

## Challenge Solving Protocols

This resource outlines reactive systems and protocols for unpacking and solving challenges. The first chart gives an example of how to capture and log challenges. Under “Example Protocols,” you can see systems for analyzing and unpacking challenges.

### Capturing Challenges

It can be helpful to develop a shared system for tracking challenges as they emerge. This could be in the form of a “Delta File” (delta meaning change), with ideas for short-term and long-term changes.

Delta File

Name	Date	Describe the challenge	Short- or long-term change?

### Example Protocols

The following protocols can be used to unpack challenges and progress to goals.

#### Example 1: SWOT Analysis

SWOT is an acronym for “strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.” The goal of this type of analysis is to gain an understanding of the internal factors (strengths and weaknesses) and external factors (opportunities and threats) that are influencing your team.

This protocol is most helpful to use when you’re planning a new project or initiative in order to think about everything that could potentially impact your success.

You can use SWOT discussions as the basis for a brainstorming session about where to take your team next. If you have a particular problem you’re concerned with, focus SWOT analysis directly on the issue. Start by drawing a large square on a whiteboard or paper. Divide the square into quadrants. Label the upper left quadrant “Strengths,” the lower left “Weaknesses,” the upper right “Opportunities,” and the lower right “Threats.”

After filling in the quadrants, talk about what stands out from this analysis. What is surprising? What are the next steps?

### Example 2: Decision Trees

A decision tree is another decision support tool that uses a tree-like model of decisions and their possible consequences. Decision trees are used to help identify a strategy most likely to reach a goal.

This protocol is most helpful to use when evaluating choices and chance events of a decision you or your team is making.

In a decision tree, each internal node represents a “test” on an attribute, each branch represents the outcome of the test, and each leaf node represents a label. A decision tree consists of three types of nodes:

- Decision nodes - typically represented by squares
- Chance nodes - typically represented by circles
- End nodes - typically represented by triangles

The decision-making tree is usually built starting with the initial decision option and moving through choices and chance events until all outcomes are reached. Once the tree is developed, you work backward from the outcomes to determine the values used to find the best path or set of choices to move through the tree.

### Example 3: Example Problem-Solving Process

This protocol is most helpful to use when there is a specific challenge that your team is working to solve.

Step	Questions to Consider
Identify and clarify the issue the team needs to address by phrasing the issue as a question	How can we ensure that all students are meeting the benchmarks in math?
Brainstorm where there is success regarding the issue	Where are students who struggle with math doing well?
Identify what is going on in the areas where success is being seen	What is occurring in these classes that contributes to student success?

Brainstorm ways to incorporate the identified successful practices into the problem area	How can we infuse math classes with the practices that are helping students succeed in other areas?
Develop a way to measure success	What formative assessments will we use to measure student progress in math?
Summarize and record the plan for addressing the issue	What practices will we try in the math classes? Who is responsible for implementation? When is our target date for implementation?

#### Example 4: Consultancy Protocol

A consultancy protocol is a structured process for helping an individual or team think more expansively about a particular challenge. Holding consultancy protocols helps build better school and classroom environments by building trust and relationships. Instead of simply identifying problems, everyone becomes part of the solution. This could easily be done for students during morning meeting/class meeting or during a staff meeting for teachers.

This protocol is most helpful to use to develop participants' capacity to see and describe the challenges that are essential to the success of their work and to help each other understand and deal with these challenges.

This example of a consultancy protocol was developed by Faith Dunne, Paula Evans, and Gene Thompson-Grove as part of their work at the Coalition of Essential Schools and the Annenberg Institute for School Reform.

Step one: Presenter overview, 5–10 minutes	<p>The presenter gives an overview of the challenge with which they are struggling and frames a question to the consultancy group to consider.</p> <p>Questions to guide your writing:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Why is this a dilemma or barrier for you? Why is this dilemma or barrier important to you?</li> <li>2. If you could take a snapshot of this dilemma, what would you/we see?</li> <li>3. What have you done already to try to remedy or manage the dilemma or barrier? What have been the results of those attempts?</li> <li>4. What do you assume to be true about this dilemma or barrier, and how have these assumptions influenced your thinking about the problem?</li> </ol>
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<p>Step two: Clarifying questions, 5–10 minutes</p>	<p>The group asks clarifying questions of the presenter. Questions should have brief, factual answers. Clarifying questions ask the presenter the “who, what, where, when, and how” of their problem. These are not “why” questions and generally can be answered quickly and succinctly. These questions are not meant to fuel discussion but to make clear any important points of reference.</p>
<p>Step three: Problem questions, 5–10 minutes</p>	<p>The group asks probing questions of the presenter. These questions should be worded to help the presenter clarify and expand their thinking about the presented challenge. Probing questions get to the “why” of the presenter’s problem. These may be open-ended inquiries. The presenter may respond to the questions, but there is no discussion of the presenter’s responses by the group. At the end of ten minutes, the facilitator will ask the presenter to restate their question to the group.</p>
<p>Step four: Group challenge discussion, 15–20 minutes</p>	<p>The consultancy group analyzes the problem while the presenter moves back from the circle, remains quiet, does not interrupt or add information, and takes notes during the discussion. Possible questions to frame the discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What did we hear?</li> <li>• What didn’t we hear?</li> <li>• What assumptions seem to be operating?</li> <li>• What questions does the dilemma or barrier raise for us?</li> <li>• What do we think about the dilemma or barrier?</li> <li>• What might we do, or try to do, if faced with the same dilemma or barrier?</li> </ul> <p>Members of the group sometimes suggest actions the presenter might consider taking. However, they work to define the issue more thoroughly and objectively.</p>
<p>Step five: Presenter reflection, 5–10 minutes</p>	<p>The presenter reflects on what they heard and on what they are now thinking. They then share with the group anything that particularly resonated during the consultancy.</p>
<p>Step six: Facilitator debrief, 2–5 minutes</p>	<p>The facilitator leads a brief discussion about the group’s observation of the consultancy process.</p>