TOOL Setting priorities using the Priority Matrix

PURPOSE

The Priority Matrix helps participants rank actions based on their time to complete, cost, importance to quality, and availability of resources. This tool can be used to prioritize strategies and actions as part of developing an action plan. It assumes that participants have completed a root cause analysis first, so that the selected actions address the root causes of the problem and not just the symptoms.

RESOURCES NEEDED

- ❑ copies of two handouts:
  Handout 1: Sample Completed Priority Matrix
  Handout 2: Priority Matrix Worksheet (blank)

PROCESS

Preparation

- Make enough copies of the Sample Completed Priority Matrix (Handout 1) and the Priority Matrix Worksheet (Handout 2) for all participants.
- Draw the sample matrix (not filled in) on a large piece of paper so that everyone can clearly see it.

Step 1. Demonstrate the tool and list priority actions

- Distribute copies of the Sample Completed Priority Matrix (Handout 1) and explain how to use the matrix.
- Using a real challenge that one of the groups is facing, choose three actions that address the root causes of the obstacles that are preventing them from reaching their desired result.
- Using Handout 2, have the participants list the actions in the three boxes in the row under "Priority actions." (These actions need to be based on the outcome of a root cause analysis.)

Step 2. Rank each priority action on a scale of 1 to 3

- On a scale of 1 to 3 (with 1 providing the least benefit and 3 the most benefit), rank each priority action according to the time needed, cost to implement, potential for improving quality, and the availability of resources.

Step 3. Calculate the total points for each priority action

- Add the numbers in each column to see the total score for each action.
- The higher the score, the higher the priority of the action based on the criteria listed. (You may choose to add or change criteria to suit your specific needs.)

Wrap up and plan next steps

Check whether the priorities make sense to the participants and make sure that they feel they can actually implement these actions without having to wait for someone else's approval or resources.

From *Managers Who Lead: A Handbook for Improving Health Services*
Cambridge, MA: Management Sciences for Health, 2005

HANDOUT Sample Completed Priority Matrix

Criteria *rank from 1 to 3*	Priority actions Train counselors	Conduct community education seminars	Renovate clinics
Time to implement *1= the most time* *3= the least time*	2	2	1
Cost to implement *1= the highest cost* *3= the lowest cost*	2	3	1
Potential for improving quality in the long term *1= the least potential* *3= the most potential*	3	2	2
Availability of resources *1= the least available* *3= the most available*	1	3	1
Total	8	10	5

This example illustrates that conducting community education seminars should be a priority. It doesn't mean that you don't carry out the other actions, but you should focus on those that will have the most impact on achieving your result, taking into account time and money.

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