7:   STRUCTURES AND SKILLS

Contents

7: STRUCTURES AND SKILLS

School Development Planning is essentially a collaborative process that draws the whole school community together in shaping the school's future. Accordingly, the implementation of the process is advanced by the development of structures and skills that facilitate effective collaboration, consultation and communication.
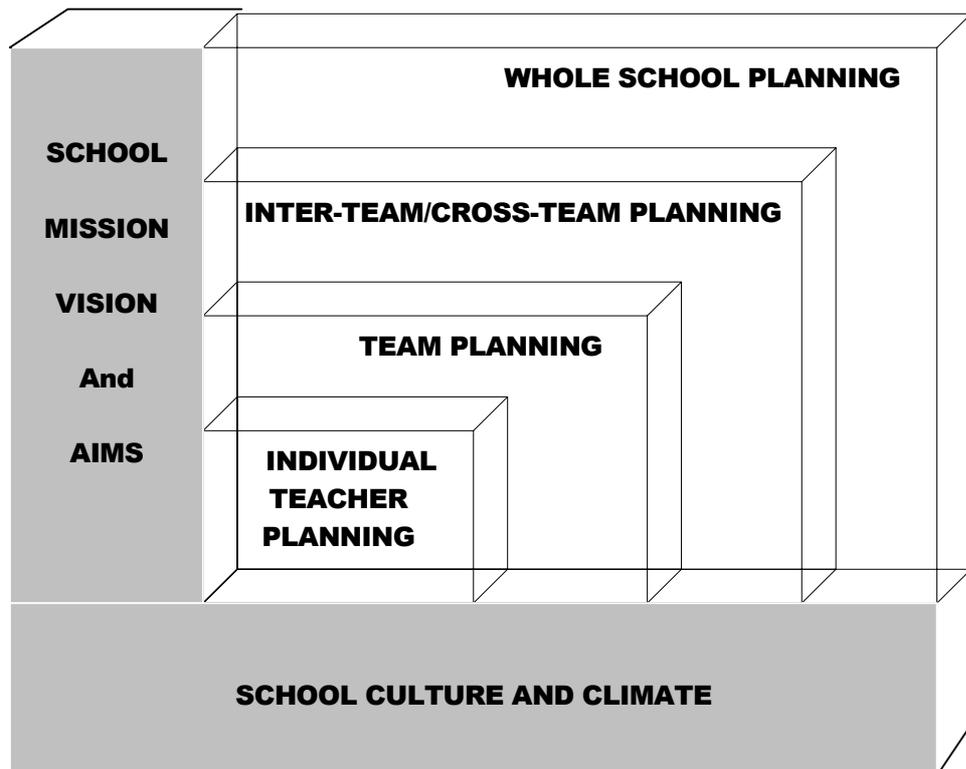
The purpose of this unit is:

♦ To suggest structures for involving the teaching staff in School Development Planning

⇒ General Framework

⇒ Specific Structures

♦ To suggest structures for involving other stakeholders in School Development Planning

⇒ Trustees

⇒ Board of Management

⇒ Support Staff

⇒ Parents

⇒ Students

⇒ Local Community

♦ To outline skills that further the implementation of the process

⇒ Communication

⇒ Teamwork

⇒ Organising and running meetings

⇒ Managing conflict

♦ To highlight the importance of staff development

I. Staff Structures

General Framework

The operation of the School Development Planning process is enhanced when every teacher on the staff views his/her work as interconnected with the work of every other teacher in the communal task of delivering on the school's vision, mission and aims. The process then becomes a framework of interrelated levels of participation that facilitates coherence in planning and consistency in implementation. It enables teachers to relate their individual planning to team planning, inter-team planning and whole school planning.

The framework can be represented diagrammatically as follows:

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                          WHOLE SCHOOL PLANNING

  SCHOOL
             INTER-TEAM/CROSS-TEAM PLANNING
  MISSION

  VISION
                      TEAM PLANNING
  And

  AIMS        INDIVIDUAL
              TEACHER
              PLANNING


              SCHOOL CULTURE AND CLIMATE
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Staff planning of the work of the school can be envisaged as occurring on four levels:

1. **Individual**

2. **Team**

3. **Inter-team/cross-team**

4. **Whole school**

1. Individual teachers plan classroom teaching by devising programmes of work, lesson plans, teaching methodologies and classroom management strategies that are appropriate for particular groups of pupils.

2. Planning by individual teachers takes place within the context created by the work of groups of teachers. Thus, individual work plans may be informed by the approach of the subject department as a whole to the syllabus, teaching methodologies, teaching materials, textbook choice, sharing of facilities, scheduling of practical work, and so on. Classroom management strategies for a particular class group may be informed by the approach of the year-group's pastoral care/ discipline team to pupil behaviour and misbehaviour. Accordingly, the work of individual teachers is co-ordinated and contextualised by team planning.

3. Both team planning and individual teacher planning are informed by inter-team or cross-team planning, which co-ordinates activities that cut across the work of many teams within the school. Planning at this level may address matters such as the structure of the curriculum in terms of core and options, the structure of the timetable in terms of option sets and time allocations, the accommodation within the school calendar of extra-curricular activities and special events, or procedures for resource allocation.

4. Whole school planning provides the context for the other three levels. It is concerned with establishing the school's fundamental direction, formulating whole-school policies, and shaping the school's response to opportunities for development and pressures for change that emerge from its environment.

The 4 levels constitute a network of interactions, so that work at each level both influences and is influenced by the other three levels.

Planning at every level is rooted in the school's culture and climate and informed by its mission, vision and aims. In turn, the school's mission, vision and aims and its culture and climate may undergo development as a result of planning.

Specific Structures

There are many possible approaches to structuring staff participation in the School Development Planning process. The suggestions offered in this Unit are neither prescriptive nor exhaustive.

School size is a major factor in determining School Development Planning structures. In a small school, members of staff may be familiar with one another's work and may function as a single team in a manner that would be impossible for the staff of a large school. Accordingly, structures can be far less elaborate in a small school. Shortage of personnel limits the capacity of a small staff to establish subgroups to undertake specific tasks. A large staff, on the other hand, may comprise so many subgroups that elaborate co-ordinating structures are required. The structures outlined below, when considered in their entirety, are more appropriate for large schools, but they contain elements that could be adapted to meet the needs of small schools.

The following staff structures are presented for consideration:

- **Planning Co-ordinator** and/or **Steering Group** to keep the process moving
- **Ad-hoc Teams** to undertake specific tasks in relation to the process
- **Editor or Editorial Team** to edit the final document
- **Interface between Ad-hoc Teams and In-School Management**

The overall responsibility of the Principal is outlined in *School Development Planning: An Introduction for Second Level Schools.* In addition, the Principal may choose to undertake specific responsibility in the facilitation or co-ordination of the process, as indicated below. Where the Principal opts to delegate the specific facilitation or co-ordination role, care must be taken to establish effective procedures for briefing him or her on progress.

Planning Co-ordinator

The School Development Planning process requires careful co-ordination. Many schools address this issue by designating a member of staff as Planning Co-ordinator. The Planning Co-ordinator may be:

- The Principal
- The Deputy Principal
- A member of the In-School Management Team
- A teacher who has particular expertise in the field of school planning

The choice of option will be influenced by circumstances within the school. The responsibility is more usually assigned to the Deputy Principal or to a post-holder.

The Role of the Planning Co-ordinator

The job-specification of the Planning Co-ordinator will vary from school to school and will be governed by many factors. A major consideration will be whether the school wishes to avail of the services of an external facilitator. Where an external facilitator is engaged, the Planning Co-

ordinator will work closely with him or her in keeping the process moving forward; where no external facilitator is engaged, the Planning Co-ordinator may well be the process facilitator.

The role of the Planning Co-ordinator may include:

- ♦ Briefing the teaching staff on School Development Planning
- ♦ Participating in the initial briefing of an external facilitator
- ♦ Liaising with the external facilitator on the preliminary design of the process: provisional planning model, schedule, and communication and consultation procedures
- ♦ Liaising with the external facilitator on the progress of the process
- ♦ Facilitating aspects of the process, or (if there is no external facilitator) the process as a whole
- ♦ Liaising with teams and groups to ensure that their work is moving forward
- ♦ Liaising with the Principal and/or Deputy Principal on the leadership and management of the process and making recommendations to advance progress
- ♦ Ensuring communication and consultation procedures are established and followed, so that all parties in the school community feel informed and involved
- ♦ Encouraging all concerned to maintain motivation and keep to the planning schedule
- ♦ Co-ordinating the processing, synthesising and editing of materials
- ♦ Arranging for the presentation of draft materials for approval
- ♦ Chairing a Steering Group appointed to oversee the process

The Steering Group

The work of co-ordinating the School Development Planning process is so wide-ranging that it may be advisable, especially in a larger school, to appoint a Steering Group to undertake the task in conjunction with, or instead of, the Planning Co-ordinator.

Membership

The Steering Group may be constituted in a number of different ways. For example, it may be:

- ♦ A sub-committee of the In-School Management Team, including the Principal and the Deputy Principal
- ♦ A sub-committee of the In-School Management Team, excluding the Principal and/or the Deputy Principal
- ♦ A representative group whose constitution is predefined: for instance:
  > x members of the In-School Management Team plus
  > y members who are non-post-holders
- ♦ An uncategorised group elected by the teaching staff
- ♦ A group of teachers who volunteer for involvement
- ♦ A group selected on the basis of relevant experience and skills

It can be a significant advantage if at least one member of the Steering Group has particular expertise in the collection, analysis and synthesis of data.

The size of the Steering Group will be governed by the size of the school, the range of experience and skills within the staff, and the scope of the proposed plan. A Steering Group of between 3 and 10 would meet the requirements of most schools.

Role

The role of the Steering Group is similar to that of the Planning Co-ordinator. The responsibilities can be summarised thus:

- To co-ordinate the activities of all groups working within the process

- To ensure communication and consultation between small groups and the whole staff

- To ensure communication and consultation with other stakeholders, as appropriate: Trustees, Board of Management, parents, students, support staff, local community

- To keep the process moving forward

Ad-hoc Teams

An ad-hoc team, or task group, is a temporary group created for a specific purpose. In the context of School Development Planning, ad-hoc teams may be established to undertake particular tasks related to review, design, implementation or evaluation. In Review Model A, for example, when the school's development priorities have been selected following the Initial Review, each priority is assigned to an ad-hoc team or task group, which conducts a Specific Review of the area and develops Action Plans. Where it is decided to administer questionnaires as part of the Initial Review process, an ad-hoc team may be established to work with the Planning Co-ordinator on questionnaire-design and response-collation, especially if no Steering Group has been appointed.

Membership

An ad-hoc team is usually composed of teachers with particular interests and skills in the priority area who volunteer for involvement. Such a composition tends to promote enthusiasm and commitment among team members.

The size of an ad-hoc team will vary with the nature and scope of its brief and the size of the school. The usual size-range is between four and seven members. As a general guideline, the larger the team, the more difficult it is to convene.

It is advisable that a Team Co-ordinator or Convenor be appointed to facilitate the effective operation of the team.

Role

The role of the ad-hoc team has both process-oriented and task-oriented aspects. Its primary role is to accomplish the task for which it was established. In order to do that, however, it needs to agree working procedures that will enable it to conduct its own business efficiently, to co-ordinate with the work of other teams, and to integrate with the overall work of the school. Accordingly, the role may include:

- Interpreting the brief of the team

- Defining its goal

- Establishing procedures for team work, including procedures for allocating responsibilities, for communicating and consulting, and for decision-making within the team

- Establishing procedures for communication, consultation and general liaison with relevant parties outside the team

- Devising a schedule of work

- Conducting research relevant to the brief

- Specifying objectives related to research outcomes

- Policy formulation

- Action planning

- Preparing and presenting draft policies or plans for discussion and amendment, acceptance and approval, and finally for implementation

The brief of an ad-hoc team in relation to a given priority can be limited to a single aspect of the planning cycle, such as the design of Action Plans, or it can extend over a number of aspects. For instance, an Action Plan might be implemented by the ad-hoc team that devised it, or it could be assigned to a second ad-hoc team for implementation and both teams could co-operate in monitoring and evaluation procedures. Much depends on the nature and scope of the particular priority, the talents of the team, and school circumstances.

Editor / Editorial Team

Some schools may find it helpful to appoint an editor or an editorial team with special responsibility for editing the school plan document. The editorial work could include:

- Designing the layout of the overall document and of its component sections, following consultation

- Specifying a standard format—page-size, font-style, heading-style, and so on— for the document

- Specifying a standard word-processing program for all sections of the document

- Advising ad-hoc teams on the preparation and layout of drafts

- Compiling and editing the final draft of the completed school plan

It is advisable that the editor or the editorial team should be able to offer three types of expertise: language editing skills, design skills and information technology skills.

Ad-hoc Teams and In-School Management

Many schools may wish to integrate ad-hoc teams with the in-school management structure. This can be done in a number of ways. For example:

- Each ad-hoc team may include an appointed representative of the In-School Management team as a full member, to act as ad-hoc team convenor or liaison officer

- Each ad-hoc team may be asked to liaise with a designated representative of the In-School Management team (who may also be a member of the Steering Group). In this case, the representative of the In-School Management team provides support and advice to the ad-hoc team and monitors its progress, but does not participate directly in its work

- Ad-hoc team convenors collectively may meet from time to time with a sub-committee of the In-School Management team (which may also belong to the Steering Group) to report on progress and to consult on the next steps in the process

- The In-School Management team can play a central role in leading and monitoring the implementation of the school plan by ad-hoc teams, subject departments, curriculum teams, discipline and pastoral care teams, and the whole staff, as appropriate

- The In-School Management team can play a central role in organising the evaluation stage of the School Development Planning process, and in ensuring that the outcomes feed in to a fresh planning cycle to inform the establishment and operation of a further set of ad-hoc teams

II. Structures for involving Other Stakeholders

The School Development Planning process involves stakeholders other than the Principal and teaching staff. These other stakeholders include:

- Trustees/Patron

- Board of Management

- Support Staff

- Parents

- Students

- Local community

Trustees

1. The Trustees are **involved** in the School Development Planning process through their representation on the **Board of Management**.

   It is the responsibility of the Board of Management to ensure that the Trustees as a body are **consulted** about issues that pertain to their particular areas of responsibility: the ethos and status of the school, and capital expenditure. The Board should agree explicit consultation procedures with the Trustees in relation to these matters. The Trustees may initiate the consultation by identifying issues that they wish the Board of Management to address in the planning process.

   In Unit III of these Guidelines, **Review** Model B provides for a survey of Trustee perceptions and expectations as a means of ensuring that the Trustee perspective on the school is taken into account in the identification and selection of development priorities.

2. When there is a prospect of major change or development, such as school rationalisation or an extensive building project, the Trustees may choose **direct involvement** in negotiations with outside bodies and may wish to establish a committee representative of a broad range of school interests to participate in planning.

3. Many Trustee bodies have established Education Offices or have appointed Education Officers whose remit includes **supporting School Development Planning** by (i) working with Boards of Management, Principals, teachers, parents and students, and (ii) organising training programmes appropriate to the needs of each group.

Board of Management

1. It is formally the responsibility of the Board of Management to arrange for the preparation of the school plan and to ensure that it is regularly reviewed and updated.

   Normally, this responsibility is delegated to the Principal, who reports regularly to the Board on progress and ensures that draft plans are submitted to the Board for approval prior to their implementation.

   The Board may choose to receive reports directly from the Planning Co-ordinator or Steering Group, in relation to the process as a whole, or from Ad-hoc Team Convenors, in relation to particular tasks or projects.

   ⇒ During the **Review** stage, the Board may wish to highlight particular issues as planning priorities—especially issues that pertain to its statutory and legal responsibilities. In Unit III of these Guidelines, Review Model B provides for a survey of the perceptions and expectations of members of the Board as a means of ensuring Board input into the identification and prioritisation of the school's development needs.

   ⇒ During the **Design and Implementation** stages, the Board may request particularly close consultation on aspects of the plan that have a significant legal or financial dimension. The Board will wish to ensure that its plans for financial and plant management integrate successfully with other aspects of the overall school plan.

   ⇒ During the **Evaluation** stage, the Board may wish to advise on the organisation of the process, to contribute to the interpretation of the evidence, to draw conclusions from the outcomes, and to make recommendations for the next planning cycle.

2. The Board may choose to participate more directly in collaborative planning. Accordingly, it may establish **planning committees** representative of teachers, parents, Board, and, where relevant, Trustees and local community, to address certain aspects of its brief, such as

   ⇒ capital development,

   ⇒ providing for students with disabilities or other special educational needs, or

   ⇒ formulating policy in relation to the admission, suspension and expulsion of students.

3. The Board may seek a formal **liaison procedure with the Parents' Association** to ensure the establishment of relationships conducive to collaborative planning. This procedure could involve

   ⇒ the parent nominees on the Board of Management being deemed ex officio members of the executive committee of the Parents' Association (the Parents' Council), and being authorised to give agreed reports of relevant Board of Management business to the Parents' Council and of relevant Parents' Association business to the Board of Management

   ⇒ a reciprocal arrangement whereby the Chairperson of the Board of Management is invited to meet the Parents' Council and the Chairperson of the Parents' Association is invited to meet the Board of Management on a fixed number of occasions in the year

   ⇒ the organisation of joint Parents' Council / Board of Management meetings to consider major development projects

4. Similarly, the Board may seek to develop its **relationship with the teaching staff** beyond the liaison achieved through the Principal and teacher nominees. Accordingly, it may request

   ⇒ opportunities for the Chairperson of the Board to meet with the whole staff, both formally and informally

⇒ a number of joint Board/staff meetings or functions in the course of its terms of office

The staff may reciprocate by keeping the Board informed of student and staff achievements and inviting the Board to attend school functions

5. The Board may wish to be **represented on planning teams** established on the initiative of the teaching staff, especially where the work of the team has a significant financial, legal, health and safety, or external relations dimension, for example

⇒ the development of the school curriculum to incorporate information and communications technology

⇒ the review of the school's procedures for dealing with accidents and emergencies

⇒ the formulation of school policy on relationships and sexuality education

Support Staff

1. The members of the support staff play a major role in the life of the school. They can offer valuable perspectives both on its work and on its development needs. Accordingly, it is important that they be **consulted** in the School Development Planning process.

⇒ During the **Review** stage, the support staff should be consulted on aspects of school life that are relevant to their work. Review Model B provides for a survey of their perceptions and expectations.

⇒ During the **Design** stage, support staff could be consulted on the formulation of policy and the development of action plans in areas where they have particular experience or expertise to offer. For example, the formulation of policy on dealing with students who are taken ill at school could be informed by the experience of the school secretary, who is likely to have contact with more sick students than any member of the teaching staff. The development of action plans on environmental awareness and litter control could be guided by the expertise of the school caretaker, who may have the deepest insights into the causes, prevalence and possible solution of environmental problems in the school. Such consultations could be conducted in a relatively informal way by a designated member of the relevant ad-hoc team.

⇒ Support staff can often play a significant role in ensuring the **implementation** of policies and plans through the performance of tasks relevant to their normal work, or through their adherence to the provisions of policies and plans in their dealings with students, teachers, or each other. Accordingly, they must be kept informed of the contents of the school plan. This could be done in a relatively informal way by means of individual briefings from the Principal or members of the Steering Group. Alternatively, the Principal could convene a meeting of the support staff, or a joint meeting of teaching staff and support staff, at which the contents and implementation of the school plan would be outlined and discussed.

⇒ The observations of support staff can be a valuable resource in **monitoring and evaluating** the implementation of the school plan. Accordingly, monitoring and evaluation procedures should be designed to draw systematically on evidence that members of the support staff are best placed to provide. For example, members of the cleaning staff who are on duty during the school day can offer a unique perspective on student behaviour in terms of punctuality, orderliness, courtesy towards each other and towards adults, co-operativeness, and respect for property. Monitoring and evaluation procedures might involve structured interviews with members of the support staff in relation to specific topics, or the provision of carefully designed questionnaires or observation record forms to enable the support staff to compile systematic reports of their observations.

2. It may be helpful to **involve** the support staff more directly in the planning process through **membership of ad-hoc teams** whose tasks require the kind of expertise that they can offer.

For example, the task of revising the school's safety procedures may be facilitated by the participation of the caretaker, who may have particular knowledge of hazards on the school premises and possible courses of action for dealing with them.

Parents

The Education Act, 1998 requires that parents be consulted in the preparation of the School Plan. Accordingly, it is important that appropriate structures and procedures be devised to facilitate their contribution to the process. There are many possible approaches to structuring parental involvement in School Development Planning. The list of suggestions outlined below is not exhaustive.

1. The parents of students attending the school are involved in the School Development Planning process through their **nominees on the Board of Management**, who ensure that the parental perspective informs all of the Board's proceedings.

2. The Education Act, 1998 provides for the establishment in each school of a **Parents' Association.** A Parents' Association can play a major role in promoting parental support for and involvement in the development of the school.

3. The **Parents' Council** (the executive committee of the Parents' Association) **and the Board of Management may establish liaison procedures** to promote partnership and collaboration (as outlined in the section on the Board of Management)

4. The **Parents' Council and the teaching staff may establish liaison procedures** to promote the development of relationships conducive to collaborative planning. These procedures may involve:

   ⇒ The co-option by the Parents' Council of teachers nominated by the staff to act as liaison officers, with responsibility for reporting to the staff on relevant Parents' Association issues and to the Parents' Council on relevant staff issues

   ⇒ The provision of opportunities for the Chairperson of the Parents' Association to meet with the whole staff, both formally and informally

   ⇒ Invitations from the Parents' Council to the staff to attend Parents' Association functions or to participate in Parents' Association projects

   ⇒ Invitations from the staff to the Parents' Council to attend school functions or to assist in the organisation of school projects, where appropriate

5. During the **Review** stage of the School Development Planning process, parents may be consulted in an Initial or General Review of the school's current situation or in Specific Reviews of particular areas in a number of ways:

   ⇒ A survey of the perceptions and expectations of the members of the Parents' Council

   ⇒ A survey of the perceptions and expectations of a random sample of parents, chosen perhaps on the basis of students' birth months or surname initials

   ⇒ A survey of the perceptions and expectations of particular samples of parents, such as the parents of First Year students or the parents of Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme students

6. During the **Design** stage, the **Parents' Council** may be invited to participate in broadly based planning committees established by the **Board of Management** (as outlined in the section on the Board of Management)

7. Parents may be asked to **nominate representatives to policy teams** to collaborate in the formulation of policy on issues such as relationships and sexuality education, discipline, and homework. Draft policies may then be submitted to the Parents' Council or to a general meeting of parents in a consultation process.

8. The Parents' Association may be asked to **nominate representatives to ad-hoc planning teams** whose task has particular significance for parents, such as the redesign of the school

uniform, the development of a student exchange programme or holiday employment scheme, or the extension of the school's range of extra-curricular activities

9. Parents with particular expertise may be **co-opted to planning teams** whose work is related to their field. For example, a computer expert might be asked to assist with the school's ICT plan, or a marketing manager may be asked to advise on the development of an enterprise education programme.

10. Parents should be informed of the contents of the **completed school plan**. This can be done by a range of media:

    ⇒ An oral presentation to the Parents' Council, followed perhaps by a formal launch of copies of the school plan

    ⇒ An oral presentation to a general meeting of parents

    ⇒ A Newsletter for parents, prepared perhaps in collaboration with the Parents' Council, summarising the contents of the school plan and highlighting aspects of particular significance to parents

    ⇒ A special edition of the school plan for parents, the style and focus of which would be designed to meet parents' needs for information and explanation

    ⇒ the distribution of copies of the school plan to the parents of every student attending the school, or to those parents who request a copy

    ⇒ the inclusion of information on the school plan in general bulletins for parents

11. Feedback from parents can be a valuable resource in **monitoring and evaluating** the implementation of the school plan. . Accordingly, monitoring and evaluation procedures should be designed to draw systematically on this feedback. Among the possible approaches are:

    ⇒ Systematic recording of informal feedback from parents—comments at Parent-Teacher meetings, approaches by individual parents involving general comments, commendations, complaints, or requests, and informal comments at Parents' Council meetings

    ⇒ Periodic meetings with the Parents' Council to review progress, identify successes and difficulties, and suggest improvements

    ⇒ Systematic surveying of parental opinion in relation to progress on specific issues at a fixed point (or points) in the planning cycle

Students

The Education Act, 1998 provides for consultation with students in the preparation of the school plan. Accordingly, it is important that appropriate structures and procedures be devised to facilitate their contribution to the process.

1. The establishment of a **Students' Council** can play a major role in promoting students' support for and involvement in the development of the school.

2. **Liaison procedures** may be established between the Students' Council and the teaching staff, Board of Management, and Parents' Council respectively.

    ⇒ A member of the teaching staff may be nominated as staff representative on the Students' Council, with responsibility for ensuring effective communication between the two bodies

    ⇒ Regular meetings between representatives of the Students' Council and representatives of the In-School Management team may be organised

    ⇒ Representatives of the Students' Council may be invited to meet the staff as a whole on a fixed number of occasions in the year

    ⇒ Joint staff / Students' Council functions or projects may be organised from time to time

⇒ Representatives of the Students' Council may be invited to meet the Board of Management to outline their programme of activities, to present proposals, or to give feedback

⇒ Representatives of the Board of Management may request opportunities to meet with the Students' Council as a whole to affirm their work

⇒ Representatives of the Students' Council may be invited to meet the Parents' Council to outline their programme of activities, to present proposals, or to give feedback

⇒ Representatives of the Parents' Council may request opportunities to meet with the Students' Council as a whole to affirm their work or to invite their participation in projects of activities

⇒ The Students' Council may seek the support and assistance of the staff, Board of Management and Parents' Council in the organisation of major programmes of activity

3. During the **Review** stage of the School Development Planning process, students can be consulted in an Initial or General Review of the school's current situation or in Specific Reviews of particular areas in a variety of ways:

⇒ A survey of the perceptions and expectations of members of the Students' Council

⇒ A survey of the perceptions and expectations of a random sample of students, chosen perhaps on the basis of their birth months or surname initials

⇒ A survey of the perceptions and expectations of particular samples of students, such as the Transition Year class, the Leaving Certificate cohort, or students with specific ability profiles

4. During the **Design** stage, students can be consulted or involved in a number of ways, for example:

⇒ Ad-hoc teams dealing with topics that the Review showed are of particular concern to students may consult with the Students' Council or with random samples of students to gather suggestions about possible courses of action

⇒ Ad-hoc teams may co-opt student representatives to assist in appropriate planning projects, such as the redesign of the school uniform, or the development of the school's programme of extra-curricular activities

⇒ The Students' Council may be invited to comment on drafts of the school plan, or on draft components of the school plan, such as the Statement of Mission, Vision and Aims, policy statements in relation to the care and management of students, or action plans related to priorities highlighted by students

5. Students should be informed of the contents of the completed school plan to ensure their support for its **implementation**. There are many possible approaches to this task:

⇒ The Students' Council may be given a thorough briefing on the contents of the school plan and may be invited to participate in the dissemination of relevant sections to the student body

⇒ Information on relevant sections of the school plan may be given at general assemblies of students

⇒ The Principal and Year Heads, in collaboration with the Class Tutors, may organise special Year Group meetings to present the school plan and explain its particular significance for each cohort

⇒ A suitably-designed summary of the school plan may be prepared for students, perhaps in collaboration with the Students' Council

⇒ Where copies of the school plan have been sent to every household, students may be advised to direct their attention to sections that have a particular relevance for them

6. Feedback from students is a valuable resource during **monitoring and evaluation**. Accordingly, monitoring and evaluation procedures should draw systematically on this feedback. Among the possible approaches are:

    ⇒ Periodic discussions with the Students' Council to review progress, identify successes and difficulties, suggest improvements

    ⇒ Systematic recording of informal feedback from interactions with individual students or groups of students

    ⇒ Systematic surveying of student opinion at fixed points in their school careers (such as the end of Transition Year, the last term of Leaving Certificate Year) or in the planning cycle (for example, the final term of the final year of the plan)

Local Community

The local community can participate in the School Development Planning process at a number of different levels.

1. The perspective of the local community (or communities) is incorporated into the school's planning through the involvement of parents at Board of Management, Parents' Council and individual level.

2. Many Trustee bodies adopt a policy of including representatives of the local community among their nominees to the school's Board of Management in order to underline their belief in partnership between school and community.

3. The school may establish liaison or formal linkages with groups and associations working for the betterment of the community (for example, Chamber of Commerce, business interests, local development organisations, residents' associations, social action groups, statutory or voluntary agencies) in order to facilitate partnership in addressing the needs of the community.

4. The **Review** stage of the School Development Planning process may incorporate a survey of the local community to establish views, requirements, and opportunities that should be taken into account in selecting the school's priorities. Such a survey could be undertaken in collaboration with community groups, where appropriate linkages have been established.

5. During the **Design** stage, the local community may be involved in the work of planning teams through consultation or through direct participation. The school may need to draw on the expertise of relevant members of the local community in planning to address particular issues. Joint school-community planning teams may be established to plan partnership projects focused on meeting community needs. Indeed, the initiative for some partnership projects may come from organisations outside the school, which may have completed preliminary review and design work before approaching the school to invite its participation.

6. The local community may participate in the **Implementation** stage by providing facilities for certain types of activity (work experience placements, for example) or by placing expertise at the disposal of the school (in mock-interview programmes or student mini-company schemes, for example). Community groups may be centrally involved in managing and supporting the implementation of partnership projects.

7. Members of the community may be involved in **monitoring and evaluation** (i) as sources of feedback or (ii) as agents in the process.

    (i) formal and informal feedback from the community should be incorporated systematically into the school's monitoring and evaluation procedures (as outlined in the sections on **Parents** and **Students**)

    (ii) community representatives should be among the monitors and evaluators of projects in which they are partners

III. Skills

The skills that facilitate collaborative planning are rooted in the school's culture and climate. Accordingly, this section begins by outlining the characteristics of a collaborative culture and suggesting some climate-setting activities to promote the development of such a culture. It then focuses on skills that underpin collaborative planning: communication, teamwork, organising and running meetings, and managing conflict. Finally, it signposts the importance of staff development.

What this section offers is merely an introduction to the subject of collaborative planning skills. Further work on skill development will be informed by the experiences of schools as the SDP process evolves within the education system.

A Culture for Collaborative Planning

The school's culture and climate influence relationships within the school community and thus play a major role in determining the prospect of successful collaboration.

A school culture that is conducive to collaboration has the following characteristics:

- Shared sense of purpose
- Trust
- Good communication
- Flexibility
- Shared responsibility
- Empowerment
- Collegiality
- Capacity for amicable disagreement in debate
- Encouragement and affirmation of effort
- Recognition of success and achievement
- Support for those experiencing difficulties
- Openness to new ideas, new learning
- Commitment to continuous improvement
- Promotion of staff development
- Routine procedures that facilitate rather than irritate
- Agreed consultation and decision-making procedures

It is the culture of an "upside-down organisation", where the role of school leaders is to empower and support staff teams and learners rather than to control them.

In schools where there is little tradition of collaborative work among the teaching staff, or where the atmosphere is characterised by indifference or negativity, it may be advisable to engage in climate-setting activities as a prelude to School Development Planning. Climate-setting activities might include:

- Improving the physical environment of the school
- Addressing minor irritants that have acquired a disproportionate significance
- Involving staff in the review and revision of routine procedures that have proved cumbersome, confusing or contentious
- Establishing procedures to affirm staff effort or achievement

- ♦ Creating opportunities for groups of teachers to work together
- ♦ Involving staff in the design of frameworks to guide future action:
  - ⇒ Agreeing procedures for formulating or clarifying mission, vision, aims and policies
  - ⇒ Devising effective communication, consultation and decision-making procedures
  - ⇒ Clarifying roles and responsibilities so that there is a shared understanding of who will do what

Success breeds success. Where the school climate presents significant difficulties, it may be advisable to adopt a modified version of the Early Action Planning model and to involve the staff in identifying a few short-term targets that are of sufficient concern to them to motivate concerted action. Early small-scale achievements can pave the way to larger undertakings. (The Early Action Planning Model is outlined in Unit II of these Guidelines)

Communication

General communication skills play an important role in the School Development Planning process. We can distinguish two sets of communication skills: planning skills and participation skills

i)   Communication planning skills relate to the design and selection of systems and methods of communication that are appropriate to various types of situation

ii)   Participation skills are utilised for direct involvement in communication—listening, speaking, asking, answering, and so on

The main focus of this section is on the former category.

Communication Systems

The following list of statements can facilitate a review of the school's communication systems by serving as a starting point for discussion. (The list could be converted into a checklist or questionnaire.)

1. The communication system for informing staff of major school issues is adequate

2. Staff have an opportunity for input before important decisions are made

3. There are effective formal and informal structures for teacher to teacher communication

4. The whole teaching staff meet with sufficient frequency

5. The support staff are kept informed of school matters that affect them

6. Communication between the Board of Management and the staff is effective in both directions

7. Communication between the Parents' Association and the staff is effective in both directions

8. Parent-teacher and teacher-parent communications are effective

9. Parent-school and school-parent communications are effective

10. Important information is conveyed both verbally and in writing

11. The timing of important messages is carefully planned and co-ordinated to increase effectiveness

12. There are systems in place for verifying that all important communications are actually received.

The discussion can be structured to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the current communication systems, to select priorities for development and to propose possible ways forward (adapting Review Model A that is outlined in Unit III of these Guidelines)

In designing and selecting methods of communication, it may prove helpful to take account of average retention rates for the various media by which information is shared:

We retain, on average:

- ♦ **5%**   **of what we HEAR**
- ♦ **10%**   **of what we READ**
- ♦ **20%**   **of what we both HEAR and READ (audio-visual)**
- ♦ **30%**   **of what is DEMONSTRATED to us**
- ♦ **50%**   **of what we DISCUSS**
- ♦ **75%**   **of what we PRACTISE BY DOING**
- ♦ **90%**   **of what we EXPLAIN OR DEMONSTRATE TO OTHERS**

Thus, a uni-sensory "once-off" message that is passively received is likely to be forgotten.

An effective communication system is one which

- ♦ conveys information through a variety of sensory channels
- ♦ involves the target audience actively rather than passively, where possible
- ♦ provides for reinforcement and repetition
- ♦ elicits feedback to check that the information was received and understood

Internal Communication

It is a worthwhile exercise to review internal communication systems by:

- ♦ Listing all the methods by which communication occurs within the school
- ♦ Listing the type of information that is passed on by each method
- ♦ Considering the appropriateness of the chosen method of communication in each case
- ♦ Identifying patterns of communication failure
- ♦ Identifying ways of improving internal communication

Every method of communication has its limitations.

Communication systems that are over-reliant on paper are likely to be slow. They presuppose a level of attentiveness to the written word that is seldom forthcoming. They lack the impact and immediacy of personal presence. Accordingly, important information may go unheeded in overlooked notices and unread documents.

Oral communication can be speedy and dynamic, especially in short briefings or one-to-one personal interchanges. But oral systems also presuppose a high level of attentiveness in the listener—a level that may not be forthcoming, especially in the latter stages of a large formal meeting. Moreover, even with high levels of attentiveness, the details of verbal messages are readily forgotten, unless they receive further reinforcement.

The design of the school's internal communication procedures must allow for the limitations of each method of communication; it should seek to compensate for them by building in backup and reinforcement systems:

- ♦ Important information should be conveyed by a variety of mutually reinforcing methods: for example:
  - ⇒ An oral presentation might be summarised by a chart or overhead and supported by an information sheet that spells out the details

⇒ Where appropriate, further reinforcement could be provided by engaging the active attention of the listeners through note-taking or discussion

⇒ Reminder notices might follow at intervals

♦ Notices and newsletters should be eye-catching for maximum impact

♦ Notice-boards should be carefully managed:

⇒ Where space allows, a separate area of notice-board should be allocated to each major category of notice

⇒ Colour-coding could be used to facilitate instant identification of the subject-matter of each notice

⇒ Notices should be removed as soon as they become redundant

⇒ The practice of pinning one notice on top of another should be outlawed

⇒ Making the main notice-board **look** different each day can encourage people to check for new notices

♦ A communication chain can be an effective method of conveying important information and eliciting rapid responses:

⇒ It might be used by an Ad-Hoc Team wishing to consult the whole staff about a proposal before proceeding to detailed planning. Instead of waiting for a general staff meeting, which might delay progress, the team members might divide the staff among them, so that each team member would be responsible for consulting a small number of teachers (individually or in small groups) and reporting their responses to the team. This approach has the advantage of using one-to-one contact to maximise the active engagement of every member of staff

⇒ It might be established as a standard procedure for communicating urgent news in a crisis. The staff could be divided into agreed contact groups. An urgent message could then be communicated to each group by contacting one person in the group, who would undertake to pass it on to the rest.

Communication with Parents

Effective communication is essential for the creation of successful home-school partnerships. It is informative for the school staff to evaluate the methods used by the school to communicate with parents. This can be done by:

♦ Listing all the methods by which the school communicates with parents

♦ Listing the type of information that is passed on by each method

♦ Considering the appropriateness of the chosen method of communication in each case

♦ Studying examples of written communications from school to home

♦ Identifying patterns of communication failure

♦ Identifying ways of improving communication

A similar exercise can be conducted, perhaps in conjunction with the Parents' Council, in relation to communications from home to school.

Communication with the Wider Community

The school's relationship with the wider community is largely dependent on the effectiveness of its systems of external communication. These can be reviewed by:

- Listing all within the wider community who need information about the school

- Listing all within the wider community with whom the school needs to communicate

- Listing the types of information (1) that the school needs to communicate and (2) that the community needs to receive

- Listing all the methods by which each type of information is (1) communicated by the school and (2) received by the community

- Considering the appropriateness of the method of communication in each case

- Listing how members of the wider community can communicate with the school

- Considering the adequacy of these means of communication

- Identifying patterns of inadequacy or failure in external communication

- Identifying ways of improving external communication

Communicating a Hidden Message

Communication has both intentional and unintentional aspects. The formal message that we intend to convey may be either reinforced or undermined by aspects to which we may pay insufficient heed.

Thus, in oral communication, the general appearance, body-language, facial expressions and tone of voice of the speaker play an important role in determining the effectiveness of the interaction.

In written communication, the appearance of a document or notice may influence the amount of attention that is paid to its content. A page packed with unrelieved text is off-putting. A comment scrawled illegibly on a pupil's exercise or report-sheet may convey an unfortunate and unintended impression.

Similarly, the appearance of the school's premises and pupils may convey unintended messages about the school's culture to the wider community. It is a valuable exercise to consider what messages a visitor to the school might infer from:

- The school entrance

- The provision (or lack) of signs or layout maps to guide strangers to the school

- Décor

- Displays relevant to student achievements

- The state of corridors and classrooms in terms of cleanliness and tidiness

- The state of the school grounds

- The appearance and demeanour of the pupils and other members of the school community

Some of these messages may be in conflict with the stated values of the school. Accordingly, it may be advisable to

- Review areas where there is a mismatch between what the visitor sees and what the school is trying to achieve

- Devise courses of action to address the mismatch, specifying who should do what, when, and with what resources

Teams and Teamwork

Advantages

The establishment of teams has many advantages in the School Development Planning process:

- Teams can offer a greater range of skills and experiences than any individual
- Teamwork maximises creative talent by encouraging the transfer of knowledge and skills
- Teamwork promotes the ownership of ideas
- Teamwork fosters problem solving
- Teamwork distributes stress and pressure
- Teamwork is more satisfying than working alone: the social dimension enhances the performance of individuals by developing trust and confidence and fostering enjoyment of the work
- Teams are more powerful learning entities than individuals in the search for continuous improvement: they promote personal and professional growth and development because they motivate, challenge, reward and support
- Teams are more capable of examining cross-functional issues than individuals
- Teams are better at communicating than individuals
- Teams can take less time than individuals to produce high-quality decisions

Characteristics of Effective Teams

The key characteristics of effective teams are:

- A shared sense of vision
- Clarity of purpose
- Open communication
- An atmosphere of trust and support
- Creative conflict
- Appropriate working methods, with clear standards and procedures
- Appropriate leadership
- Regular review and reflection
- Sound links with other teams

In order to function effectively, a team needs a clear definition of responsibilities within the team; clear goals; basic operating resources of personnel, time, space, and energy; and agreed procedures for discussion, decision-making, assigning tasks, consulting and reporting. A team needs to know the extent of its accountability, the limits of its authority, the resources on which it can draw, and the results expected of it, so that it can plan its activities.

Ideally, all team member should be able to: initiate discussions; seek information and opinions; suggest procedures for reaching goals; clarify or elaborate on ideas; summarise; test for consensus; keep discussion on track.

Team Composition

The success of a team can depend on the balance of types within its membership. Research has identified nine types of team role that are indispensable to the successful completion of a team's business. In an effective team, each member adopts **one or more** of these roles:

1. **Co-ordinator or Chairperson:** clarifies objectives, assigns tasks, encourages participation by each team member, ensures that the best use is made of each team member's potential

2. **Shaper:** shapes the way in which team effort is applied by providing drive, directing attention to objective-setting, and challenging and arguing in discussion

3. **Plant:** puts forward original ideas, provides imagination and creativity, tries to initiate breakthroughs in the team's approach to problems

4. **Resource investigator:** explores and reports on ideas, developments and resources outside the team; creates useful external contacts

5. **Monitor-evaluator:** analyses problems and evaluates ideas and suggestions so that the team is better placed to make balanced decisions

6. **Team worker:** fosters harmony and team spirit, improves communication, builds on the suggestions of fellow members

7. **Company worker:** turns concepts and plans into practical working procedures; carries out agreed plans systematically and efficiently

8. **Specialist:** provides the team with expertise in a particular field that is relevant to its work

9. **Completer-finisher:** checks for mistakes of both commission and omission; ensures that tasks are completed

Roles can be combined so that individuals within a team can sometimes play two or three parts.

Team Building

Teamwork does not just happen. The members of a team have to learn to work together. The team has to go through a process of formation and growth if it is to function properly. Research has identified four stages in the development of a team:

- ♦ **Forming**
- ♦ **Storming**
- ♦ **Norming**
- ♦ **Performing**

1. Forming

At this stage, the group is a collection of individuals rather than a team. Group members experience a range of emotions as they move towards a sense of team identity: fear, suspicion, anxiety, anticipation, excitement, optimism. Discussion tends to focus on abstract issues and organisational barriers to teamwork rather than on the task in hand.

2. Storming

As members get to know each other there is potential for discord and progress is slower than expected. The challenge of the team's task may evoke a negative reaction. Interpersonal conflict may arise. One-upmanship may develop. There may be arguments about lack of progress and time-wasting.

3. Norming

At this stage, team cohesiveness is achieved. The team develops its methods of working: it establishes its own rules or norms and clarifies the roles that its members should play. There is a reduction in conflict and ideas are discussed openly.

4. Performing

At this stage, team behaviour has become the norm. Having resolved their differences and established their ways of working, team members concentrate on the task. With the growth in team confidence, they undertake more innovative activities. Team loyalty is strong.

Meetings

Meetings are an essential element of collaborative planning. Accordingly, it is important that participants develop skills in organising and running effective meetings.

Managing an effective meeting involves

1. Clarity about the purpose of the meeting

2. Awareness of the behavioural processes at work

3. Structuring of the meeting so as to channel the energies of participants positively

In judging a meeting's effectiveness, the key questions are:

1. Did the outcome of the meeting justify the time invested in it?

2. Could there have been a better outcome for the same investment of time?

3. Will the outcome of the meeting be acted on?

Purpose of a Meeting

There are many possible reasons for holding a meeting:

- ♦ To brief those in attendance
- ♦ To motivate the group
- ♦ To enable participants to exchange information
- ♦ To collect views and proposals
- ♦ To generate ideas
- ♦ To enquire into the nature and causes of a problem
- ♦ To settle differences
- ♦ To take decisions
- ♦ To plan courses of action

Planning a Meeting

Before a meeting can be planned, it is necessary to establish who is responsible for convening the meeting, for deciding its purpose, and for preparing the Agenda. Where there is to be a series of meetings, at the end of each meeting the group often agrees outline plans for the next one.

The key questions in planning a meeting are:

1. What is the purpose of the meeting?

2. What objectives is it hoped to achieve?

3. Is the meeting the appropriate form of communication to achieve these objectives?

   ⇒ It may be a waste of time to organise a meeting for the presentation of factual information that could be circulated in a document, unless there is need for clarification or discussion

4. Is advice or information on any issues required in advance?

⇒ If meeting-time is to be used effectively, all relevant information must be available to participants either before or during the meeting. Accordingly, it may be necessary for the meeting convenor to ensure that research is done, that briefing documents are prepared, or that informed advice is sought on matters requiring particular expertise.

⇒ To enable participants to prepare for the meeting, it is advisable to circulate relevant documentation in advance, wherever possible

5. Who should attend the meeting?

⇒ It is important to ensure that the people needed for the business of the meeting can and do attend. In determining who should attend, consider:

- Who has the information needed at the meeting?
- Who can give a responsible undertaking?
- Who will have to act on the outcome?

⇒ In many cases, the attendance will be predetermined by the nature of the meeting—team meetings are intended for members of the team

6. What notification of the meeting should proposed participants receive?

⇒ The level of formality of the notification will vary with the size and purpose of the meeting and the nature of the group. It is important, however, that all proposed participants are informed of the following:

- The date, time, duration, and venue for the meeting
- Who is to be present
- Who is to chair
- Necessary materials or documentation
- The items on the Agenda
- The reason for the inclusion of each item (for information, for discussion, for decision…)
- Who is to introduce each item (where relevant)
- The desired outcome

7. What considerations should govern the organisation of the Agenda?

⇒ A well drawn up Agenda can clarify and expedite the business of the meeting

⇒ It is advisable to look for connections between different items and arrange them in a logical order

⇒ Important items should get the fullest discussion. This consideration should inform both the ordering of items on the Agenda and the allocation of time to each item. The tendency to prioritise the urgent at the expense of the important should be strictly controlled

⇒ Most Agendas commence with the minutes of the previous meeting and a report of follow-up action

⇒ The Agenda should conclude with arrangements for the next meeting

Preparing for a Meeting

The running of a meeting is greatly facilitated if suitable preparations have been made for it. Preparations include:

♦ Preparation of a suitable meeting room, and necessary facilities and equipment

♦ Chairperson's preparation for managing the meeting by reflecting on the Agenda, studying relevant documentation, and considering appropriate ground-rules and procedures for structuring discussion and arranging follow-up in order to expedite business

♦ Participants' preparation for contributing to the meeting by reflecting on the Agenda, studying relevant documentation, clarifying ideas, drafting responses,

considering proposals, preparing inputs, thinking about how to further the business

Running a Meeting

The chairperson plays a major role in ensuring that the meeting runs smoothly and efficiently. The chairperson is responsible for managing the process by controlling the pace, establishing procedures, structuring discussion, regulating time-keeping, ensuring order and fairness, and maintaining sufficient formality to get the business done.

The chairperson should:

♦ Clarify at the beginning the ground rules of procedure that will keep discussion to the point and allow everyone to participate in a non-threatening manner

♦ Arrange at the beginning for minutes to be taken (where appropriate) and ensure that an appropriate level of formality and detail is agreed

♦ Structure the approach to each item of business in a logical way, so that, for instance, presentation of the facts relevant to an issue precedes discussion of the issue and decision in relation to it:

Facts ⟶ Discussion ⟶ Decision

♦ Encourage constructive discussion which gives participants ample opportunity to contribute and which allows everyone to have a voice in decision-making

♦ Maintain control of discussion by stopping participants jumping ahead or going over old ground. But the chairperson should not impose an over-rigid structure that precludes or curtails productive discussion or that makes no allowance for flexibility and spontaneity

♦ At the end of discussion of each Agenda item, summarise decisions taken, actions agreed, and responsibilities assigned, and ensure that these are recorded in the minutes. It is advisable for the chairperson to keep a personal record to supplement the official minutes in case clarification is required at a later date

♦ At the end of the meeting, ensure that procedures are in place for following up on decisions and for establishing who does what, when, where, and how

♦ At the end of the meeting, make arrangements for the next meeting (where appropriate)

♦ Ensure that there is harmony at the end of the meeting

The recording secretary should:

♦ Establish at the outset the level of detail required in the minutes: what needs to be recorded

♦ Compile the minutes, ensuring that they are clear, accurate and unambiguous

♦ Record decisions taken, actions agreed, and the name of the person(s) responsible for each agreed action

♦ Circulate copies of the minutes within an agreed period

Characteristics of Effective Team Meetings

Promptness   Meetings should start and end on time

Participation   Every team member should participate in team discussions and activities

                                  The team leader should develop a process for ensuring inclusion

Basic Courtesies   Each speaker should be listened to attentively

                                  No-one should be interrupted when speaking

                                  There should be no note-passing, no distracting activity

                                  Interruptions from outside should not be permitted—telephone calls, etc. should be blocked for the duration of the meeting

Agenda and Minutes   A team recorder should be appointed to take minutes

                                  The Agenda should be published in advance and revised at the beginning of the meeting if necessary

                                  The final report of the meeting should be agreed by all team members

Breaks   Break times should be agreed at the outset. Breaks should be taken at agreed times

Assignments   Work will need to be done between meetings

                                  When assigned a job, a team member should complete it on time

                                  If the job cannot be completed on time, this should be brought to the attention of the entire team so that alternative arrangements can be made

Discussions   Every member should be encouraged to take part

                                  The environment should be conducive to the open expression of views

                                  It should be clearly understood that, whereas it may be acceptable to attack an idea, it is never acceptable to attack another person

                                  Members should feel that their opinions are valued

Next Meeting Agenda   The Agenda for the next meeting should be established at the end of the current meeting

                                  The Agenda should be owned by the team not by an individual

Meeting Evaluation   Self-evaluation at the end of a meeting is the team's main source of feedback. The evaluation should focus on effectiveness and efficiency

Meeting Close   The meeting should end on a friendly note

Why Meetings Fail

A meeting may fail for many reasons. They include the following:

- The meeting is unnecessary
- It lacks clarity of purpose
- The type of meeting adopted is inappropriate for the business
- The style of chairing is inappropriate
- Control of proceedings is too loose
- The meeting is too large
- The Agenda is too long
- The wrong people are present
- Essential information is unavailable
- Those present have not familiarised themselves with the advance documentation or with the issues on the Agenda
- Preparatory tasks (assigned, perhaps, at a previous meeting) have not been completed
- The meeting facilities are uncomfortable
- The minutes taken are inaccurate, thus hampering follow-up
- Decisions are not acted on

Conflict

Conflict has both positive and negative aspects. The positive aspects are frequently overlooked, however, with the result that the absence of conflict is often regarded as an unmixed blessing. But lack of conflict may indicate apathy, abdication of responsibility, or lazy thinking.

The Benefits of Conflict

Conflict that arises from honest differences of opinion about issues is valuable

- It can pose healthy challenges to established practices
- It helps to ensure that different options for action are properly considered
- It stimulates discussion that may lead to the emergence of creative proposals
- It helps to ensure that each chosen course of action is scrutinised for feasibility before it is implemented, thereby reducing the risk of missing an important flaw that might emerge later

Accordingly, creative conflict is a key characteristic of effective teams.

Managing Conflict

Attitudes to conflict determine the ease with which it can be managed. Where it is accepted that conflict is an unavoidable part of life but that agreement is possible, differences can be resolved by an approach involving give-and-take or problem-solving (depending on whether the issue is low-stake or high-stake). Where efforts are made to avoid confrontation rather than to resolve conflict, however, the result can be increasing tension and frustration, or procrastination and inaction.

A collaborative school culture is conducive to the prevention of unnecessary conflict because it promotes:

- **Collective responsibility** both for the interests of the school and for the individual interests of the staff, thus obviating the kind of conflict that arises when different parties are concerned only to protect their own interests
- **Participative decision-making** in which the views of interested parties are sought out before decisions are made, thus allowing for differences of opinion to be addressed before positions are taken up, so precluding the kind of conflict that arises from refusal to climb down for fear of losing face

Guidelines for Dealing with Conflict

1. Maintain as much communication as possible with any person with whom you come into conflict. Do not avoid or postpone discussing the problem: closing your eyes to it will not make it go away. Delay dialogue only if the level of acrimony is such that a damaging confrontation may ensue.

   When conflict has become acrimonious, it may be necessary for an intermediary to arrange a meeting of the parties in order to discuss the problem.

   The discussion between the parties in conflict should involve:

   ⇒ Talking calmly but openly about issues and feelings

   ⇒ Listening carefully to each other in order to understand each other's views

   ⇒ Trying to avoid becoming aggressive or defensive

⇒ Placing the conflict in the larger context of the interest of the school and identifying common goals

⇒ Focusing on future actions rather than on past events

⇒ Establishing trust in each other's good faith

⇒ Planning clear actions for the resolution of the conflict, agreeing who will do what by when

2. If you are in conflict with someone, do not escalate the problem by talking **about** the person rather than **to** the person

3. Do not enlist supporters to take your side against the other person

4. Defuse interdepartmental rivalry by establishing cross-curricular teams and encouraging joint projects

5. Try to prevent conflict situations being viewed in terms of win or lose

6. Try to see all sides of a dispute

7. Remember that negative behaviour arises when people believe that they are under threat

8. Ensure that all effort and achievement is fairly recognised and affirmed.

Conflict Management Skills

Managing conflict requires the following skills:

1. The ability to confront differences in a calm and reasonable manner

2. The ability to present ideas and feelings clearly, concisely, calmly and honestly

3. The ability to listen attentively and to show understanding of what has been said

4. The habit of asking questions rather than making statements

5. The ability to evaluate all aspects of a problem, rising above the limitations of an individual perspective to understand the positions of other parties

6. The ability to articulate common goals that help those in conflict to rise above their differences and to focus on future achievements rather than past differences

Conflict Modes

There are five modes of conflict-handling behaviour:

♦ **Competing** (forcing):   I'm not prepared to change my position

♦ **Collaborating** (problem-solving): Let us work together on this

♦ **Compromising** (sharing):   Let us give and take

♦ **Avoiding** (withdrawal):   I cannot take responsibility for this decision

♦ **Accommodating** (smoothing):   I concede that point

All five modes are useful in some situations. Each represents a set of useful social skills.

Competing involves behaviour that is assertive and uncooperative. It is appropriate:

1. When quick decisive action is needed, for example in an emergency

2. When unpopular decisions have to be made about important issues, for example when costs have to be cut

3. When you know you are right in relation to a vital issue

Collaborating involves behaviour that is assertive and co-operative. It is appropriate:

1. When different sets of concerns are too important to be compromised, so that an integrative solution is required

2. When the objective is to learn by understanding the views of others

3. When it is necessary to incorporate a range of concerns into a consensual decision in order to gain commitment

Compromising involves behaviour that is intermediate in assertiveness and co-operativeness. It is appropriate:

1. When goals are moderately important but not worth the effort or potential disruption of more assertive modes

2. When two opponents of equal power are equally committed to mutually exclusive goals

3. When a temporary settlement or an expedient solution is desirable, perhaps because of time-pressure

4. When the assertive modes of competition and collaboration have failed

Avoiding involves behaviour that is unassertive and uncooperative. It is appropriate:

1. When an issue is trivial or when other more important issues have to be dealt with

2. When the potential damage of confronting a conflict outweighs the benefit of resolving it

3. When it is necessary to let people cool down to regain perspective and composure

4. When further research outweighs the benefits of an immediate decision

5. When you perceive no chance of success in changing the situation, or when others can resolve the situation more effectively than you

Accommodating involves behaviour that is unassertive and co-operative. It is appropriate:

1. When you realise that you are wrong, or that you are outmatched and losing the argument

2. When the issue is more important to another person than to you, and you wish to preserve harmony, avoid discord and maintain a co-operative relationship

3. When you wish to build up social credits for later issues that are important to you

Staff Development

Staff development is a pre-requisite for the promotion of school effectiveness and school improvement. Accordingly, it is essential that the school plan makes provision for Continuing Professional Development.

Staff development includes personal development, team development and school development. It serves a number of major functions:

- ◆ It enhances the personal and professional lives of teachers
- ◆ It provides for the updating of old skills and the development of new skills
- ◆ It sets the groundwork for implementing school aims
- ◆ It facilitates the introduction of change
- ◆ It is a means of promoting shared values

Responsibility for staff development is shared. The school as a whole has a responsibility to develop policies and provide resources for staff development. But the individual teacher also has a stake in his or her development and should take some responsibility for it. If the individual does not own the development process, it will not happen. The school cannot force development to occur; it can only facilitate and encourage.

Identifying Staff Development Needs

Staff development needs can be identified through:

- ◆ The review of the school's provision and performance in relation to meeting pupils' needs
- ◆ The review of trends, which may indicate the emerging need for new skills
- ◆ The design of plans, which may indicate areas where training for staff is required before proposals can be implemented
- ◆ The evaluation stage of the planning process, which may reveal areas where additional expertise would be beneficial
- ◆ Teachers' reflection on their own work, which may lead them to identify strengths on which they would like to build or weaknesses that they would like to redress

Implementing Staff Development

Steps that might be taken to cater for staff development include:

- ◆ The provision and development of a staff library
- ◆ The development of an inservice education programme
- ◆ Research into courses of study that could be undertaken by staff
- ◆ The organisation of school-based curriculum days
- ◆ Inviting guest lecturers to speak to the staff
- ◆ Inviting individual teachers to report to staff on projects or approaches that they have developed, or on key aspects of courses or conferences that they have attended
- ◆ The provision of financial aid for staff development
- ◆ Facilitating staff attendance at relevant in-career development or post-graduate degree courses

Detailed guidelines on Staff Development are provided in **Unit 8**.

IV. Notes

1. Section I, **Staff Structures: General Framework**, draws on the ideas of David Tuohy
Section I, **Staff Structures: Specific Structures**, draws on the work of Sr. Una Collins

2. Section II, **Structures for Involving Other Stakeholders**, was influenced by the ideas of Sr. Una Collins

3. Section III, **Skills**, owes much to the following sources:

   Collaboration: Patrick Diggins, Eileen Doyle and Don Herron on "A Culture for Collaborative Planning"

   Communication: In-Career Development Unit, Department of Education and Science, *School Development Planning: A Resource-Pack for Facilitators*

   Teams and Teamwork: Deirdre Mathews, "Evaluation in the School Development Process: The Contribution of Internal Teams in Primary Schools", M. Ed. Thesis, University College, Dublin, 1997; In-Career Development Unit, Department of Education and Science, *School Development Planning: A Resource-Pack for Facilitators:* K. B. Everard and Geoffrey Morris, *Effective School Management*, London: Paul Chapman Publishing, 1990, 1996

   Meetings: Materials prepared by the Leaving Certificate Applied and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme Support Teams; K.B. Everard and Geoffrey Morris, *Effective School Management*

   Conflict:: Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument; K. B. Everard and Geoffrey Morris, *Effective School Management*

   Staff Development: Department of Education and Science, *Developing a School Plan: Guidelines for Primary Schools*, Dublin: Government of Ireland, 1999