



TOPICS

An occasional paper on the literature
and practice of Technical Assistance

“Thinking Points”: A Synthesis of Ideas about the Change Process

*Updated by Joicey Hurth and Sue Goode, June 2009
From the original unpublished manuscript by Pat Trohanis, 2004*

About this Series

This series, *Topics in TA*, is being produced by NECTAC staff to share with our colleagues and others who are interested in the research on and practice of technical assistance. We will address various topics drawing from relevant literature and our experience in providing technical assistance. The impetus for this series is in large part to honor our late director, Pascal “Pat” Trohanis, who guided and inspired us for 35 years. Pat was a consummate collaborator and greatly enjoyed sharing with and learning from our TA colleagues in and outside of the OSEP-funded TA & Dissemination network. This first paper is one he originally prepared to share with that network and concerns systemic changes in service systems. We welcome your comments on this paper and the series.

A Definition

“Systems change involves changing the capacity, interrelationships and interdependencies among parts, levels and stakeholders of a system with the consequence that desired changes in one part and level are accompanied by changes in other parts and levels to reach an idealized and sustainable vision of the whole”.

Thanks to Ken Olsen of the MidSouth Regional Resource Center for this contribution (February, 2002).

General Concepts of Change

1. Positive change alters the status quo to benefit people and organizations. ^{3, 6, 7, 14, 15, 18, 19, 20}
2. Successful and enduring change takes time. ^{4, 7, 11, 12, 13, 19, 20, 21, 22}
3. Change is a journey and not a one-time event. ^{6, 7, 11, 12, 13}
4. The integration of change is one of the biggest sources of complexity for organizations. ^{1, 7, 14, 19, 2}
5. Change is a process that is non-linear and involves strategizing across multiple dimensions. ^{2, 6, 7, 18, 20, 21, 23}

Change and Organizations/Systems

6. The impetus and urgency for change can come from external or internal sources - mandated, pressures, needs, opportunities, dissatisfaction with the status quo, etc. ^{7, 10, 15, 20, 21}
7. Because systems are conservative and components are interrelated, a change in one component is likely to be forced back to the status quo, unless accompanied by supportive changes in all related components. ^{7, 16, 18, 19, 20}
8. Change impacts the culture of an organization, organizational structures, policies and procedures; job responsibilities, communications, and use of technology. ^{7, 20}

Change and Individuals

9. Change affects individuals within organizations and systems. ^{12, 13, 15, 18}
10. Change involves letting go of old patterns, transitioning, and starting something new - "reculturing" ^{2, 5, 6, 7, 15}
11. Change initiatives call for people to think, feel and behave differently. Thus new skills and capabilities will be required of individuals involved in the change activities. ^{7, 15, 20, 21, 24}
12. People involved in change efforts want to know "what's in it for me?" Also, what are the costs in terms of money, time, potential confusion and conflicts? ^{12, 13, 20}
13. During the "learning curve" efficiency and outputs are likely to drop from old "prechange" levels. Once new skills and procedures are mastered and practiced, productivity can climb to new heights. ^{1, 5, 17, 20, 22}
14. Change can evoke a range of reactions that can be painful, rewarding, uncomfortable, unpredictable, fun, uncertain and exciting. ^{7, 13, 20, 21, 22}
15. To change, people need to be ready, willing and able. ^{4, 7, 8, 22}
16. There are always natural "innovators," ready to try new ways. A single person, a team, or a program may commit to "pilot" and then model successful strategies for others. ^{18, 20, 21, 22}
17. "Show me" people are often willing to change when they can observe new procedures and evidence of effectiveness. The "fence sitters" will join as more people are successful. ^{7, 13, 18, 21}
18. When a critical mass of people makes the change, the new way becomes the "way we do business". The change is then "institutionalized". ^{10, 12, 20}

Planning for Change

19. Create a shared "Vision of the Solution" to the precipitating problems that are driving the need to change. ^{9, 11, 15, 18, 19, 20, 21}
20. Paint a picture for individuals of how a system will look and work after the change effort. ^{12, 18, 19, 20, 21}
21. Involve all stakeholders; listen to the friends of change and its enemies. ^{5, 6, 9, 11, 19, 21}
22. Successful change efforts have champions, leaders, shepherds and workers. ^{5, 14, 20, 21, 22}
23. An external agent can be helpful to facilitate, nudge, support and bring resources and knowledge to a change initiative and its work group. ^{7, 9, 19, 20, 22}
24. Planned change efforts cannot predict everything; flexibility is required. ^{3, 9, 11, 22, 23}
25. Unforeseen consequences are inevitable. ^{3, 11, 12, 21}

Sustaining Change

26. Develop a comprehensive, long-term plan for implementing change and strengthening the infrastructure needed to sustain change at all levels of the system (supportive leadership, policies and procedures, funding mechanisms, accountability measures). ^{4, 7, 22, 23}
27. Gather meaningful process and outcomes data at regular intervals. Feedback loops provide critical information about what is and isn't working. ^{4, 7, 23}
28. Actively build capacity for lasting improvement (continuous learning, ongoing coaching and mentoring, communities of practice, open communication within and outside the system). ^{4, 6, 7, 11, 12, 20, 21, 22, 23}

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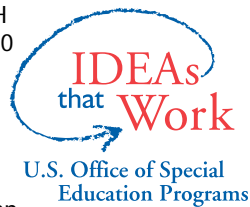
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