creditable service in step 5
step 6 to step 7	104 weeks of creditable service in step 6
step 7 to step 8	156 weeks of creditable service in step 7
step 8 to step 9	156 weeks of creditable service in step 8
step 9 to step 10	156 weeks of creditable service in step 9

# Quality Step Increases

## Quality Step Increases: Timing Matters

Managers sometimes give Quality Step Increases and wonder why the employee they were trying to reward gets upset. The issue is usually timing. This article reviews timing issues with Quality Step Increases and offers a checklist of factors to consider when deciding on the timing of a Quality Step Increase.

### Quality Step Increase

A Quality Step Increase is a *faster than normal* within-grade increase used to reward employees at all General Schedule grade levels who display high quality performance. To be eligible for a Quality Step Increase, an employee must:

1. be below step 10 of their grade level;
2. have received the highest rating available under their performance management program;
3. have demonstrated sustained performance of high quality; and
4. not have received a Quality Step Increase within the preceding 52 consecutive calendar weeks.

### Timing Matters

Quality Step Increases are given in addition to regular within-grade increases and won't affect the timing of an employee's next regular within-grade increase, **unless** the Quality Step Increase places the employee in step 4 or step 7 of their grade. In these cases, waiting periods are extended an additional 52 weeks (waiting periods are 52 weeks for steps 1-3, 104 weeks for steps 4-6, and 156 weeks for steps 7-9). The time an employee has already waited counts towards the next increase, but they must wait the full period that the new step requires.

**Example:** Jane has been an excellent employee with sustained high quality performance. She is at GS-7, step 6, and will be eligible for her within-grade increase to step 7 in 45 days.

*Scenario 1-* Jane's supervisor has decided to give her a Quality Step Increase. The award is proposed, approved, and made effective within 3 weeks.

Jane is happy with her award until she realizes that the human resources (HR) office has not processed her regular step increase. When she questions the HR office, she finds out she cannot receive her within-grade increase because she is now at step 7 and must wait an additional 52 weeks to be eligible for step 8. Even though she doesn't feel the immediate benefit of the award, Jane has still received a *faster than normal* increase. She will receive her step 8 two years earlier than she would have without the Quality Step Increase.

*Scenario 2-* Jane's supervisor would like to recommend her for a Quality Step Increase. First, the supervisor checks with the HR office to make sure Jane meets all the requirements. While checking with the HR office, her supervisor learns that Jane will soon be eligible for her within-grade increase to step 7, and also learns about the extra waiting time required if the Quality Step Increase is granted before the regular within-grade increase. The supervisor decides to hold the recommendation for the Quality Step Increase until after the HR office processes the within-grade increase.

Jane receives an immediate benefit because her regular within-grade increase and her subsequent Quality Step Increase are processed within one pay period of each other.

### Factors to consider

In recommending a Quality Step Increase, the supervisor and HR specialist should review several factors in regard to timing:

1. How long will the employee be able to enjoy the benefits of a Quality Step Increase?
2. Will the employee be promoted in the near future?

3. Will the Quality Step Increase make a difference in setting the promotion pay?
4. Has the employee received a Quality Step Increase within the last 52 weeks?
5. When is the employee eligible for their next within-grade increase?
6. Will the increase take the employee to a new waiting period, i.e., step 4 or step 7?



# DECISION MATRIX - WEIGHTED



EXHIBIT D	Criteria 1	Criteria 2	Criteria 3	Criteria 4	Criteria 5	
CRITERIA DESCRIPTION						
	Criteria 1	Criteria 2	Criteria 3	Criteria 4	Criteria 5	WEIGHTED SCORE
WEIGHT						0
						0%
OPTIONS	Criteria 1 SCORES	Criteria 2 SCORES	Criteria 3 SCORES	Criteria 4 SCORES	Criteria 5 SCORES	
Option A						0
Option B						0
Option C						0
Option D						0
Option E						0

### INSTRUCTIONS

List each option in the first column.  
 List the criteria descriptions in the second row.  
 Add/remove columns, as appropriate.  
 Determine the scale to be used in the rankings.  
 Define your must-haves.  
 Determine the scale to use for the weights. Then, assign weights to the criteria.  
 Assign objective rankings for how each option satisfies each criteria.  
 Perform a gut check to make sure the result feels right.  
 Check the winning option against the must-haves if they were not included as criteria.  
 Document the process and results.

### NOTE

It's best to hide the scores until all cells have been filled in to prevent skewed results.  
 < - - Total Weighted Score Percentage should equal 100%.

MUST-HAVES

### EXAMPLE

Criteria 1	Criteria 2	Criteria 3	Criteria 4	Criteria 5
------------	------------	------------	------------	------------

## DECISION MATRIX - WEIGHTED

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CRITERIA DESCRIPTION	COST	LEARNING CURVE	POSSIBILITY OF FAILURE	COOLNESS	EFFORT	
	Criteria 1	Criteria 2	Criteria 3	Criteria 4	Criteria 5	WEIGHTED SCORE
WEIGHT	5	3	4	1	2	15
	33%	20%	27%	7%	13%	100%
OPTIONS	Criteria 1 SCORES	Criteria 2 SCORES	Criteria 3 SCORES	Criteria 4 SCORES	Criteria 5 SCORES	
BUY NEW COMPUTER	4	3	1	5	3	3
UPGRADE EXISTING COMPUTER	2	1	4	1	2	2

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## EXHIBIT E

# When to use a decision matrix

You don't always need to use a decision matrix. This process is powerful—and relatively easy—but it's most effective when you're deciding between several comparable options. If the evaluation criteria aren't the same between your different choices, then a decision matrix likely isn't the best decision-making tool. For example, a decision matrix won't help you decide what direction your team should take for the next year because the things you're deciding between aren't comparable.

Use a decision matrix if you are:

- Comparing multiple, similar options
- Narrowing down various options into one final decision
- Weighing a variety of important factors
- Hoping to approach the decision from a logical viewpoint, instead of an emotional or intuitive one

## How to create a decision matrix in 7 steps

A decision matrix can help you evaluate the best option between different choices, based on several important factors and their relative importance. There are seven steps to creating a decision matrix:

### 1. Identify your alternatives

Decision matrices are a helpful tool to decide the best option between a set of similar choices. Before you can build your matrix, identify the options you're deciding between.

### 2. Identify important considerations

The second step to building a decision matrix is to identify the important considerations that factor into your decision. This set of criteria helps you identify the best decision and avoid subjectivity.

### 3. Create your decision matrix

A decision matrix is a grid where you can compare important considerations between the various options.

#### **4. Fill in your decision matrix**

Now, rate each consideration on a predetermined scale. If there isn't a large variation between the options, use a scale of 1-3, where three is the best. For more options, use a scale of 1-5, where five is the best.

- This is where the advantages of a decision matrix really start to shine.

#### **5. Add weight**

Sometimes, there are certain considerations that are more important than others. In such a case, use a weighted decision matrix to identify the best option for you.

To add weight to a decision matrix, assign a number (between 1-3 or 1-5, depending on how many options you have) to each consideration. Later in the decision-making process, you'll multiply the weighting factor by each consideration.

#### **6. Multiply the weighted score**

Once you've applied your rating scale and assigned a weight to each consideration, multiply the weight by each consideration. This ensures that the more important considerations are being given more weight, which will ultimately help you select the best \_\_\_\_\_.

#### **7. Calculate the total score**

Now that you've multiplied the weighted score, add up all of the considerations for each agency. At this point, you should have a clear, numbers-based answer to which decision is the best one.