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INNOVATIVE PRACTICE

Capability Gap Survey and Assessment Process

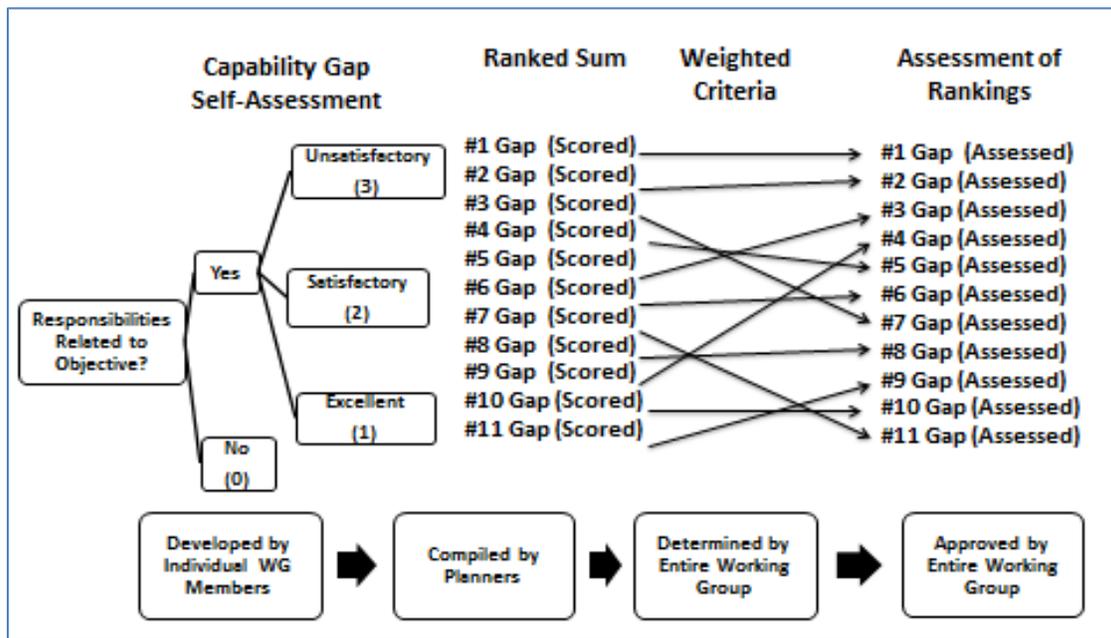


Figure 1: Capability Gap Survey and Assessment Process

SUMMARY

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Office of Operations Coordination and Planning, Plans Division uses a survey and assessment process to help inform capability-based planning at DHS. The process integrates self-assessments and strategic-level policy guidance via a survey tool to assess capability and capacity shortfalls more efficiently and accurately than otherwise possible.

DESCRIPTION

The Plans Division is periodically tasked to develop assessments of DHS operational capabilities. However, a traditional DHS-wide inventory audit might lack the accuracy, timeliness, and support necessary to successfully assess all capabilities useful for homeland security missions, especially complex ones like "preventing terrorism" that are hard to count

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or measure. To solve this problem, a different approach for collecting data and assessing capability and capacity shortfalls is necessary.

The first and most important step in the process is to convene a working group consisting of action officers from all the offices contributing to or impacted by the project. Members should have knowledge of the workings of their entire organization, not just the office or job they are assigned to perform. This is important because DHS has Components, divisions, and program offices with thousands of employees with very unique missions and authorities. In order to develop a comprehensive picture of capability gaps, the working groups need representation that can speak authoritatively on those capabilities or at least know whom to contact within their organizations to gather that data.

In addition, a list of pre-determined capabilities should be provided to the group members. This allows for an accurate "apples to apples" comparison of capabilities later in the process. The core capabilities identified via Presidential Policy Directive-8 are a good source for capability lists.

Next, the working group members should perform the following self-assessment steps:

- a) Review the list of individual pre-selected capabilities common to all participants.
- b) Determine if their organization has any responsibilities relevant to that particular capability and self-assess their organization's ability to perform each capability on a 0-4 scale. The ordinal scale provides sufficient level of detail for some hard-to-measure capabilities such as "deterrence".
 - 0) None: Organization has no responsibilities related to this capability.
 - 1) Excellent: Organization has responsibilities related to this capability and can easily meet its responsibilities.
 - 2) Satisfactory: Organization has responsibilities related to this capability and can satisfactorily meet its responsibilities.
 - 3) Unsatisfactory: Organization has responsibilities related to this capability but cannot satisfactorily meet its responsibilities.

When each working group member completes his/her self-assessment, all organization-specific results are aggregated into a single, ranked list of gaps with the ranking determined by those capabilities judged most unsatisfactory by the most participants.

Once the ranked sum of capabilities is scored, the working group members apply selection criteria and their knowledge of organizational equities, policy guidance, etc. to validate or readjust the rank order as necessary. This is important because the working group might recognize that some of the gaps identified are outside the scope of this project or are not feasible to resolve. At this point, the working group analyzes the survey results and adjusts the ranked list of gaps by multiplying the gap scores by weighted evaluation criteria developed by the working group. Examples of these criteria and the weighting may include:

- 1) Impact of the gap on lives, property, and national security **(x2)**
- 2) Estimated cost to implement corrective action **(x1)**
- 3) Technical feasibility of anticipated corrective action **(x1)**
- 4) The degree to which the agency has responsibility for the gap **(x2)**
- 5) The timeliness of potential solutions **(x1)**

The multiplication of the scored gaps by the evaluation criteria may result in a slight but noticeable reorganization of the results. However, using weighted evaluation criteria mitigates the impact of strong personalities or groupthink, and it reduces the time

necessary for the working group members to debate the rankings. The selection criteria are straightforward and transparent, and weighting allows for greater emphasis to be placed on the areas of greatest concern to senior leadership, which generates further buy-in from the working group members and the leadership they represent.

This process for identifying capability gaps is typically very well received and effective for strategic planning and policy making. The success of the process validates the assumption that asking organizations to self-assess their capabilities and then aggregating the results is faster and more accurate than other options available under a short timeline. In addition, the aggregation of specific results into a generalized list nullifies fears that the input provided by individual working group members will be used to “grade” capabilities of individual offices, divisions, etc. Instead, the process yields a broad and sufficiently general list that is appropriate for an organization-wide strategic assessment that does not penalize the individuals who contribute to the effort. Furthermore, the application of weighted selection criteria allows senior leadership to provide their priorities consistently across all the identified capabilities. Finally, the transparent and fair manner of the process increases buy-in for the effort and facilitates support and adoption of the results by the entire organization.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This process is recommended for situations where an expansive gap assessment is required but the time and/or resources necessary for a comprehensive inventory or audit are unavailable. It is also recommended for situations where a high degree of specialization exists across the organization and/or where substantial buy-in is required from the participating organizations to achieve success.

For example, the process might be used for assessing common counterterrorism prevention capability gaps across multiple organizations. The PPD-8 list of capabilities provides a standard list of capabilities to assess, and the scoring process allows the experts from each organization to assess their own capabilities without undue outside influence or fear that their assessments will be used against their organizations in a negative manner. The aggregation of the results and subsequent use of evaluation criteria provides senior leadership a quantifiable measure of their influence that nonetheless remains transparent and fair. Overall, the process succeeds because it applies an objective process to mitigate the complexities of an inherently subjective assessment topic.