The EI Team Process

Training Module

Labor and management working together to solve specific work process problems or implement new initiatives

This is an introduction to "employee involvement" (EI) teams for public service organizations developed by Millennia Consulting of Chicago, IL. Circa 2004. ICA Colleagues Jim Troxel and Karen Snyder, then members of Millennia, played a key role in the development of this program which was employed by several Illinois state agencies as well as a few large nonprofit organizations.

MILLENNIA CONSULTING®

28 East Jackson Boulevard
Suite 1700
Chicago, Illinois 60604
312-922-9920 • fax 312-922-0955
www.ConsultMillennia.com
Millennia@ConsultMillennia.com

The EI Team Process

Labor and management working together to solve specific work process problems or implement new initiatives.

Team process is circular, one thing leads to another and the process starts over once a team completes one project and begins another.

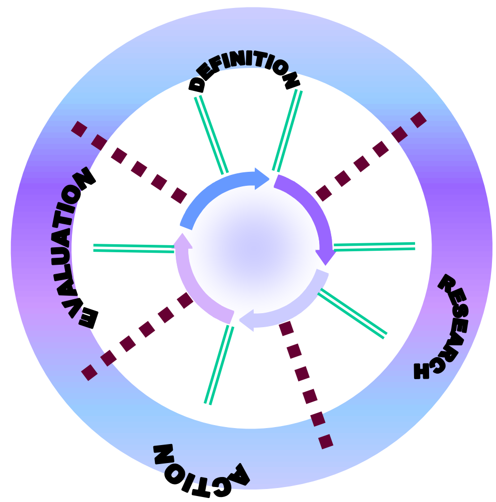
This team process is dynamic in nature. It will evolve and change over time but there are certain steps that all teams are expected to work through.

Learning objectives:

- To understand the flow of events.
- To comprehend the team process content of each step in the team building process.
- To grasp that teams have a beginning and an end.
- To realize that the process is data driven and outcomes oriented.

The Four Phases

THERE ARE FOUR PHASES of the process that a team should go through.



Phase I: Definition

Define mission, membership, and the project the team will focus it activities around.

Phase II: Research

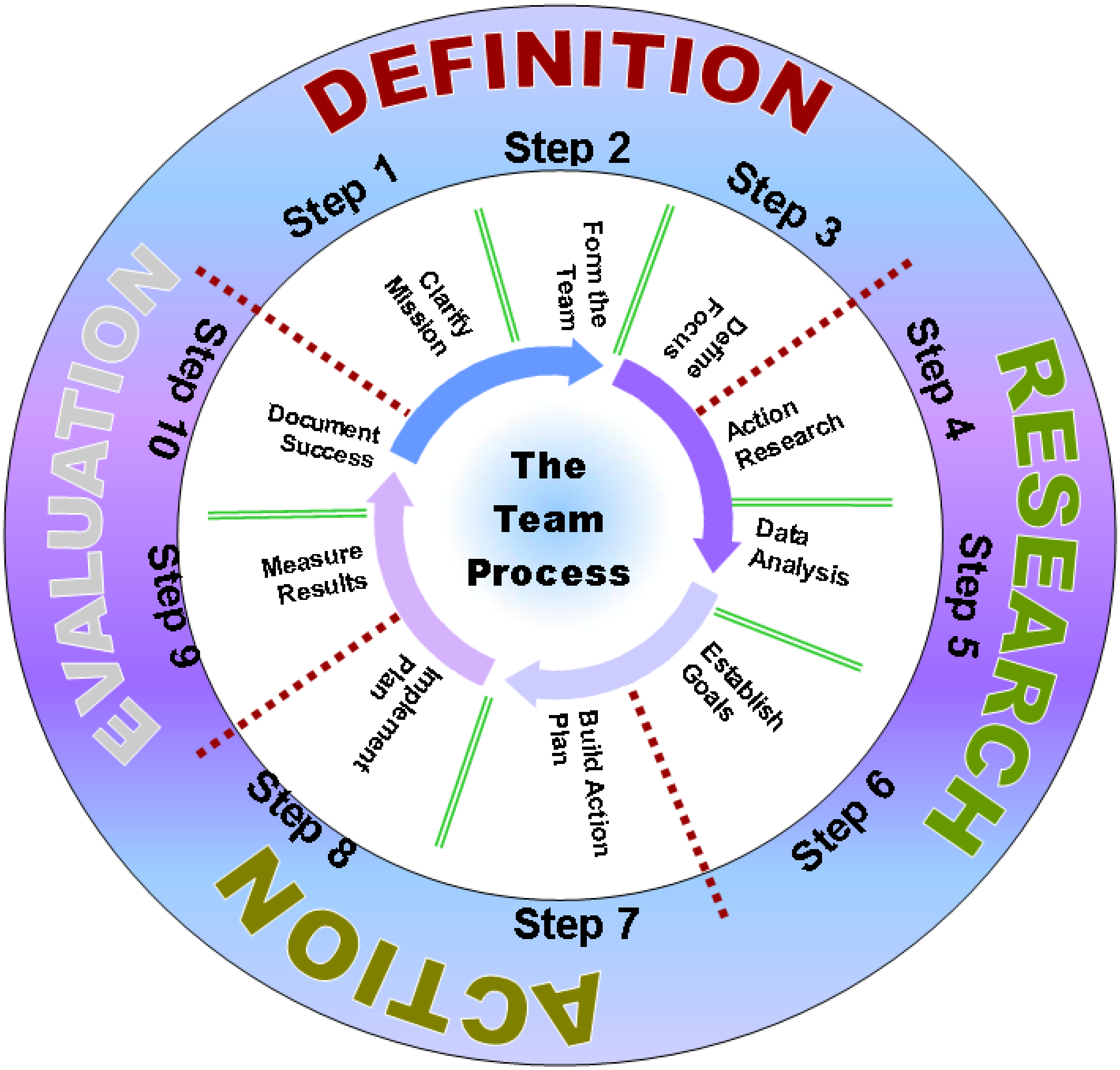
Is a data-driven process. Once a project focus is chosen, the team must gather relevant data so that decisions about problem solving or the development of new initiatives are based on facts not assumptions or myths. The team reviews its data and establishes goals based on information gathered.

Phase III: Action

Build a work plan that includes a detailed roster of activities timeline, and those responsible for achieving objectives. Assign tasks so that the team members themselves actually carry out the plan.

Phase IV: Evaluation

Here the team measures progress and outcomes and documents its successes and if necessary, its failures.



DEFINITION
RESEARCH
ACTION
EVALUATION
Step 1
Step 2
Step 3
Step 4
Step 5
Step 6
Step 7
Step 8
Step 9
Step 10
Clarify Mission
Form the Team
Define Focus
Action Research
Data Analysis
Establish Goals
Build Action Plan
Implement Plan
Measure Results
Document Success
The Team Process

Phase I - Definition

Step 1: Clarify Team Mission

Charters are designed to guide the team and set limits, but are not meant to stifle creativity or meaningful action.

Has the team written its charter?
- ✓ If yes, move on.
- ✓ If no, then

Step 2: Form the Team

Building the team is critical to its success. Time needs to be spent getting to know one another and educating each other about the team process as well as the roles and responsibilities of leaders and members.

Has the team been oriented to its task?
- ✓ If yes, move on.
- ✓ If not, schedule a team meeting to educate about roles and responsibilities.

Team members must understand the philosophy of participation and labor management equality that is the foundation of this effort.

The team is the launch pad and plays several important functions. Teams decide on the project focus, research agenda, objectives, tools, and evaluation measures. But even more importantly, the team models collaborative behaviors and must trumpet the cause.

Step 3: Define Focus

Within the parameters of its charter, the team needs to describe and localize the problem, issue, process or opportunity it will work on.

Has the team defined a problem, process or issue to address?
- ✓ If yes, move on.
- ✓ If not, use group decision-making techniques to help team describe, define, and narrow focus.

For example, the team might have decided its charter is to be a communications team, but communications is a broad topic area. Will the team work in internal, employee-to-employee communication or will it focus on communication to external audiences? What are the critical issues and how can they be solved?

Exercise: Case Study

Profile of a Child Welfare Office

Referring to the University of Chicago case study, **"Profile Of A Child Welfare Office 1998"** on the following page:

- Identify the work problems, processes or issues described in the case study.
- Use a flip chart to record all the possible problems that a team might select to work on.
- Quickly prioritize, selecting your two top choices for a team project.
- Apply the selection criteria to the top two choices.
- As a group, decide which would be the best choice, and why?
- Sometimes, a group may need to do data collection before deciding exactly what it will work on.

PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA

- Is the problem, process or issue doable?
- Will success in problem resolution empower employees?
- Will success have a multiplier effect?
- Will success make a real difference?

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SERVICE ADMINISTRATION
SSA MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE

PROFILE OF A CHILD WELFARE FIELD OFFICE*

Paul Jensen is a field services manager with the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). He has been with DCFS for twelve years. Jensen has worked as a child protection investigator, as a placement worker, and as a casework supervisor; he has been in his present position for two years. He oversees seven placement teams and their supervisors.

Jensen and his staff encounter difficult working conditions at their field office. The site is lacking in basic office supplies such as notepads and good pens. The one photocopying machine is frequently broken. When it is working, there is always a waiting line to use it. The individual offices are crowded, with up to seven caseworkers in one room. The file cabinets are crammed full, and some of them are difficult to open. According to Jensen, the Department has promised to provide funding to improve the physical facilities.

The office has not had a receptionist for almost a year. There is no one to answer the phones or take messages. The caseworkers often get complaints from clients and other professionals that they cannot be reached. Several staff members have suggested voicemail. Jensen agrees with them but has been told that it's "just not in the budget."

Jensen believes that his professional staff does an effective job under difficult circumstances. Overall, the staff is skilled in human services and committed to their work. He does have some specific concerns about a handful of people. Some caseworkers "lack a strong sense of professionalism." In addition, the Department has promoted some unqualified people to be supervisors. However, most of the workers "are dedicated people who really put their heart into their work and do their best."

Jensen is especially concerned about the stressful, crisis-oriented work environment that his staff faces. One supervisor noted that "I just don't have enough time to do weekly case conferences with my workers. Most of my time and energy is spent on patchwork and crisis intervention. I'm waiting for the problem that I can't fix and that turns ugly."

Jensen admits that the Department has made some progress in alleviating the problem of high caseloads, but he thinks that caseloads are still too high: "In the past few years, it seems that more cases are always coming in, but not enough cases are going out." In addition, the heavy paperwork is time-consuming and often diverts the workers from the direct services they should be providing. A related workload issue is the amount of time spent in juvenile court. Jensen's caseworkers often complain of "wasting the day" by sitting and waiting for their case to be heard by the judge. Caseworkers are also often scheduled for cases in more than one court calendar at a time.

The workload problems for Jensen and his direct service supervisors have been exacerbated by clinical practice retraining, which takes staff out of their offices for six weeks. In addition, says Jensen, filling vacancies on placement teams is a difficult and cumbersome process: "It's very time-consuming to fill vacancies. We've had to live with staff shortages for months on end."

---

* This case was written by Melissa Remolina and Carolyn Gleason under the direction of Lawrence B. Joseph and Laurence E. Lynn, Jr. All names mentioned in the case are pseudonyms.

Phase 2 – Research

Step 4: Action Research

The process is "data driven", "disciplined", and oriented towards short-term problem solving.

Teams cannot rely on hearsay but should fully investigate whether assumptions are accurate.

- Get the facts before selecting a team project.
- Get the facts during the problem solving process, too.

Has the team collected planning data necessary for innovation, problem solving or process re-engineering?

- ✓ If yes, move on.
- ✓ If not, team needs to look for root causes, data patterns, and/or investigate processes using data gathering tools learned in the team training.

Step 5: Data Analysis

Analyzing data and displaying it visually is important to team credibility and to the documentation process. A team wants to be able to make its case for a particular solution in a way that can be publicly examined and understood.

Taking data and putting it in graph or chart form is one way of showing others what has been discovered.

Has the team identified the root problem and created a vision of alternatives?

- ✓ **If yes, move on.**
- ✓ If not,
  - Team uses analysis of data to discern solutions.
  - Team explores alternatives and creates a vision for project outcomes that is attainable and measurable.

Step 6: Establish Goals

Each team must take its data and analyze results. The results will tell the team something about what its task is.

Examples of measurable goals might be:

- In six months, we will cut the time that caseworkers spend in juvenile court by 50%.
- In three months, we will reorganize inter-branch mail and materials delivery such that delivery time will be 50% shorter.
- In four months, we will …

Has team translated vision into measurable outcomes?

- ✓ If yes, move on.
- ✓ If not, refer to measurement of project outcomes presentation.

Good Goals are SMART Goals

Case Study

Data determined that library customers wanted faster inter-branch delivery

A one-page survey was sent to all branch personnel.

84 of 93 surveys returned-a 90% return rate.

Problem: inter-branch delivery of mail and materials took too long.

This case study is meant to exemplify how data was used to define the project focus and to update the group's understanding of the problems.

It is also an example of how one team surveyed its "customers". A team should view themselves as representing a constituency or consumer base. Customers might be other employees if the project focus is on an internal work process or policy, while the customer could be children or families if the team is addressing mentoring issues.

Never take for granted that you know what the customer wants. Use research methods to revisit the problem and update information.

Phase 3 – Action

Step 7: Build Action Plan

Action plans should be specific. They should include a listing of specific tasks to be accomplished by a particular date, and assign responsibilities to an individual or group of individuals.

Has team created an action plan to implement its goals?

- ✓ If yes, move on.
- ✓ If not, use action planning method to build a plan that includes specific activities, accountabilities, and a time line.

Step 8: Implement Plan

To ensure implementation of the action plan, schedule regular meetings where members report back progress, problems, etc.

Be flexible.

Has team scheduled regular meetings to check progress on action plan?

- ✓ If yes, move on,
- ✓ If not, schedule biweekly meetings to report on progress and trouble shoot, making needed adjustments.

Phase 4 – Evaluation

Step 9: Measure Results

Each goal should have a projected outcome that is measurable. In the library example, the team might have found that it was taking 2-3 days to delivery inter-branch mail.

If the team resurveyed its constituents after making changes and discovered that delivery had been cut to a day and a half, it would have decreased transfer time by 50%.

Has team measured progress toward its goal and compared with baseline data?

✓ If yes, move on.
✓ If not, team needs to gather baseline data, set benchmarks, and begin measuring project goals.

Step 10: Document Success

Capture the story

- How did the team work
- How did it settle on a project and why
- What steps were taken to collect data
- What did the data tell them
- What solutions did it lead the team to
- How did they use the data and their own action planning to achieve change

What was important and lasting about this process and its outcomes?

Use successful outcomes to promote change in other offices or in departmental policy by laying out the facts and "promoting" or "marketing" the story.

Generate support for problem solving. Determine the audiences that need to hear about your team's success and find a way to share your work with them.

Has the team documented the results of its efforts?

✓ If yes, move on.
✓ If not, then team needs to capture the story of its process and achievements in a report or story board format that allows others to appreciate team outcomes

Rollout or Adjourn?

A HALLMARK OF the team process is that teams and projects have a distinct beginning and end. We are not forming teams or projects that are never-ending. Each team should be selecting a doable, short-term project.

Teams need to understand the importance of completion. One project needs to formally conclude before a team begins something new. We want to avoid the phenomenon of ongoing committees that lose their focus, energy and momentum.

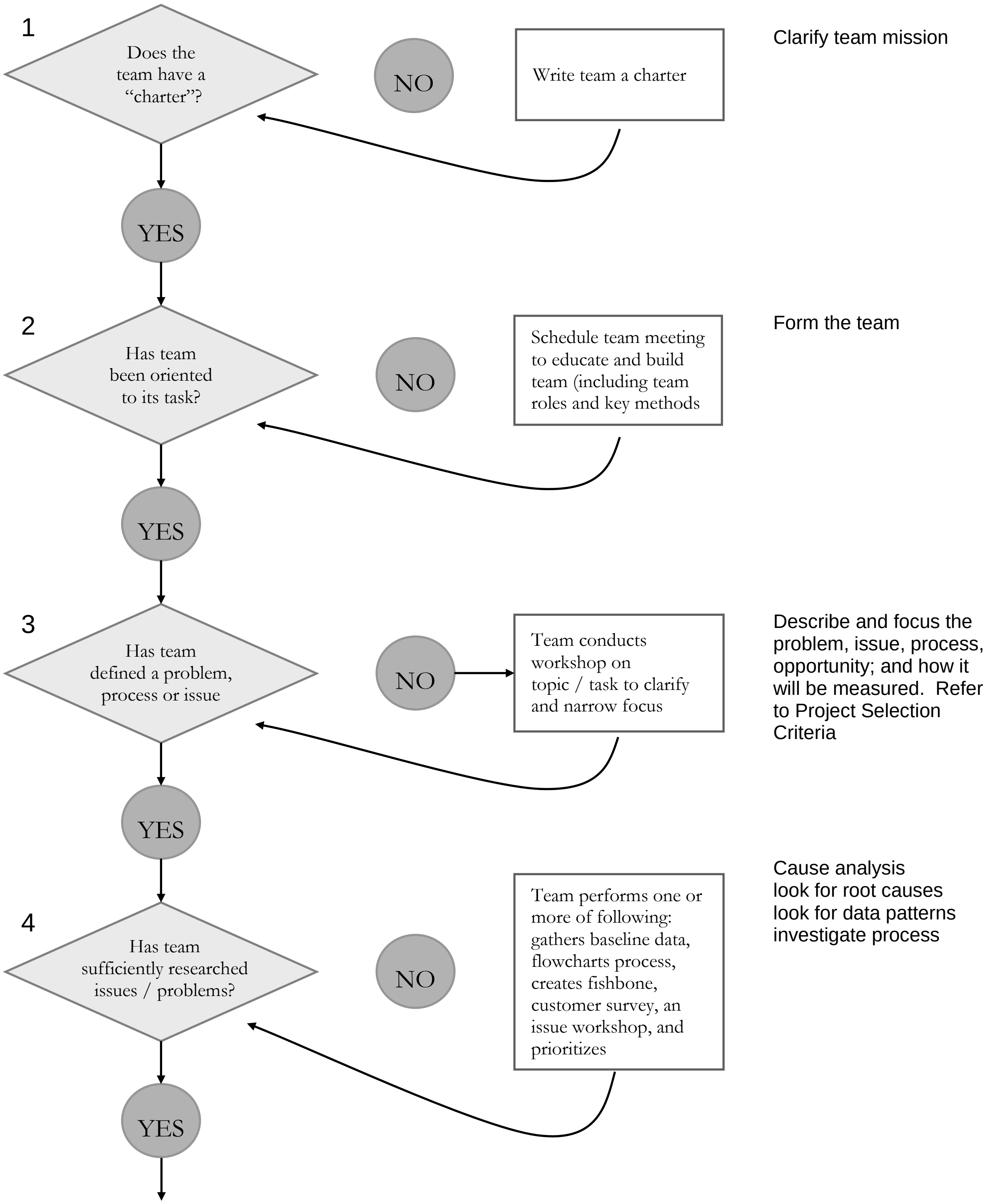
Should team project results be extended to the rest of organization?

- ✓ If yes,
- ✓ If team results do not seem relevant to the rest of the department, then has the team decided to adjourn or to select another project?

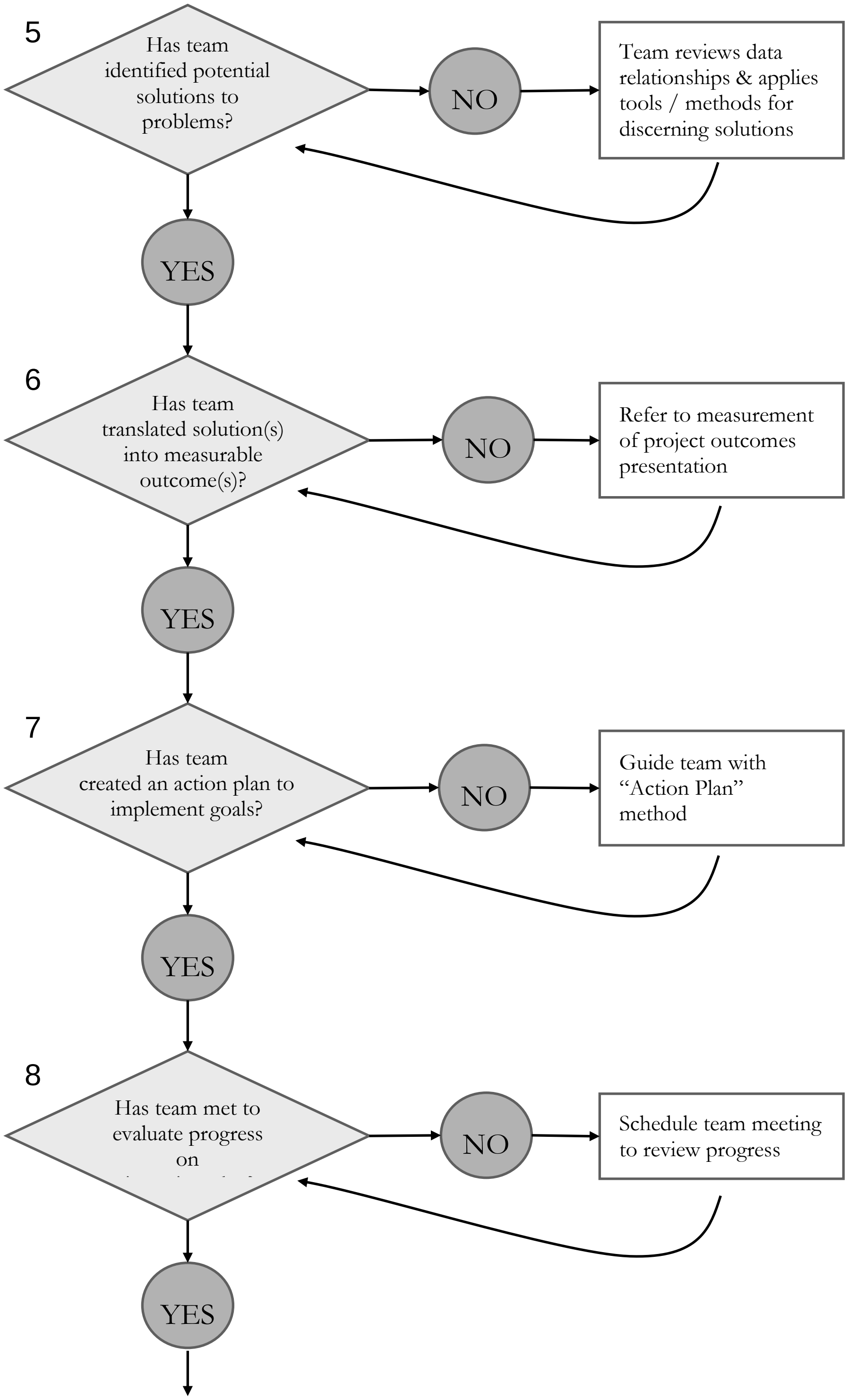
Hold a final meeting. Review your accomplishments over the course of the project. Acknowledge each other's hard work and contributions. Celebrate and have fun!

If the team plans to select a new project then it should formally conclude its current work and launch the 10-step process again.

Problem-Solving Process - Flowchart



Problem-Solving Process – Flowchart (continued)



Explore alternatives to the situation & create a vision for project outcomes

Establish S.M.A.R.T. goals

Build an improvement plan for the team to implement and acquire necessary support for the plan

Monitor plan's implementation and make necessary adjustments. This may take 2-3 months

Problem-Solving Process – Flowchart (continued)