



District
Management
Group

MANAGER'S TOOLKIT

Developing and Refining a Theory of Action

Originally published in *District Management Journal*, v.8, Fall 2011

Use this toolkit to identify the top three to five priorities for your district and envision what specific improvements will result from focusing on these areas.

Developing & Refining a Theory of Action

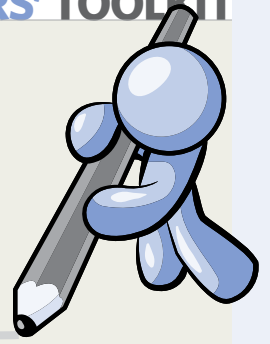
Step One : What do we believe?

At DMC, we structure the formation of a theory of action into three basic steps. This toolkit addresses Step One — drilling down to underlying assumptions and giving voice to core beliefs. Consider the list of common theory of action elements on p. 42 and 43. These elements target different priorities, from teacher quality to community engagement. Using the chart below, identify the top three to five priorities for your district, and envision what specific improvements will result from focusing on these areas.

Common theory of action elements (example: principal autonomy)		Why is this a priority? What underlying assumptions are you making about the root causes of performance in your district?
1.		
2.		
3.		

For most districts, a single element cannot express a comprehensive theory of action. The next step therefore is to tie the multiple elements together into a clear pathway from aspirational vision to desired student outcomes.

In our district, success is defined as _____. Our theory of action can be summarized as: if _____ then _____. We have _____ and spend more time on _____ and use fewer resources on _____. We will measure success by _____



Creating a District Theory of Action: Three Steps

What do we believe?

1

What do we look like now and
what do we want to look like?

2

How do we get there? What needs to change?

3

In three years, what specifically will be different in the district if this is fully implemented?

_____, and if _____, and if _____,
_____ key priorities and efforts that will create success for the district. In order to achieve these goals, we need to use more
_____. In order to free resources for this purpose, in the coming years our district will do less _____
_____.



Stay tuned!

This worksheet focuses on Step One of designing a revised theory of action. The District Management Council will be publishing a full toolkit for developing a Theory of Action that addresses all three stages of development. Check our website for updates!