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Comprehensive, Enduring Change: More than Just a Hammer

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Comprehensive implementation of restorative practices in educational settings is an undertaking with multiple challenges. Challenges not only impact implementation, but can derail or delay it. As difficult as they seem, most of implementation challenges encountered when working to integrate restorative practices in an educational setting parallel those encountered in any organization any time an innovation is attempted. Thus, they can be successfully mitigated, or strategically navigated, via a thorough understanding of how to implement organizational change.

Change and Challenge in the Field

In the video entitled *Restorative Practice: The Swansea Model* (International Institute for Restorative Practice, 2014), educational practitioners reflect on their local experiences of implementing a restorative practices model in a local educational setting. Challenges of adoption and implementation are typical: how to phase in the changes successfully, how to maximize impact and minimize transitional stress and resistance, how to ensure that trainings are implemented at the classroom level, and how to make certain a consistent approach and practice occur across the entire school environment.

Educators describe a number of successful approaches to those challenges. Leadership has a clear and consistent role as a “champion” of the change, making sure that training is widely available and used, and ensuring clear expectations across the organization. Universal implementation is clearly communicated. Staff as well as students use restorative practices on a regular basis. Moreover, coordination with support services in the community beyond the school itself, and officially connecting restorative practices implementation with pre-existing school

values (in this case, the United Nations Protocol on the Rights of the Child) increases the odds that behavioral and values changes will “stick” and the restorative practices approach will become part of the norm for the school. In fact, the video concludes with an inspiring call to create a new vision, that of a “restorative city.”

Similarly, McCluskey, Lloyd, Kane, Riddell, Stead & Weedon (2008), in describing the implementation and findings of a national pilot project in Scotland and its two-year evaluation, also identify typical challenges to implementing change. They contextualize the change in a social and political environment, and note current and emerging views of children, children’s needs, and children’s behavior. They highlight the distinctive features of restorative practice that align with these views, but also note that the full potential of restorative practices in schools has not yet been fully evidenced by the research from the field. What has become clear, according to McCluskey, et al., and in the resources they cite, are the salient features or characteristics common in schools where restorative practices seem to be working. Where existing initiatives are in harmony with restorative thinking, successful implementation of a restorative practices program is likely to be smoother, faster, and more successful.

Thus, McCluskey, et al. also identify key change characteristics that increase the likelihood of success. They discuss existing organizational culture characteristics, the need for strong modeling and overt leadership investment, a necessary and clear investment in training and supports, and the high value of a pre-existing “restorative ethos” (p. 214), or pre-existing climate that offers prerequisite values and behaviors compatible with restorative thinking.

Ultimately, however, it is clear that successful change implementation requires more than mere environmental scanning, addressing emerging challenges on the fly, and evaluating process

at the two year mark. Understanding how organizational change occurs, comprehending the transformative processes at work even when they are invisible to the untrained eye, and strategically using this understanding are what offer educational leaders an opportunity to be, or to create, powerful change agents capable of moving an entire organization in a new direction.

Good News from Applied Theory

So, really, how *can* education settings effectively manage the change process while implementing restorative practices? McCluskey, et al. and the *Swansea Model* video offer hints. Blood and Thoresborne (2006) however, cut directly to the chase, with a thorough analysis and distillation of theory and practice related to managing the organizational change process so as to strategically increase the chance for sustainability of restorative practices within a school culture. Theirs is not merely an analysis of experiences or a retrospective on what worked in a particular environment. Instead, they bring together a number of theories of change management, most which have been developed and tested in corporate or business environments, and then extract and apply the key learnings from each. Essentially, Blood and Thoresborne propose that successful implementation of restorative practice in educational settings parallels, in both its challenges and its successes, what occurs in any organization, of any size, at any time an “innovation” or new way of thinking/acting/being is introduced.

In her seminal work, Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1983) presents a potent analogy of change as architecture to describe and reveal the “how tos” and the “whys” of creating organizational change. In a detailed analysis of innovation and strategic change in the US corporate sector, she points out that being a “change master” requires a finely honed ability to “envision a new reality and aid in its translation into concrete terms” (p. 278).

Indeed, Kanter's analogy of architecture, in both its art, and in its careful engineering, holds well, for the organizational leader, the "ultimate change master," must be able to combine creative vision and innovation with "the building up of events, floor by floor, from foundation to completed construction. How productive change occurs is part artistic design (and) part management of construction" (Kanter, 1983, p. 278-279). This aptitude for "conceiving, constructing and converting into behavior new view(s) of organizational reality" requires, moreover, a capacity to recognize, and then use, specific "building blocks of change" in a step-by-step iterative process of partial commitments toward the innovative vision, rather than simply a single, massive, one-time change.

Blood and Thoresborne (2006) also carefully summarize those building blocks of change, citing key theories and models for initiating, launching, supporting, causing, and sustaining innovative change within an organization of any type. While their article focuses on overcoming the natural and expected resistance to a restorative practices initiative in an educational environment, the theories and models they use to explain the process are universal. Whether the innovation or change in consideration is the implementation of restorative practices or some other innovation, the primer of change processes and approaches they provide are precisely what "change masters" such as Kanter's architects of change must not only understand, but also use to leverage change.

A Basic Toolkit

Successful architects need expertise with a wide variety of complex tools. Yet, typically, a few stand out as fundamental. Which of the tools summarized by Blood and Thoresborne seem to be the "top five most versatile" tools in a "change masters" tool kit when implementing an

innovation such as restorative practice in an educational setting or other environment? Which offer us critical leverage to not only address, but move through and beyond the many challenges of implementation described by practitioners? Which allow a leader to sturdily form- continuing Kanter's analogy- the foundational building blocks in the structure, and thus offer not only a solid base, but also an inspiring architectural design that carries organizational members toward embracing new meanings and new ways of being? Consider these:

1. Understand who you're asking to change.
2. Accept that resistance is normal, expected, and manageable.
3. Act as if perception is everything. It is.
4. Accept that change must be and will be incremental, or it will not be real change at all.
5. Starting is the easier part of the process. Sustainability requires the long-term investment.

Looking Inside the Tool Kit

In many ways, innovative change is more about the "who" than, really, the "what." Blood and Thoresborne (2006) adapt Rogers' (2003) "diffusion model" of innovation and walk carefully and thoroughly through characteristics and necessary strategy for each of five groups present in all organizations involved in change. The details, while important, are beyond the scope of this paper.

What is helpful to remember, however, is that innovation moves from inception among a small group of "innovators," through the "true internal change agents," the approximately 13% of the group who are "early adopters." These are the people critical to the change process's successful spread. As role models, and as internal leaders willing to accept risk if there's

evidence of success, these early adopters have the power to bring at least one-third of the organization's staff into the change process.

Early adopters influence the 34% of staff known as the "early majority." As "pragmatists with good will" (Blood and Thoresborne, 2006, p. 11), these organizational members do not like risk, but, once convinced of an innovation, their participation is vital to success. In fact, once convinced of the value and feasibility of a change, these are the people who will help articulate emerging policy and help convince the 34% "late adopters" to come onboard. Even the "laggards," the skeptics typically very wary of innovation, may shift from cynicism to acceptance. While dealing with both active and passive resistance is a significant challenge in organizational change, a recalcitrant or even obstructive laggard can, with adequate time, support, patience, and peer influence, "get on board."

In discussing the "laggards," however, Blood and Thoresborne touch on the reality of resistance to change. It is essential for change agents to recognize that as change is inevitable, so too, is resistance to change. Resistance is impacted by many variables, including the norms of the organization, the way that the innovation is introduced and communicated, and whether or not there are valued "champions" supporting the change (Kanter, 1983, p. 296 and following). Again, Blood and Thoresborne are thorough in exploring resistance, and the details, though beyond this paper, are worth reviewing.

Rogers (2003), cited by Blood and Thoresborne, also looks at perceptions as components of change and highlights the change agent's related role. Increasing the likelihood of innovative change requires that the change is, or must become, *perceived as* (emphasis mine) being better or more effective than what is already happening. Moreover, it must be viewed as compatible with

existing organizational values and must be easy to understand and use. Kanter similarly emphasizes the key role of leadership in creating and supporting helpful perceptions across the organization. In fact, using symbols, images, and even re-conceptualizing the past, present, and future via a culturally-valued language of the head and/or the heart is a key role for leaders. Indeed, it is a leader's role to create and communicate this "shared truth" (Kanter, p. 305).

While it is often tempting to hope for rapid, thorough, organization-wide transformation, this type of change is not typical nor is it generally sustainable. Change takes time, typically more time than initially anticipated. And, while a crisis may even be necessary to initiate a change, for change to "stick," it must be incrementally implementable (Kanter, 1983, p. 292). Leaders must encourage and support tweaking, experimentation, and modification so that the innovation can be tested and customized to fit the organization's existing realities. Blood and Thoresborne call this "trial-ability"; the core of the innovation must remain, but one must be willing to adapt the non-essentials.

Whether started by a crisis, or launched by planned initiative, starting change is typically the easier part of the change process. Sustaining change requires causing the innovation to shift from being a new, exciting experiment to being the "new normal" now embraced as the way things simply are. Kanter (p. 97) names this phase "institutionalization" of change. This shift takes time, consistent and persistent engagement, and a willingness to use the right tools and the right strategies, over a much longer span than any enthusiastic change master typically anticipates or desires. "Change must be driven by both inspiration and realism," cautions Kanter (p. 306), so that, eventually, a critical mass within the organization takes ownership of the vision and makes it their own.

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We may consider implementing restorative practices in an educational setting, mull over introducing it in some other setting, or dream, like the narrators in the video, of entire communities embracing restorative realities. But, causing transformational, sustaining change to actually happen requires more than a romantic hope or a handful of well-written summaries and inspirational testimonials.

Change, even massive, culture-shifting change, is “do-able.” At the same time, understanding change and wielding the appropriate architectural tools while strategically planning, vigilantly engineering, and carefully erecting the complex structure are requisite to success. Change masters, be they educational leaders implementing restorative practice, or leaders within other types of organizations, will always face complex challenges when introducing innovations and working to move an organization in a new direction. They must understand how change unfolds. They must intentionally and strategically use specific tools to start, integrate, and sustain innovations. They must place the challenges of implementing restorative practices alongside those of a multitude of other paradigmatic shifts that have offered positive, sustainable outcomes across all sectors of our society. Understanding change- what it is, how it occurs, how to leverage it strategically and well- is unmistakably a foundational understanding critical not only to the field of restorative practice, but to society as a whole. A basic “tool kit” is merely a small start.

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