



HOW TO EVALUATE YOUR STUDENT ORGANIZATION TO MAKE IT THE BEST IT CAN BE

Introduction

I'm going to share with you an evaluation process that student leaders can use to improve their organizations. It's a modified version of a quality circle. The concept came from Kaoru Ishikawa, a Japanese university professor and influential quality management innovator. Although his model was intended for private industry, it can readily be applied to academic processes. I've used it successfully when working with student groups.

It works like this; you divide your organization into small working groups, no more than five people per group. Every group discusses the same problem areas using the same procedures. For sake of illustration I'll use the three problems below to demonstrate how the quality circle process works.

Problem Areas

1. What problems need to be resolved before the purpose of the organization can be accepted by all of the membership?
2. What problems need to be resolved before communication can be noticeably improved between and among members of the organization?
3. What problems need to be resolved before the organization can conduct effective meetings and establish clear priorities?

Instructions

Divide the participants into working groups (quality circles) comprised of 3-5 members, to address the problems listed above or ones specific to your organization. Have each group select a facilitator/spokesperson and someone to record the groups' decisions.

When discussing the problems identified above, each quality circle is to follow the same format guided by the group's facilitator:

1. Brainstorm answers to each of the problems by:
 - A. Not judging ideas
 - B. Requiring each person to add input
 - C. Welcoming a variety in thinking/responses



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D. Energizing the group with creative thoughts

For example if your group was discussing Problem 3 above, each person would be asked to identify a specific problem that needs to be resolved before the organization could conduct effective meetings and establish clear priorities. If a person doesn't have an answer when it's his/her turn to respond, s/he should say "I pass." An answer is sought from each person until everyone says, "I pass."

During the brainstorming there are no interruptions for discussion, clarity or debate. After all the ideas have been recorded, the group spokesperson calls for a discussion of any of the problems listed. This is the time to seek clarification on any of the problems listed. Combine any ideas that are the same. (Combine only if they are the same).

2. Next vote on the ideas to get a rank order (priority). The highest votes get ranked first and so on. *Rank only the top five.* As you rank them, keep track of the number of people who voted for a particular idea (see Table 1 below).

Table 1-rank order of problems

Problem #3	How many members feel this way	Total
Feel my input is ignored	XXXXX	5
Poor attendance at meetings	XXXX	4
Chairperson not supported	XXX	3
Poor communication among members	XXX	3
Meetings poorly planned	XX	2

3. After the top five ideas have been identified, the next step is to determine cause and effect. For example, you will determine why members feel their input is ignored; why there is poor attendance at meetings; why the chairperson is not being supported and so on.

You will need to brainstorm again and list what each person feels is the cause of the problem being discussed. This time *only rank the top three causes.* Let's use the problem (Chairperson not supported) to illustrate how this works (see the example that follows).



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Example:

chairperson not supported = belittles membership
effect cause

chairperson not supported = committee roles unclear
effect cause

chairperson not supported = inactive & disengaged members
effect cause

As you can see, you're getting down to the nitty gritty and members, if they are being truthful and candid, will share exactly what they perceive the problems to be. Remember not to judge their responses and encourage them to speak frankly, because ultimately your organization will benefit from their honesty. Be sure to complete the cause and effect for each of the five problems your circle identified, but only rank the top three causes.

4. Next each quality circle is to recommend one solution for resolving each of the three causes identified above. Brainstorm your solutions and then *vote on only one solution* for each cause. For example your circle could vote that the way to resolve the cause of (committee roles being unclear) is to write up duties for all committees and spell out clearly what is expected of each committee member. The clearer you can make your solutions, the greater chances your organization will resolve its problems.
5. After each quality circle has completed the process above, bring all the quality circles together for their reports. All group reports should be presented by the spokesperson and follow the same format:
 - A. Mention the problems your quality circle identified in rank order.
 - B. List and explain the causes and effects of the problems you've identified.
 - C. Next list your quality circle's solutions to resolving the problems.



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Be sure to have someone record all of the Quality Circles' reports and prepare an analysis. This will allow members to see the similarities in their reports and areas where there is group consensus on resolving the problems.

Lastly, all of the problems from each Quality Circle's group report should be combined. Do the same for each group's causes and effects statements. After everything has been combined, the entire student organization should then vote on the top 3-5 problems, their related causes and effects, and finally vote on the solution for each of the 3-5 problems.

Now the organization has some specific solutions to work on for the academic year, the entire membership was involved in reaching consensus, everyone's input was solicited and members can claim ownership of the decisions.

I think you'll agree that this is a powerful and effective method for evaluating your student organization. Although it does require a time commitment, the benefits can be tremendous and you will be on your way to making your student organization the best that it can be.

This article can be found in the booklet: Students of Color Leadership Training Manual by Dr. Charles A. Taylor. [You can get your copy here.](#)

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