



# “Year of Democracy”

## Whole School Democratic Empowerment Quality Handbook



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## Empowering Schools in the “Year of Democracy”

This handbook serves as a key reference and guidance tool for your school as you navigate the ‘Year of Democracy’. As a structured guide, it helps you not only to embody a democratic school culture, but also to embed it in a measurable and sustainable way within your day-to-day school life and your quality management system.

As part of this process, you will use tried-and-tested methods of school development to understand democratic goals as an integral part of your quality management system (QMS). This handbook supports you in documenting processes in such a way that they meet the requirements of modern, participatory education.

### **This programme is designed to:**

- ◇ Illustrate the whole school approach: Show, in a clear and practical way, how schools can pursue democracy goals as an integral part of their development. This directly contributes to fostering active participation across the educational community and empowers school leaders and teachers to create truly learning-promoting environments.
- ◇ Stimulate democratic processes: Provide tangible materials and guidance that enable school leaders and teachers to implement concrete democratic procedures within their primary schools. This empowers teachers to support learners in developing crucial key competences for active citizenship and lifelong learning, fostering a truly learner-centered environment.
- ◇ Strengthen Quality Management Systems (QMS): Extend existing QMS frameworks by integrating democracy targets and the whole school approach. The ultimate goal is to embed a democratic culture at all levels of the school, ensuring all stakeholders benefit from increased participation and empowerment. This also upskills school leaders and teachers in leveraging their QMS for democratic education.

This handbook ensures that your school adopts a consistent and well-considered approach. By working through the four phases and six milestones, you will generate valuable evidence to support your school’s development. You are not merely guiding your school through a project; you are building a robust, tried-and-tested model for strengthening a democratic school culture that will endure long after the project year has ended.

## Quality Guidelines for the Process

To ensure that the “Year of Democracy” has a lasting impact and meets the requirements of your quality management system, its implementation is guided by the following principles:

- ◇ Resource-based approach: We build on the strengths that already exist at your school. Existing democratic practices are identified and developed in a targeted manner.
- ◇ Participation as standard: Quality arises from participation. The involvement of all groups (teachers, pupils, parents, school management) is not only a goal but a prerequisite for every step.
- ◇ Evidence-based management: Decisions are based on concrete data (coACTION Sensor). This ensures an objective basis for school development.
- ◇ Transparency and communication: A continuous flow of information within the entire school community ensures that the process remains transparent and is accepted.
- ◇ PDCA cycle (Plan-Do-Check-Act): Measures are planned, implemented, reviewed and adjusted where necessary. This systematic reflection is at the heart of your quality assurance.

# Democratic Empowerment Process

The process of fostering a more democratic school environment is visually represented in the image below. This handbook serves as your step-by-step companion, explaining and making every phase of this standardized process comprehensible. Follow these guidelines to effectively support the schools on their democratic development journey.

*Note on the diagram: Please note that the diagram shown here has been simplified for ease of use. A flowchart breaking down the steps individually can be found in Appendix 1 of this handbook.*

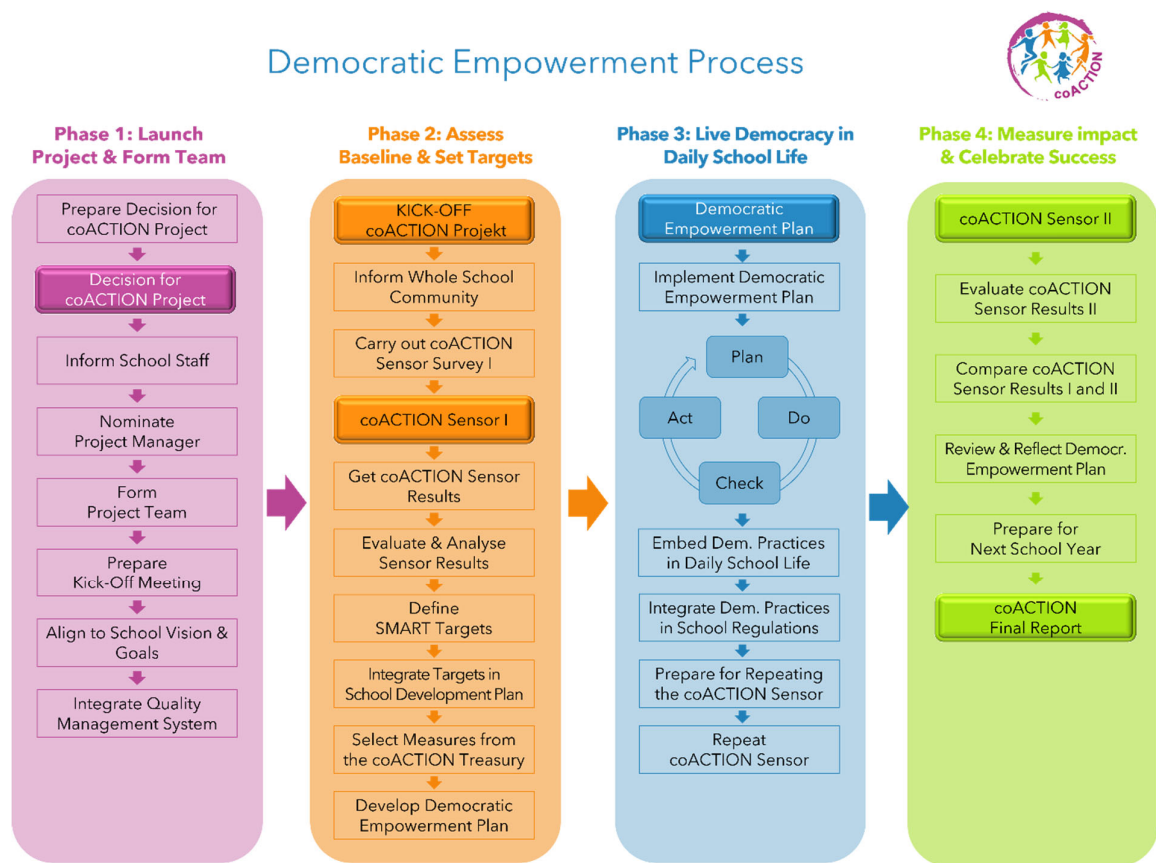


Fig. 1: Democratic Empowerment Process

## Quality Assurance Tools

To further facilitate the schools' progress and ensure a cohesive approach across all participating countries, several key tools complement this coach's guide:

### Guide to Democratic Empowerment (online, interactive – [LINK](#))

Designed specifically for schools, this interactive guide is hosted on the [Democratic Empowerment Platform](#). It offers modular content, correlating directly with specific steps in the coACTION process. Through easy-to-understand lessons, it provides schools with practical guidance for their democratic development.



Fig. 2: Democratic Empowerment Guide Modules & Project Phases

### coACTION Diary ([LINK](#))

The [coACTION Diary](#) is your key tool for structured documentation. Here you can record your progress, document completed activities and collect valuable reflections and observations from everyday school life.

In terms of quality management, the diary serves as ongoing evidence of your process quality and internal school development.

The particular advantage: by keeping it up to date, you create the perfect database for generating your coACTION final report at the end of the year virtually "at the touch of a button".

## coACTION List of Milestones (LINK)

This [List of Milestones](#) provides an overview of the key success factors for the project. The milestones ensure that your school development remains on track with the agreed timetable and that the essential quality criteria are met at the right time.

### Project Phases, Timeline and Milestones

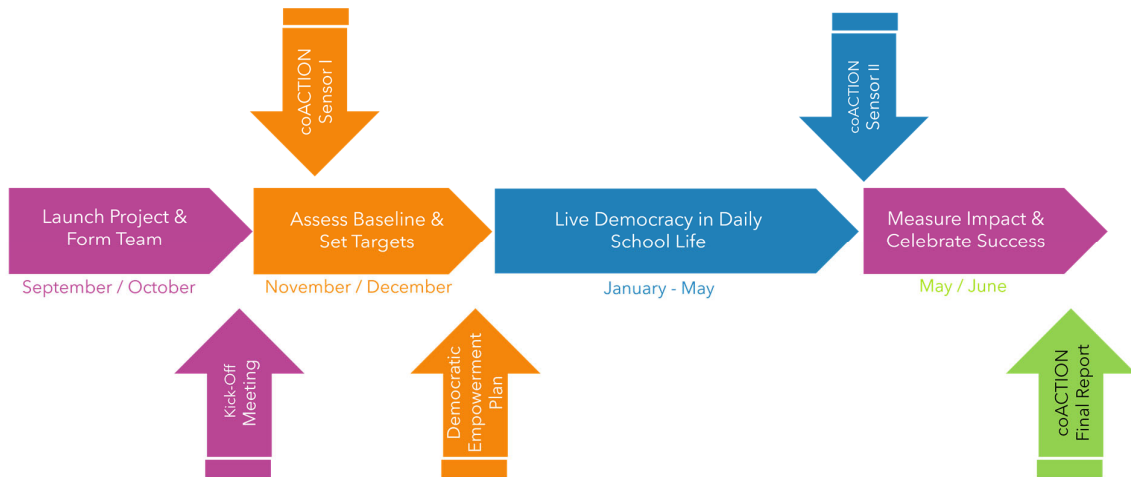
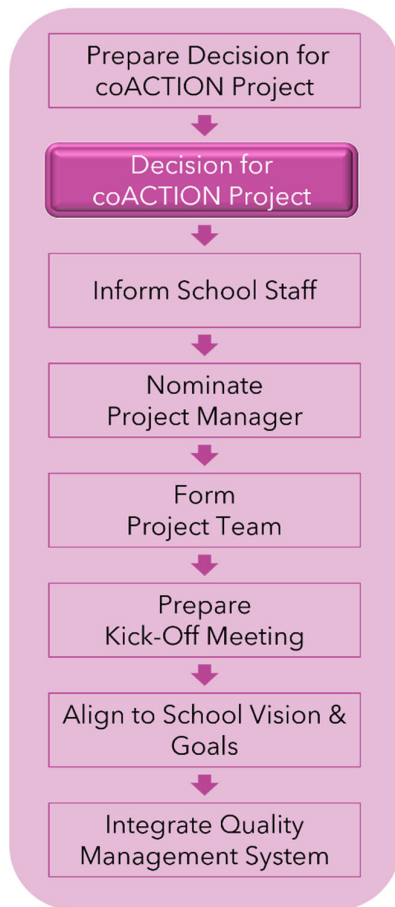


Fig. 3: Project phases, timeline and milestones

Where necessary and appropriate, this handbook contains explicit references to these tools. The synergy between the Guide (knowledge), the Diary (documentation) and the Milestones (monitoring) enables your school to systematically achieve its democratic goals.

**Supporting Material:** Guide for Democratic Empowerment, Module 0: "What's it all about?"

## Phase 1: Launch Project & Form Team



### Key Objective of Phase 1:

By the end of this phase, the “Year of Democracy” (YoD) project will be officially established at your school. You will have set up a well-informed project team under clear leadership, held the kick-off meeting, and ensured that the project objectives are aligned with your school’s vision and your existing quality management system (QMS). This lays the foundation for the upcoming data collection (Sensor).

Fig. 4: Phase 1 of the Project: Process Steps 1 – 7; Milestone 1

### Step 1: Prepare Decision for the coACTION Project

**Objective:** Secure a clear, collective decision from school management and key stakeholders (school team, parent representatives if appropriate) to participate in the project.

**Procedure:**

- Convene a meeting with the school management and teaching staff to establish the vision and long-term benefits of a stronger democratic culture.

**Checklist Item:**

- Has the school leadership formally committed to the project?
- Is this commitment clearly communicated internally?

**Supporting Material** (online): Guide for Democratic Empowerment, Module 1: “Let’s get started!”

## Milestone 1: Decision for coACTION Project

This milestone is achieved when the following outcomes have been met:

- ◇ Commitment from the school management: Formal approval has been given by the school management and the project objectives have been finalised.
- ◇ Team mobilisation: The necessary staff resources have been allocated and the core team has been established.
- ◇ Informed school community: The project has been communicated transparently and all stakeholders are on board.

### Step 2: Inform & Activate School Staff

**Objective:** The entire school staff is fully informed about the project and invited to actively participate.

**Procedure:**

- Communicate the "Why": Explain the core motivation behind the project and highlight the benefits for pupils, the teaching staff, and the wider school community.
- Utilize Existing Channels: Use established communication platforms (e.g., staff meetings, newsletters, internal briefings) to ensure transparency and provide space for questions.

**QM Checklist:**

- Has the entire staff been informed about the project's objectives and the planned timeline?
- Is there a clear channel established for feedback and questions from staff members?

### Step 3: Nominate coACTION Project Manager

**Objective:** The school management establishes a central coordination point for the entire process, the coACTION Project Manager.

**Procedure:**

- Appoint a lead to guide the project throughout the school year (e.g., coordinating team meetings, communicating with management and staff, and tracking project progress).

**QM Checklist:**

- Has the Project Manager been officially named and informed of their specific responsibilities?

## Step 4: Form the coACTION Project Team

**Objective:** A dedicated team of teachers (and potentially other stakeholders) manages the project operationally and represents the whole school community.

**Procedure:**

- Before finalizing the team, issue an open invitation. The entire staff is invited to volunteer for active participation in the project team.
- Form the team based on the feedback received. Aim for a diverse mix (different grade levels, departments, and where applicable, parents and pupils) to include a wide range of perspectives.
- The foundation of the team is a genuine interest in democratic development, ensured by the principle of voluntary participation.

**QM Checklist:**

- Was a transparent invitation to participate sent to all staff members?
- Is the project team functional and representatively composed based on voluntary sign-ups?

## Step 5: Prepare the Kick-off Meeting

**Objective:** The kick-off meeting marks the official start of the coACTION project. Together, the project team establishes the framework and clarifies the distribution of necessary roles..

**Procedure:**

- Hold a moderated meeting with the following agenda:
  - Welcome address by the school management.
  - Introduction of the project team and individual roles.
  - Initial assessment: Which democratic measures are already in place?
  - Definition of communication channels and regular meeting schedules.
  - Introduction to the coACTION Diary.

**QM-Checklist:**

- Did the Kick-off meeting take place with all team members present?
- Was the Diary introduced as the primary documentation tool?

## Step 6: Align the Project with School Vision & Goals

**Objective:** To ensure long-term sustainability, this step confirms that the project supports the school's long-term strategy (vision, mission, and goals).

**Procedure:**

- Examine the current school vision, mission statement, and the School Development Plan (SDP).
- Explicitly formulate how the "Year of Democracy" project complements or sharpens these existing values.

**QM-Checklist:**

- Is the link between project objectives and the school vision formally documented?

## Step 7: Integrate the School's Quality Management System

**Objective:** The project team uses the existing Quality Management System (QMS) as a foundation for the upcoming steps.

**Procedure:**

- Examine existing quality documentation and development plans.
- Pinpoint specific areas where democratic goals can be seamlessly integrated into the official school development processes later on.

**QM-Checklist:**

- Has the coACTION Project Team familiarized themselves with the school's Quality Management System (School Development Plan)?

**Supporting Material** (online): Theory & Background, Module Quality Management: "An Eye on Democracy"

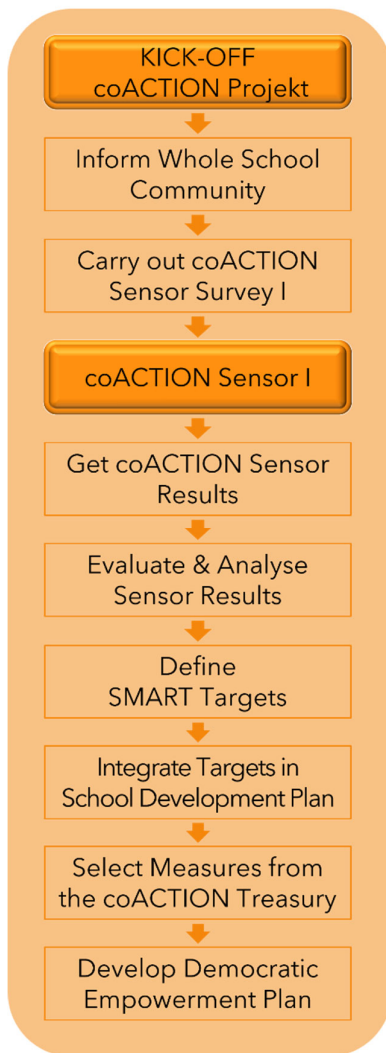
## Milestone 2: Project Kick-off

This milestone is achieved when the following results are documented and available:

- ◇ Appointed Project Lead: A responsible Project Lead has been officially nominated and serves as the central point of contact for the entire duration of the project.
- ◇ Established Project Team: The working group is finalized, including a complete member list, and is ready for operational implementation.
- ◇ Successful Kick-off: The initial meeting has been conducted, and the results are recorded in the minutes to serve as a common foundation for the team.

Following the successful completion of Milestone 2, the focus shifts from organisational preparation to data collection. In the next phase, you will prepare for the implementation of the coACTION Sensor.

## Phase 2: Assess Baseline & Set Targets



### Key Objective of Phase 2:

In this phase, your school conducts a comprehensive baseline assessment of current democratic practices using the coACTION Sensor. From these findings, you will derive specific, measurable SMART targets and create a concrete implementation plan based on the coACTION Treasury, ensuring these results are sustainably anchored within your School Development Plan (SDP).

Fig. 5: Phase 2 of the coACTION Project: Process Steps 8 – 15; Milestone 2, Milestone 3

### Step 8: Inform the Whole School Community

**Objective:** The entire school community is informed about the goals and the significance of the upcoming coACTION Sensor survey. In particular, the anonymity of the survey is emphasized to ensure high and honest participation.

#### Procedure:

- Use appropriate communication channels to reach teachers, pupils, parents, and school management.
- Emphasize that the Sensor is a diagnostic tool for school development and does not constitute a personal performance evaluation.

**QM-Checklist:**

- Has a clear communication plan been created to inform all target groups?
- Are age-appropriate explanations available for the pupils?

**Step 9: Carry out the coACTION Sensor Survey**

**Objective:** The four specific surveys (School Management, Staff, Pupils, Parents) are precisely administered, and the data is fully recorded.

**Procedure:**

- Ensure a quiet setting for the survey (especially for the children).
- Clarify logistical questions (devices, online access, or paper versions).
- The Project Lead monitors the response rates of the questionnaires.

**QM Checklist:**

- Have all four target groups been successfully surveyed?
- Is the data collection complete and finalized?

**Supporting Material** (online): Guide to Democratic Empowerment, Module 2: "Check Your Democracy Level"; Theory & Background: "Tutorial - coACTION Sensor"

**Milestone 3: coACTION Sensor I**

This milestone is achieved when the following results are available:

- ◇ Complete Data Collection: All surveys have been conducted within the school community, and the questionnaires have been successfully submitted.
- ◇ Verified Database: The responses have been checked for completeness, and all processed data is ready for analysis.
- ◇ Availability of Results: The required automated reports have been generated and are ready for review.

## Step 10: Get coACTION Sensor Results

**Objective:** The Project Team accesses the Sensor results via the platform and prepares a solid foundation for analysis.

**Procedure:**

- The Project Lead logs into the platform, downloads the reports, and conducts a preliminary review.
- Ensure that all team members understand how the results (strengths, development areas, and suggested measures) are visualized and presented.

**QM-Checklist:**

- Are the automated Sensor evaluation reports fully available?
- Have team members been briefed on the structure and content of the result reports?

## Step 11: Evaluate & Analyse Sensor Results

**Objective:** The Project Team develops a deep, shared understanding of the current state of democratization at the school and identifies the most critical areas for action.

**Procedure:**

- Discuss the data as a team during a dedicated analysis workshop.
- Compare the perceptions of the different groups (staff, pupils, parents).
- Focus on recognizing "blind spots" and setting priorities for school development.

**QM-Checklist:**

- Was a collaborative analysis meeting conducted?
- Are the core findings (strengths/weaknesses) documented in the coACTION Diary?

**Supporting Material** (online): coACTION Guide to Democratic Empowerment, Module 3: "Let's get real"

## Step 12: Define SMART Targets

**Objective:** Your school defines one to three precise SMART targets that serve as a concrete roadmap for improving democratic cooperation in the coming school year.

**Procedure:**

- Transform the identified action areas into targets that are:
  - ➔ Specific
  - ➔ Measurable
  - ➔ Attractive
  - ➔ Realistic
  - ➔ Time-bound
- Make sure these goals involve the entire school community.

**QM-Checklist:**

- Are there 1-3 formally documented SMART targets available?

**Supportive Material** (online): coACTION Guide to Democratic Empowerment, Module 4: "SMART Democracy Targets"

### Step 13: Integrate Targets in School Development Plan

**Objective:** The SMART targets are formally incorporated into the school's strategic planning documents to guarantee long-term commitment and sustainability.

**Procedure:**

- Embed the new targets into your existing QMS or the official School Development Plan (SDP).
- This demonstrates to the staff and school authorities that democratic education is a permanent pillar of your quality assurance.

**QM-Checklist:**

- Are the democracy targets officially anchored in the School Development Plan?

**Supportive Material** (online): Theory & Background, Module Quality Management: "An Eye on Democracy"

### Step 14: Select Measures from the coACTION Treasury

**Objective:** The school selects specific measures (GEMs) and procedures from the coACTION Treasury that are best suited to achieve the defined SMART targets and fit the school's unique culture.

**Procedure:**

- The Project Team explores the digital coACTION Treasury.
- Evaluate proposed GEMs based on feasibility, impact, and resource requirements.
- Choose measures that are both motivating and realistically implementable.

**QM-Checklist:**

- Have specific measures (GEMs) been selected from the Treasury?
- Do the chosen measures have a direct impact on the agreed SMART targets?

**Supportive Material** (online): Theory & Background, Tutorial: "coACTION Treasury"

**Step 15: Develop the Democratic Empowerment Plan**

**Objective:** A detailed and binding implementation plan (Democratic Empowerment Plan) ensures that the chosen measures are structured into daily school life and that responsibilities and timelines are clearly communicated.

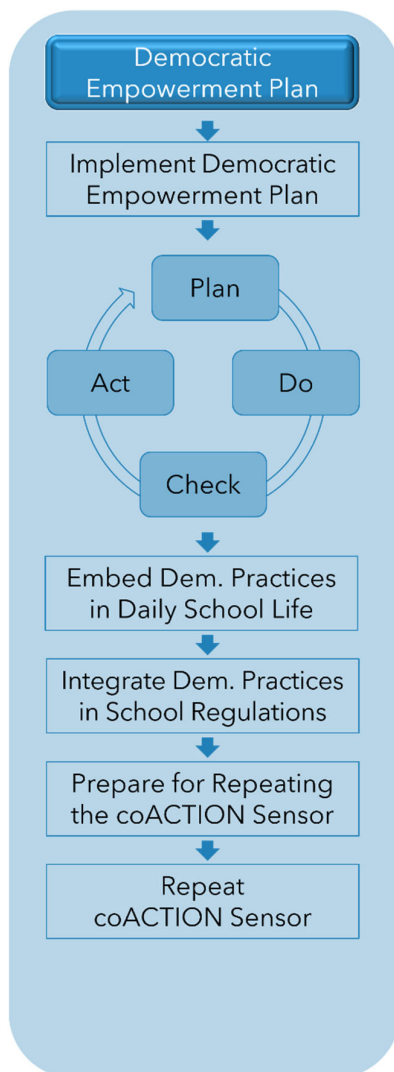
**Procedure:**

- The team creates a concrete plan including the chosen measures, a detailed timeline, and resource allocation.
- The plan specifies who does what by when, which resources (time, material, space) are needed, and how success will be recognized (success indicators).

**QM-Checklist:**

- Is there a written implementation plan with timelines and responsibilities available?
- Is the plan realistic and manageable for everyone involved?

## Phase 3: Live Democracy in Daily School Life



### Key Objective of Phase 3:

By the end of this phase, the school will have systematically implemented their chosen democratic measures using the PDCA cycle, integrated democratic practices into both the curriculum and school regulations, and prepared for a re-evaluation of their progress through the re-administration of the coACTION Sensor.

Fig. 6: Phase 3 of the coACTION Project: Process Steps 16 - 20, Milestone 4

### Milestone 4: Democratic Empowerment Plan

This milestone is achieved when the following results are available:

- ◇ Guaranteed Information Flow: The Sensor results have been communicated, and the entire process is transparently documented for the school community.
- ◇ Precise Target Definition: The goals for the upcoming year have been defined and verified according to the SMART principle (Specific, Measurable, Attractive, Realistic, Time-bound).

- ◇ Strategic Anchoring: The democracy targets are officially integrated into the School Development Plan (SDP).
- ◇ Selection of Methods: Suitable measures (GEMs) have been selected from the coACTION Treasury and evaluated regarding their feasibility, impact, and resource requirements.
- ◇ Finalized Implementation Plan: The complete comprehensive document is available and serves as the binding roadmap for all further steps.

## Step 16: Implement Democratic Empowerment Plan using PDCA Principles

**Objective:** The project team ensures effective implementation of all measures by applying the continuous cycle of Planning, Doing, Checking, and Acting (PDCA).

### Procedure:

- Plan: Break down the measures into small, manageable sub-steps and define clear success criteria for each stage.
- Do: Execute the activities (e.g., workshops, new teaching methods, or participation formats).
- Check: Hold regular reflection meetings to review progress against your criteria. What is working well? What needs optimization?
- Act: Adjust your strategies or timelines based on the insights gained during reflection.

### Accompanying Measures:

- Create a communication plan to keep the school community informed of progress.
- Continuously document challenges and successes in the coACTION Diary.
- Celebrate reached milestones to maintain high motivation within the team and the staff.

### QM-Checklist:

- Is the PDCA cycle actively used to manage the implementation of measures?
- Are feedback mechanisms (e.g., suggestion boxes, short surveys) active for all stakeholders?

**Supportive Material** (online): coACTION Guide to Democratic Empowerment, Module 5: "Boost your Democracy"

## Step 17: Embedding Democratic Practices in Daily School Life

**Objective:** Democratic principles are explicitly and sustainably integrated into daily school routines and classroom instruction.

**Procedure:**

- Collaborate with the teaching body to find opportunities within the existing curriculum to practice democratic competencies (e.g., group decision-making, debate culture, active listening).
- Encourage cross-curricular projects that strengthen democratic values.

**QM-Checklist:**

- Are there documented examples of the integration of democratic practices into classroom instruction?

## Step 18: Integrate Democratic Practices in School Regulations

**Objective:** Democratic procedures are formalized in the school's official rules and guidelines to ensure long-term validity and authority.

**Procedure:**

- Examine existing rules (e.g., school house rules, codes of conduct).
- Anchor formal democratic processes, such as the student council's right to participate in rule changes or clear procedures for conflict resolution.

**QM-Checklist:**

- Have steps been taken to formalize democratic practices within the school's official regulations and policies?

## Step 19: Prepare for Repeating the coACTION Sensor

**Objective:** The school is logistically and organizationally prepared to conduct the coACTION Sensor again to evaluate the impact of the implemented measures.

**Procedure:**

- Prepare the second survey following the same logic as Step 9 (Phase 2).
- Pay special attention to consistent administration to guarantee valid data comparability ("Before-and-After" analysis).

**QM-Checklist:**

- Are the timeline and logistics for the repeated Sensor survey finalized?

## Schritt 20: Repeat coACTION Sensor Surveys

**Objective:** All four coACTION Sensor surveys are successfully conducted a second time to obtain a new database for the impact analysis.

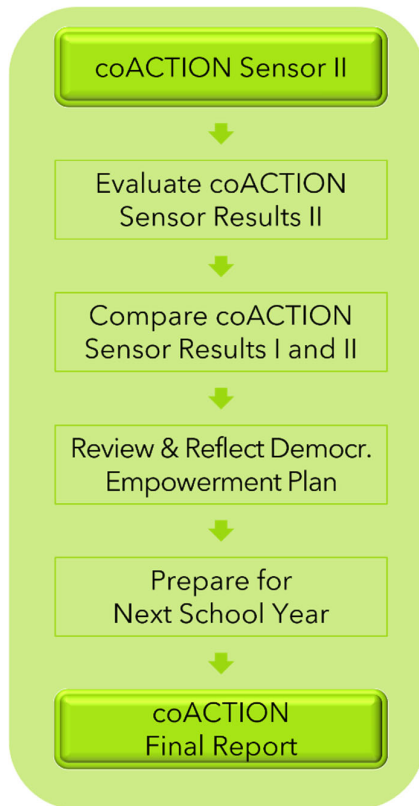
**Procedure:**

- Oversee response rates across all target groups (School Management, Staff, Pupils, Parents) and ensure all data is fully captured on the platform.

**QM-Checklist:**

- Have all four target groups been successfully surveyed again?
- Is the data collection for the final analysis complete?

## Phase 4: Measure Impact and Celebrate Success



### Key Objective for Phase 4:

By the end of this phase, the school will have comprehensively analyzed the impact of their democratic initiatives by comparing the initial and repeated coACTION Sensor results, reflected on their implementation journey, and developed a Final Project Report that documents achievements, challenges, and outlines a strategy for sustainable democratic development in the long term.

Fig. 7: Phase 4 of the coACTION Project: Process Steps 21 - 24, Milestone 5, Milestone 6

### Milestone 5: coACTION Sensor II

This milestone is achieved when the following results are available:

- ◇ Complete Data Collection: The second survey round has been successfully completed, and all questionnaires from the school community have been collected.
- ◇ Finalized Evaluation: The data has been processed, and the full evaluation of the results is available.
- ◇ Foundation for Comparison: The reports are ready, enabling a well-founded analysis of developments compared to the initial baseline assessment.

## Step 21: Evaluate coACTION Sensor Results II

**Objective:** The project team develops a precise understanding of the current status of democratization at the end of the project year.

**Procedure:**

- Access and review the evaluation reports of the second survey on the platform.
- Identify current strengths as well as areas that continue to present challenges.
- Conduct a team meeting to collaboratively interpret the data.

**Checklist Item:**

- Has the team reviewed and understood the results of the second measurement?
- Are the current strengths and areas for development documented in writing?

## Step 22: Compare coACTION Sensor Results I and II

**Objective:** Through a direct comparison of the new data with the initial baseline, the actual impact of the implemented measures is made objectively visible.

**Procedure:**

- Analyze the Comparative Report:
  - Where were significant improvements achieved?
  - In which areas was there little change, and what could be the reasons?
- Celebrate visible achievements together as a project team and with the entire staff.

**QM-Checklist:**

- Was a comparative analysis (Before vs. After) conducted?
- Were the areas with the highest growth identified?

**Supporting Material** (online): coACTION Guide to Democratic Empowerment, Module 6: "Check your Democratic Progress"

## Step 23: Review and Reflect Democratic Empowerment Plan

**Objective:** The school critically reflects on the entire implementation process to gain valuable insights for future school development projects.

**Procedure:**

- Conduct a formal reflection session.
- Use your coACTION Diary as a primary source:
  - Did the measures achieve the intended impact?
  - How effectively did the PDCA cycle and team collaboration work?
  - What obstacles occurred, and how were they overcome?
  - What are the key takeaways for the future?

**QM-Checklist:**

- Did a structured reflection on the overall process take place?
- Are the most important learning experiences documented?

## Step 24: Prepare for Next School Year

**Objective:** The school ensures the sustainability of the results through a formal report and a concrete strategy for the upcoming school year.

**Procedure:**

- Derive concrete actions for the next year based on the data (Which measures remain? Where is new action needed?).
- Compile the Final Project Report (using the content from the coACTION Diary). This serves as the central document for knowledge transfer and as evidence for your Quality Management.
- Have the report formally confirmed by the school management.

**QM-Checklist:**

- Is there a clear strategy for the continuation of democratic development?
- Is the Final Project Report complete and approved by the school management?

## Milestone 6: coACTION Final Report

This milestone is achieved when the following results are available:

- ◇ The Completed Diary: Your journey is fully documented, the Diary is now your school's central knowledge repository.
- ◇ Compact Review: The data shows "in black and white" what has moved during the project year.
- ◇ Successes & Outlook: A shared reflection on highlights and future planning has been completed.
- ◇ Green Light: The school management has formally and successfully concluded the project year.

## The "Year of Democracy" as a Standardized Process for Democratic Empowerment

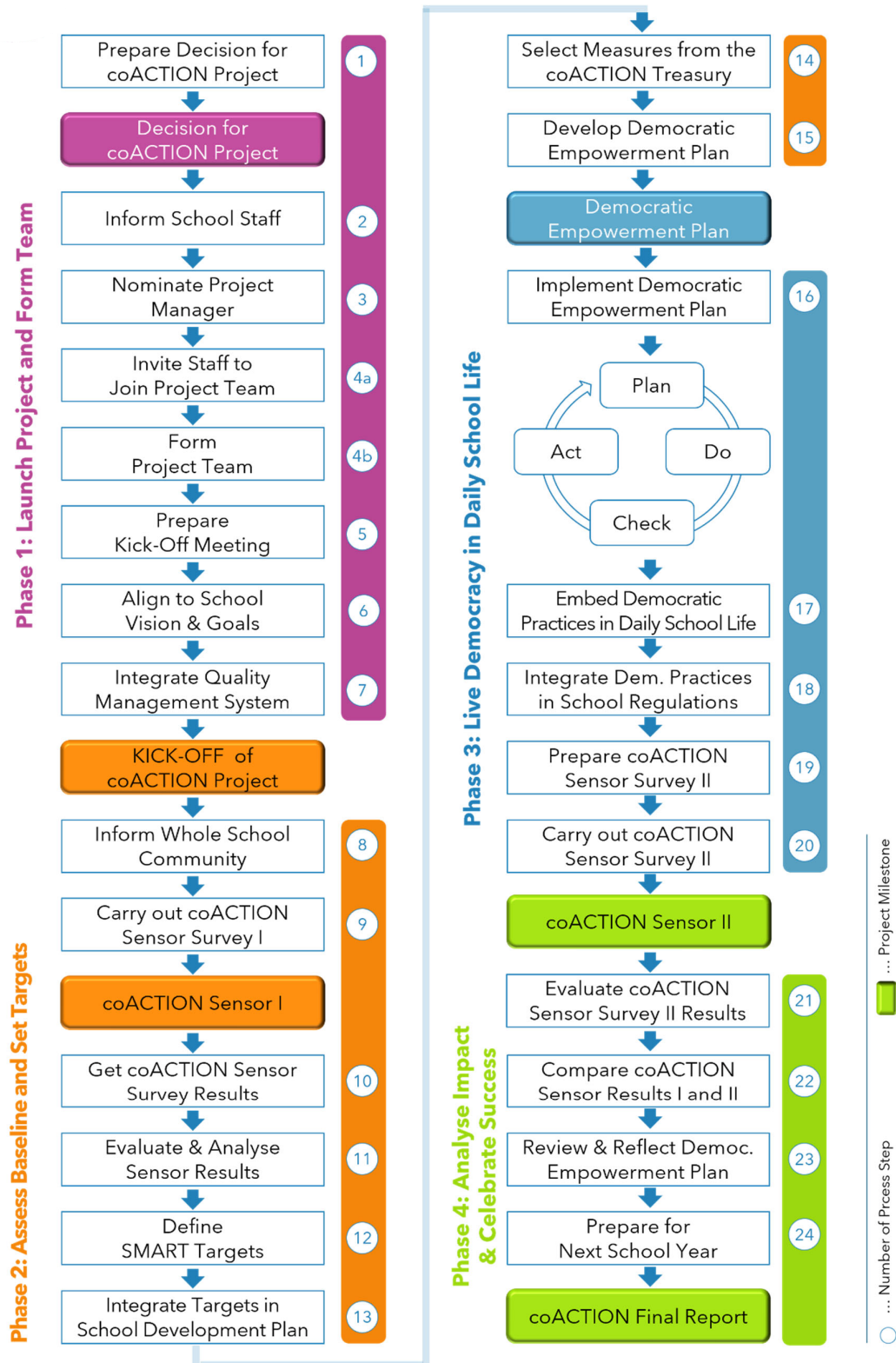
The "Year of Democracy" is the heart of the coACTION project. Throughout this school year, your school demonstrates that the approach of involving the entire school community in strengthening democracy is not just a vision, but a reality that can be successfully implemented in the daily practice of primary schools.

From the initial baseline assessment using the coACTION Sensor to the final evaluation, you follow a standardized path built on participation and quality. By implementing targeted measures from the coACTION Treasury and utilizing the digital democracy platform, you ensure that all stakeholders, school management, staff, pupils, and parents, are an integral part of this journey.

The ultimate success of this year lies in the integration of your democracy targets into your school's existing Quality Management System. This ensures that democratic development does not remain a one-off project, but becomes a permanent pillar of your school culture and your strategic direction.

# Annex 1:

## Democratic Empowerment Process (Flow-chart)





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