

The Achievable Project Test

The Achievable Project Test (APT Test)

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On many occasions, an individual or a group comes up with an idea for a project that they feel will help students or colleagues in their school. Very often, they enthusiastically develop the idea among themselves and then request a meeting with the Principal or Vice-principals to gain support for the project. Thoughtfully answering the questions in the following Achievable Project Test (APT Test) can help people determine the degree to which the proposed project seems feasible. The acronym PLANS highlights the five key sets of questions in the APT Test:

P = Purpose of the project

L = Learning that must take place

A = Adaptations required by those involved

N = Needs that must be met

S = Support required, i.e., human, physical and fiscal resources

Purpose: The first and most important question to ask in such a situation is: How relevant is the project and how well is it defined? It is important to take the time to consider the following questions and develop appropriate answers for each of them:

- Why is the project needed at this time?
- What are the major objectives? Are they in line with the school's vision?
- What actual changes will occur when the project is implemented?

It often takes some time to clearly define a project, but taking the time to do so is time well spent as being able to articulate why a project is needed and the benefits that will emerge from it are absolutely essential in gaining support for the project.

Learning: Very often in school settings, proposed projects involve people learning how to do something in a new way. Therefore, another key question to consider and one that is sometimes forgotten is: How much learning must take place before the proposed project can be successfully implemented by:

- Students?
- Teachers?
- Administrators?
- Support staff?

If the answer to the above questions is that there is a great deal of learning involved by the above people, then the challenge of implementing the project will increase exponentially. Hence, it is important to consider what must be learned and when and how such learning will take place.

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Adaptation: As noted above, implementing projects in school settings often requires people to change their practice. Hence, before initiating a project it is important to consider the degree to which people will have to change their usual behaviors. In other words, how much adaptation is required by the people involved in terms of their:

- Current practices?
- Work habits?
- Work environment?

Again, if people have to change “the way they do things”, then time and opportunities should be made available for them to understand why they need to do so.

Needs: Answering the above questions related to the purpose, learning, and behavioral adaptations involved in implementing a project can help people assess the resources that will be required to successfully implement a project. Quite simply, think through what people need to implement the project under each of the following headings:

- Human: time, opportunities to learn, practice skills, etc.?
- Physical?
- Financial?
- Technical?

Accurately identifying the potential needs of the project helps answer the final set of questions regarding the support that is available for it.

Support: Based on the answers to the above questions, the final question that must be considered in determining the achievability of a proposed project is: How much support is available to meet the above needs, in terms of:

- Human resources?
- Physical resources?
- Technical resources?
- Financial resource?

This final question is extremely important as it is quite unfair to begin a project without thinking through whether the required resources are available or potentially available in the future. It is very unwise to begin a project without answering the above APT Test question, as it is extremely demotivating for people to begin a project and then find that they do not have the time or the resources to actually implement it. In sum, reflecting on the above five sets of questions can provide helpful information on whether a proposed project is actually achievable.