

## Exercise | Theory of Action

In this exercise, we'll work together to develop an action plan to address issues of sexual harassment in the library. A theory of action framework will help us analyze the situation from multiple angles and in three perspectives: staff, managers, and administration. Creating a theory of action results in an if-then statement that summarizes the actions that will be taken. Through the process, we'll examine underlying assumptions, prioritize different action steps, and strategize how to act in such a way that we reach a desirable outcome while still building relationships and strengthening the library's core. A theory of action is basically an overarching approach that is composed of different strategies that speak to interrelatedness of each group of stakeholders. This approach is frequently used in strategic planning for schools and other educational institutions, and we've adapted it here.

### Who are our stakeholders?

In this example, we've identified three major stakeholders that are common to all libraries: **administrators**, **managers**, and **staff**. If your library has a different structure - perhaps a large system with multiple branch managers who in turn supervise other department managers, you might take this exercise back to your library with four stakeholder groups. Whatever your needs, the process remains the same.

### What approach will we take?

First, we'll do a quick brainstorm, working backwards from where we most want to see the change (staff) to the group that has the most power to set change into motion (administrators). Then, we'll explore each stakeholder group in depth, ultimately drafting ideas for strategies to engage each stakeholder group. At the end, we'll have produced a clear, strategic action statement (and created an example of a process you may wish to employ at your library.)

### Brainstorm: Actions & Feelings

A good theory of action looks at actions *and* motivations. Let's freewrite - list the first few words that pop into your head for each stakeholder group.

How should our stakeholders *feel* once you've taken action? → This is your "why."

Administrators	Managers	Staff

What do you want them to *do*? → This is your "how."

Administrators	Managers	Staff

### Brainstorm: Mad Libs

If our administrators \_\_\_\_\_, then  
managers will be better able to \_\_\_\_\_,  
which help staff members \_\_\_\_\_.

**Stakeholder group 3: Staff**

How does the team experience sexual harassment? What are the issues we are facing?

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How do we know this is a problem?

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Are there processes in place to address these issues? Does everyone understand them?

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What about the staff experience needs to change?

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## Stakeholder group 2: Managers

How are managers supporting their staff?

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What are managers doing (or not doing) to empower their staff?

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Are there any processes or management styles that *discourage* staff from raising these issues?

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What are some steps managers could take to better support and empower their team?

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**Stakeholder group 1: Administrators**

How does the director approach this topic? Is this something you've talked about before?

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Do managers feel empowered to support their teams? Do they have support from admin?

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How does the director find out what's happening? Is the process working?

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What changes could be made to ensure managers have what they need to support their team?

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**Prioritization**

Our top priority for staff is: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

The action for managers that will have the biggest impact is: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Administration can best support managers by: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Theory of Action**

If library administrators...	then managers will...	so that staff members...

**Strategies**

Stakeholders	Strategies	Tactics