improving leadership and management practices

One step at a time

by Jill Bella

All change, even the changes we perceive as positive, can create stress. As a result, many people naturally resist change. In our society we applaud those who make bold, grand changes, taking on monumental tasks or implementing ground-breaking, innovative initiatives. When successful these bold changes are celebrated, but when they fail the results are devastating — often forcing people to step backward and lose faith in future attempts at change.

Fortunately, there are other ways to approach change. In the Japanese culture there is a concept referred to as *kaizen*. Kaizen emphasizes taking small, doable steps in any change process, personal or organizational. The well-known quote from Lao Tzu captures this philosophy, "A journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step." Kaizen involves asking small questions, taking small actions, and solving small problems. Approaching change from this perspective helps eliminate the fear and resistance that

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can accompany the change process. By re-conceptualizing change as a series of small incremental steps, real improvements seem more achievable, yet the ultimate goal remains great.

Taking small steps toward change is a sensible way to improve the leadership and management practices in your early care and education program. As a program director you deal with a wide range of administrative issues. Your role as both leader and manager is pivotal to program success; you are the gatekeeper to quality. Without efficient and effective systems in place at the organizational level, quality teaching practices cannot be sustained at the classroom level.

As a director you must be able to make continuous improvements without alienating staff by asking them to make drastic changes that seem overwhelming and unachievable. Because many staff feel overworked, overstressed, and underpaid, any change that upsets the status quo is apt to be met with resistance. In order to reduce resistance and get buy-in, you must demonstrate that the change is attainable. Taking on change one step at a time is a way for you to simplify the goal and demonstrate success early on in the change process. The *Program Administration Scale* (PAS) is an assessment tool

designed to help you make change in small incremental steps.

The Program Administration Scale

Designed to complement the environment rating scales that measure the quality of learning environments, the PAS measures the quality of leadership and management practices of early care and education programs on a 7-point scale (from 1 meaning inadequate to 7 meaning excellent) on 79 quality indicator strands.

These indicator strands comprise 25 items clustered in 10 subscales: human resources development, personnel cost and allocation, center operations, child assessment, fiscal management, program planning and evaluation, family partnerships, marketing and public relations, technology, and staff qualifications. The 7-point continuum for each quality indicator strand allows you to easily see your program's strengths and target areas for improvement. As such, the PAS is a convenient and powerful tool for you to use in your early childhood program improvement efforts.
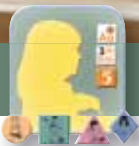
The program improvement process

The program improvement process using the PAS is straightforward and involves five steps:

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■ **Rate individual PAS indicators.** For each item in the PAS, begin by rating the indicator strands, progressing across each quality rubric from 1 (inadequate) to 7 (excellent). Depending on whether or not the indicator is met, you would note a Y (yes) or an N (no) in the spaces provided. For example, in the item Supervision and Performance Appraisal, one of the indicator strands includes the following indicator: "Written performance appraisal includes goals and professional development targets for the next year." If the performance appraisal process in your program includes these components, you would respond with a Y for this indicator. Figure 1 (below) provides an example of a completed PAS item. By simply rating the indicators, or asking small questions, you have taken the first step toward quality improvements. The

ratings allow you to easily identify leadership and management practices in place that support quality programming.

■ **Generate a score for the PAS items**. Once all of the indicators for an item have been rated, you can determine the item score by following the scoring rules found in the PAS book. An average PAS item score is generated by totaling all of the item scores and dividing by the number of items assessed. This score gives you an overall picture of the quality of administrative practices in your early care and education program.

■ **Create a PAS profile.** Once scoring is complete for all items, you can plot your scores on the graph provided in the PAS book. This profile provides a visual picture of the areas of strength in your program and the areas in need of

improvement. Your PAS Profile provides a snapshot of the current level of quality from an organizational perspective. Figure 2 (on opposite page) provides an example of a completed PAS Profile.

■ **Target areas for improvement.** The distribution of scores on the PAS Profile can help you determine where to begin making improvements in your program. Look for trends — items in a particular subscale that are consistently high or low. Determining which areas to target for improvement will depend on several things — your program's strategic priorities, the fiscal and human resources available, and the time available to devote to the program improvement process. In some cases you will want to tackle items that are easily achievable. In other cases, you
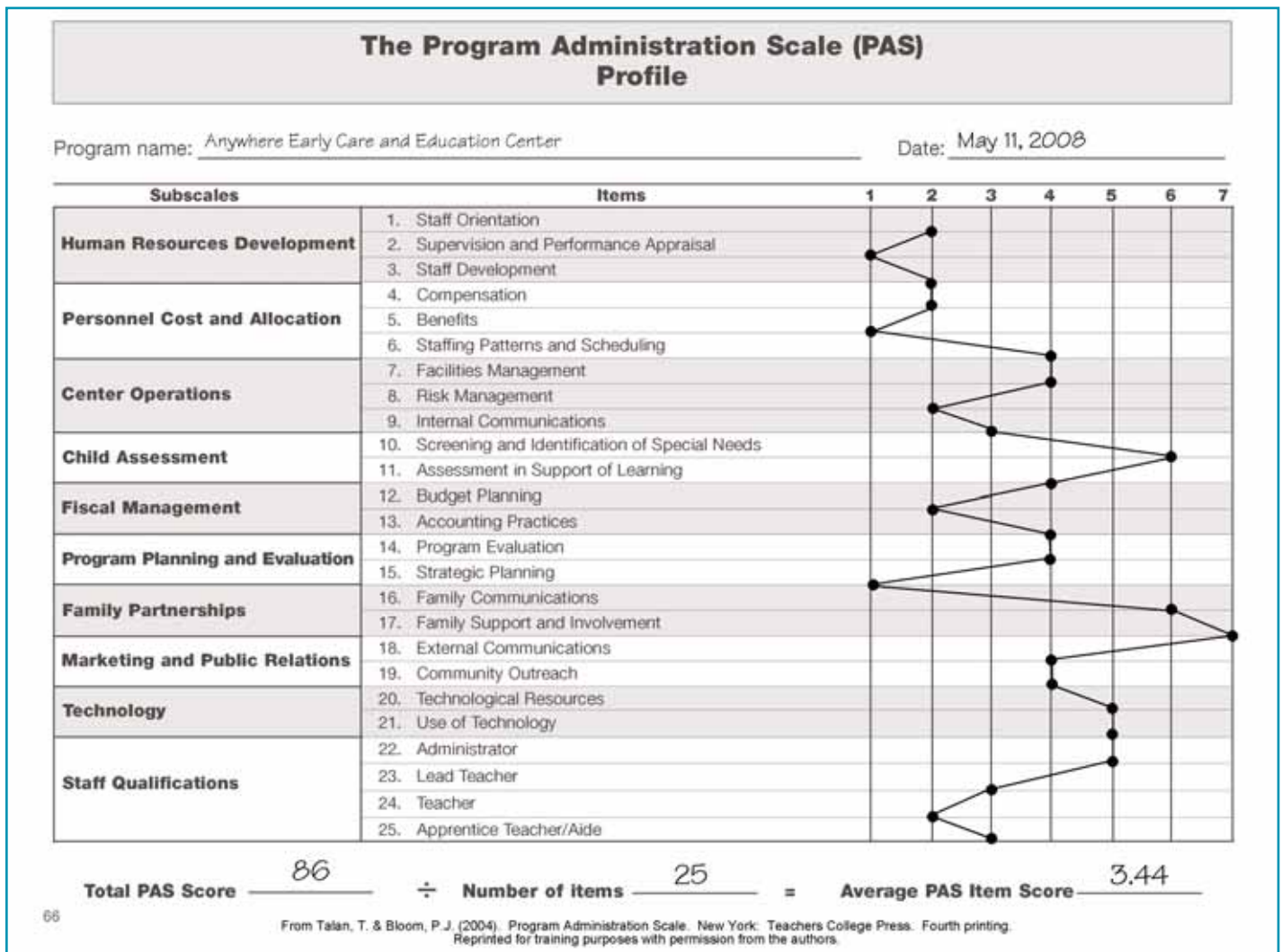
2. Supervision and Performance Appraisal

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Inadequate		**Minimal**		**Good**		**Excellent**

N 1.1 Written annual performance appraisal is not conducted for teaching staff.*	Y 3.1 D Written annual performance appraisal is conducted by supervisor for teaching staff.*	Y 5.1 D Teaching staff participate in annual performance appraisal process (e.g., written self-appraisal in file along with supervisor's appraisal).*	Y 7.1 D Written performance appraisal includes goals and professional development targets for the next year.
Y 1.2 Criteria used for performance appraisal are mostly subjective and trait-based (e.g., teacher is warm, friendly, caring).	N 3.2 D Criteria used for performance appraisal are mostly objective and behavior-based (e.g., teacher uses positive guidance techniques, asks children open-ended questions).	N 5.2 D Performance appraisal criteria differ by role and are tied to the specific responsibilities detailed in each job description.	N 7.2 D Performance appraisal includes multiple sources of evidence (e.g., artifacts, parent feedback, co-worker feedback).
N 1.3 Teaching staff are not formally observed as part of the supervision and performance appraisal process.**	Y 3.3 Teaching staff are formally observed as part of the supervision and performance appraisal process.**	Y 5.3 At least three times a year, supervisors provide teaching staff with written or oral feedback based on observation of the teacher's performance.	N 7.3 D A system is implemented to provide ongoing feedback and support to teaching staff.***

Comments:
1.2–3.2: Performance appraisal criteria are mostly subjective
5.2: Performance appraisal forms are the same regardless of teaching role (i.e., Lead Teachers and Apprentice Teachers complete the same form)
7.2: Performance appraisals do not include multiple sources of evidence
7.3: The only element of a system for providing ongoing feedback and support is concrete

Circle the final score based on the scoring rules on page 5.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

2. Supervision and Performance Appraisal

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The Program Administration Scale (PAS)
Profile

Program name: _Anywhere Early Care and Education Center_   Date: _May 11, 2008_

Subscales	Items	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Human Resources Development	1. Staff Orientation							
	2. Supervision and Performance Appraisal							
	3. Staff Development							
Personnel Cost and Allocation	4. Compensation							
	5. Benefits							
	6. Staffing Patterns and Scheduling							
Center Operations	7. Facilities Management							
	8. Risk Management							
	9. Internal Communications							
Child Assessment	10. Screening and Identification of Special Needs							
	11. Assessment in Support of Learning							
Fiscal Management	12. Budget Planning							
	13. Accounting Practices							
Program Planning and Evaluation	14. Program Evaluation							
	15. Strategic Planning							
Family Partnerships	16. Family Communications							
	17. Family Support and Involvement							
Marketing and Public Relations	18. External Communications							
	19. Community Outreach							
Technology	20. Technological Resources							
	21. Use of Technology							
Staff Qualifications	22. Administrator							
	23. Lead Teacher							
	24. Teacher							
	25. Apprentice Teacher/Aide							

Total PAS Score _86_   ÷   **Number of items** _25_   =   **Average PAS Item Score** _3.44_

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may decide to tackle items that require a long-term commitment. In either case, the kaizen approach will work. Items that are easily achievable usually require less significant change on the part of those involved. These types of changes also usually build on practices and policies that already exist. Items that require a long-term commitment may seem overwhelming but can be broken down into achievable steps using an action plan.

■ **Develop an action plan.** Targeting an area for improvement will be an idle exercise in daydreaming unless there is follow-up with a concrete action plan. Your action plan should embrace the concept of kaizen, noting improvements in small achievable steps, or objectives. The objectives should include additional information necessary for their success. Figure 3 (see page 10) provides a sample action plan for improving Item 2 on the PAS.

Supervision and performance appraisal

This action plan focuses on the second indicator strand in Item 2 — the criteria used to measure performance in the center's performance appraisal system. As evident in the example, the objectives are precise statements of what needs to be done to achieve a positive rating in this indicator strand. For each objective, detailed action steps are described and the individuals responsible for completing the action steps are noted along with the resources and time needed to accomplish each action step. In addition, the action plan includes evaluation checkpoints to assess progress and determine if the objective has been met.

Small steps can support big changes

Using the PAS for self-assessment and creating an action plan to improve program quality based on the results may seem like a daunting task. But following the kaizen approach and making small incremental changes can help reduce feelings of anxiety, encourage creativity, and increase effectiveness. By choosing one item on which to work and crafting an action plan for improving that item's score, you will be taking an important step in creating a norm of continuous improve-

ment in your program and helping to
achieve your goal of program
excellence.

*The most efficient and effective route to bold
change is the participation of everyone,
every day in incremental change.*
— Tom Peters

References

Talan, T., & Bloom, P. J. (2004). *The
Program Administration Scale: Measuring
Early Childhood Leadership and
Management.* New York: Teachers
College Press.

Action Plan

Goal: Performance appraisal criteria will be more objective and appraisals will be more individualized. (PAS Item #2)   **Date:** May 11, 2007

Objectives	Action Steps	Person Responsible	Time	Resources Needed (people, materials, $$$)	Evaluation Checkpoints
To change performance appraisal criteria so they are objective and behavior-based (e.g. teacher uses positive guidance techniques, asks children open-ended questions). (Indicators 1.2 & 3.2)	▶ Review currently used and sample performance appraisals for objective and behavior-based criteria and determine which criteria should be included in performance appraisals ▶ Create new performance appraisals that are mostly objective and behavior-based.	▶ Director ▶ Director and Administrative Assistant	▶ 8 hours to research and refine self-appraisals ▶ 4 hours to create, format, and edit	▶ Internet, *Blueprint for Action* book, community Director's Network members ▶ Computer	▶ Feedback from staff on new form at weekly meeting. Feedback from mentor at next meeting. ▶ Review forms after using for mid-term appraisals.
To differentiate current performance appraisals so they reflect the various teaching roles at the center. (Indicator 5.2)	▶ Review job descriptions for lead teachers, teachers, and apprentice teachers and determine which responsibilities are not included in the current performance appraisals for each	▶ All teaching staff and director	▶ Approximately 2 hours of planning time	▶ Current job descriptions, current performance appraisals	▶ At next program meeting staff will submit edits to current performance appraisals
To increase sources of evidence used in the performance appraisal process to include artifacts, parent feedback, and co-worker feedback. (Indicator 7.2)	▶ Develop parent feedback form ▶ Develop co-teacher feedback form ▶ Implement portfolio system	▶ All teaching staff and director ▶ All teaching staff and director ▶ Director	▶ Approximately 4 hours ▶ Approximately 4 hours ▶ Approximately 50 hours over the year	▶ Sample parent feedback forms ▶ Sample co-teacher feedback forms ▶ Workshop presenter on the topic of professional portfolios ($225), digital camera ($150)	▶ At next program meeting staff will go over both feedback forms ▶ At end of each month teachers add two items to their portfolio