

LEADING AND MANAGING COMPLEX CHANGE

Educators know that schools are a complex organism with a life of their own. To fully implement change, an understanding of the components of systemic reform requires experience, people skills, and extreme patience. Knoster (1991) in a presentation to The Association for Severely Handicap (TASH) Conference introduced a Managing Complex Change Model that has several components. Knoster suggested that when the components of vision, consensus, skills, incentives, resources and action plan are collectively inherent in the system, then change will likely take place. However, if any one of the components was missing, then the “Change Process” may be inhibited or may not take root.

A unique feature about Knoster’s model for change is its surgical approach. In assessing the condition and climate of an organization, this model offers a potential remedy by identifying the symptom and then restoring the missing component (link). Quite often leaders may sense what is wrong, but do not understand how to resolve or determine the root of the problem. As an example, if the change agent senses or anticipates sabotage as a symptom from within the organization, then the ability to work through consensus through collaboration is paramount. If there is a high level of resistance, then the leader needs to identify the incentives and determine what will personally motivate an individual to change. In some schools, the problems are so severe that multiple missing links have created a hostile environment that is difficult to sort through.

Developing this trust through relationship building may draw out the essential missing link. Then the change process may continue to develop and help the organization arrive at the desired results.

Vision

- ‘A shape of the future that an individual or group desires, a set of ambitions.’ Rhinesmith
- ‘An expression of a desirable direction and future challenging state for the school.’
- ‘Vision constitutes partly the sensing by an individual of what the organisation should look like, how it should work, how it should be taken into the future – based on a web of beliefs, supported and mediated by each individual’s values and beliefs.’ Sowell
- ‘Vision is useless if it is merely straplines and catchphrases which have no foundation.’
- ‘Vision must generate action, must involve change.’

- 'An effective vision provides a perspective, an ambition of how the people in the organisation will operate, in philosophical terms, in terms of decision making, in terms of serving others, in adding value to society.'
- Building a shared vision is a critical factor in managing change.
- The vision process, creating the vision, can be more important than the vision itself allowing stakeholders to join in, feel strong ownership in order to buy into it and promote it as their own.
- Vision creates the big picture – needed by everyone if they are to have a sense of where change is leading them.
- Without the big picture the staff do not have a sense of direction.

Absence – confusion – created by a lack of vision and therefore lack of direction.

Consensus

- Co-operation – agreement on ideas, valued, purposes, shared understanding.
- Collaboration – working together in an atmosphere of support and encouragement.
- Collegiality – development of a learning community gaining skills and expertise together.

Absence – sabotage – where the unwilling or unconvinced can actively work against the willing; negativity of counter arguments drags everyone down and prevents action.

Skills

- Identify of whatever knowledge or expertise is required to move forward.
- The capabilities to implement new plans.
- The means to act in new ways, explore different ways of working, negotiating, collaborating.
- The abilities to try out different strategies, developing skills as teachers and within pupils.
- Reasons to change, intellectual excitement, opportunities for collaboration in planning and delivery, to try new things.

Absence – anxiety – in those who feel they do not have the necessary knowledge or expertise to cope with or to implement new situations; have little faith in training to provide them with knowledge / skills.

Incentives

- What is in it for me, additional payments, self-esteem, sense of achievement?

- Reasons to change, intellectual excitement, opportunities for collaboration in planning and delivery, to try new things.

Absence – resistance – from those who see nothing in the changes for them, no moral meaning, no personal meaning, no benefit; or a conviction that things are all right as they are, no need to change.

Resources

- Physical resources.
- Any items which people feel are necessary to enable them to make the required changes.
- Use of existing knowledge or expertise within the organisation or outside it.
- Existing staff used as a resource including management team members, collegiality.
- Emotional or social support / collegiality.
- Development of knowledge, expertise, skills through effective training programmes.
- Extra staffing.
- New equipment.
- Time given to development, planning, reflection.

Absence – frustration – if resources are not supplied to adequately implement the changes – to ensure success.

Action Plan

- Steps worked out to direct actions towards future goals.
- Process shared by participants, understanding what needs to be done and how.
- Identified leadership, timescale, resources, monitoring processes.
- Committed leadership.

Absence – treadmill – doing what we have always done in the way we have always done it and therefore not succeeding in working in new ways, not achieving new goals.

Although the model below may appear to be simple, it is a powerful tool to connect the symptom with the components of change. Unless a leader is able to connect with the people of the organization through empathic listening, they will never understand the emotion behind the concerns of their clients.

Leading and Managing Complex Change

Vision +	Consensus +	Skills +	Incentives +	Resources +	Action Plan	= Change
	Consensus +	Skills +	Incentives +	Resources +	Action Plan	= Confusion
Vision +		Skills +	Incentives +	Resources +	Action Plan	= Sabotage
Vision +	Consensus +		Incentives +	Resources +	Action Plan	= Anxiety
Vision +	Consensus +	Skills +		Resources +	Action Plan	= Resistance
Vision +	Consensus +	Skills +	Incentives +		Action Plan	= Frustration
Vision +	Consensus +	Skills +	Incentives +	Resources +		= Treadmill

Adapted from Knoster, T. (1991) Presentation in TASH Conference. Washington, D.C.
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