THE "THINK TANK" PROCESS

THINK TANK

COLLEGE OF PHARMACY
The University of Tennessee Health Science Center
Memphis • Knoxville
ORIENTATION TO THE “THINK TANK” PROCESS
The University of Tennessee Health Science Center College of Pharmacy

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The College of Pharmacy-sponsored “think tank” groups each follow a certain process, as described below, to achieve their goals.

1. Adoption of an “STP” approach to problem identification and resolution

We will first try to agree on what the problem is that we want to address. This can be called the current Situation. (In other words, what’s broke?). It is important that we have a common understanding of the problem we will be working on.

Next, we will pool our thoughts on what the Target is that we’re trying to achieve. What does a successful outcome “look like”? This should be as specific and graphic as we can make it. We should all agree on this vision of the endpoint.

Third, (and this is the tough part), we will develop a Proposal for how we move from where we are (S) to where we want to be (T). The proposal should include specific, achievable, measurable intermediate steps. (This is really a strategic plan.)

2. Pooling our latent information and knowledge

All members of the group will each be encouraged to share their experiences with the topic, offer opinions based on their experiences, and/or summarize what they have learned from reading the literature or discussing the topic with colleagues who have had some experience in this arena. In this step, we are learning from each other.

3. Literature review

Key articles from the literature will be distributed for review and discussion.

4. Identification of questions that need to be answered

Based on steps 2 and 3, the group will identify gaps in our knowledge that need to be addressed. These needs might be addressed by (1) data collection and analysis, (2) bringing in an expert consultant, or (3) a combination of (1) and (2).
5. **Regrouping after we have answered the questions**

As a group, we will consider what we have learned through the exercise described in step 4 above. We may at this point uncover additional questions that need to be addressed. This is an iterative process.

6. **Developing a set of tentative recommendations**

The “deep thinking” part of the process occurs here. We will need to think creatively, boldly, and synergistically. We will need to take lessons from past failures, but not be too quick to conclude that what didn’t work in the past can’t work in the future. The output from this step is a tentative roadmap from $S$ to $T$.

7. **Gestation period**

It is important to build in some time for reflection on the output from step 6. This might be a week or two.

8. **Development of final report**

The final meeting of the group will be devoted to refining its recommendations after having had time to reflect on the group discussion in step 6. The final recommendations should be supported by a narrative that helps the reader understand how the recommendations were arrived at.

Although the College of Pharmacy is sponsoring this “think tank” group, it is hoped (expected) that the recommendations would apply broadly to all health professions educational programs and practice settings.