

Tool 3 – Gap Analysis

TOOL: The **Gap Analysis** is a 6-step general evaluation procedure. (Also known as an "Evaluation Model.")

WHEN: The **Gap Analysis** is one of the simplest and probably the most powerful tool any problem solver can have. It can be used in virtually any situation when you are being asked: "*Evaluate this*", or "*What should we do?*" The tool can be used in a one-on-one setting with a client, or as a guide in larger meetings.

HOW: Follow a **6-step procedure**. Start by defining: **(1)** what it is you are about to evaluate; **(2)** describe the ideal solution; **(3)** describe the current situation; **(4)** identify the differences; **(5)** identify the causes of the differences, and lastly **(6)** determine the necessary action to move from where you are toward the ideal.

1. The Subject Area – The subject area is the "*What*" you are going to evaluate. It could be anything from one's social life to a complex system. If this is a large group setting, "*What are we evaluating?*" needs to be worked out and written so all can see it. It will be vital to keeping the group on track.

2. The Ideal (How should it be) – Here you describe the vision of how it should be. If you are working with an individual (or even alone) it could be a paragraph or a few sentences. If it is a large group, then each of the next five (5) evaluation questions could be brainstormed and the responses could be written on flip charts (to be tacked to the walls for viewing during later steps). Try to get some specificity in the response. Try to quantify the response. At least, try to qualify what the ideal state would be. [See **TIP 4**]

3. The Current Environment (How it is now) – Here you describe the reality of how it really is. You might go back to the categories that grew out of the previous step and ask, "*How is it now?*" Again, try to get some specificity in the response.

4. The Discrepancies (What is the difference) – Here you compare "*How it should be*" to "*How it really is*". If you were successful in gaining some specificity in the first two steps, this step will be the arithmetic remainder of subtracting the "*How it is*" from "*How it should be*." . . . If the responses to the previous two questions yielded only, *exist vs. non-exist*, or *yes vs. no*, then the response to this question will look very much like the responses to the previous question. This sometimes happens, so do not worry about it, and press on.

5. Analysis of Discrepancies (Why the difference) – This is a pivotal step in determining how much specificity and validity will be contained in the last step, Corrective Action. (And, it will also determine how much time will be spent on this step). If a detailed action plan is desired in the last step, then this step is the problem solving step. Each "*discrepancy*" identified in the previous step could be formulated into a problem statement and then analyzed using any number of techniques, such as a *Cause and Effect Diagram*. . . . If the intent of the final step is to simply arrive at some level of consensus on what needs to be done, then this step can be at a very summary level on what some of the "*causes*" of the discrepancies might be.

6. Recommended Corrective Action (How to overcome discrepancies) – This is where the plan of action is spelled out. It can be at any level desired, from simply a recommendation to eliminate the discrepancies, to a detailed work plan of 'how to' implement the recommended solution to eliminate the discrepancies.

- TIPS:**
- 1.** Create a worksheet containing the above six steps as fill-in-the-blank spaces.
 - 2.** Memorize the six steps of the **Gap Analysis** and then go to the board, and *amaze* your colleagues with your problem solving skills as you take them through the process.
 - 3.** Don't underestimate the value of **Step 1 (the Subject)** and then hurry through it to get to the "fun" stuff. Make an effort to see that the group understands (and agrees) to what the group is about to evaluate.
 - 4.** A very powerful ploy is to brainstorm through **Step 2 (the Ideal)** asking the group "How should it be?" without the group knowing in advance that the next step, **Step 3**, will be where you will ask, "How is it now?" If you decide to use this tactic, remember you cannot handout the 'Tool' at the beginning of the session. You really need to follow **Tip 2** and memorize the steps. I cannot overemphasis how effective this strategy can be to uncovering the core issues.

This "tool" is from **Tom Adams' Problem Solvers Toolbox** which he compiled over his years of working as an Information Systems Analyst. These Problem Solving Tool Abstracts are NOT copyrighted; please share them. They are based upon the concepts of other problem solvers.
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