

Processes and Lessons Learned in Facilitating Systemic Transformation

Substantive change begins with a design, a well-developed multi-year strategic plan, and resources to facilitate making it a sustainable reality.

The key to successful transformation is to allocate resources for *both* direct implementation and the processes involved in facilitating the transformation. Given that budgets for schools are always tight, this means identifying ways to redeploy and pull together existing resources and weave them with whatever new funds can be mustered, as well as with any other resources that come along (e.g., extra-mural support).

Flagrant deficiencies associated with facilitating systemic change are failure to give sufficient strategic attention and time to

- underwriting and establishing an effective systemic change operational infrastructure
- creating readiness, commitment, and engagement among a critical mass of key stakeholders
- developing a design document to communicate and guide the work
- developing a multi-year strategic plan
- ensuring policy is instituted that makes the changes a high priority
- reworking an organization's daily operational infrastructure to support development and sustainability of the changes.

In what follows, we explore facets of each of these matters and share some lessons learned.

Operational Infrastructure for Accomplishing Systemic Change

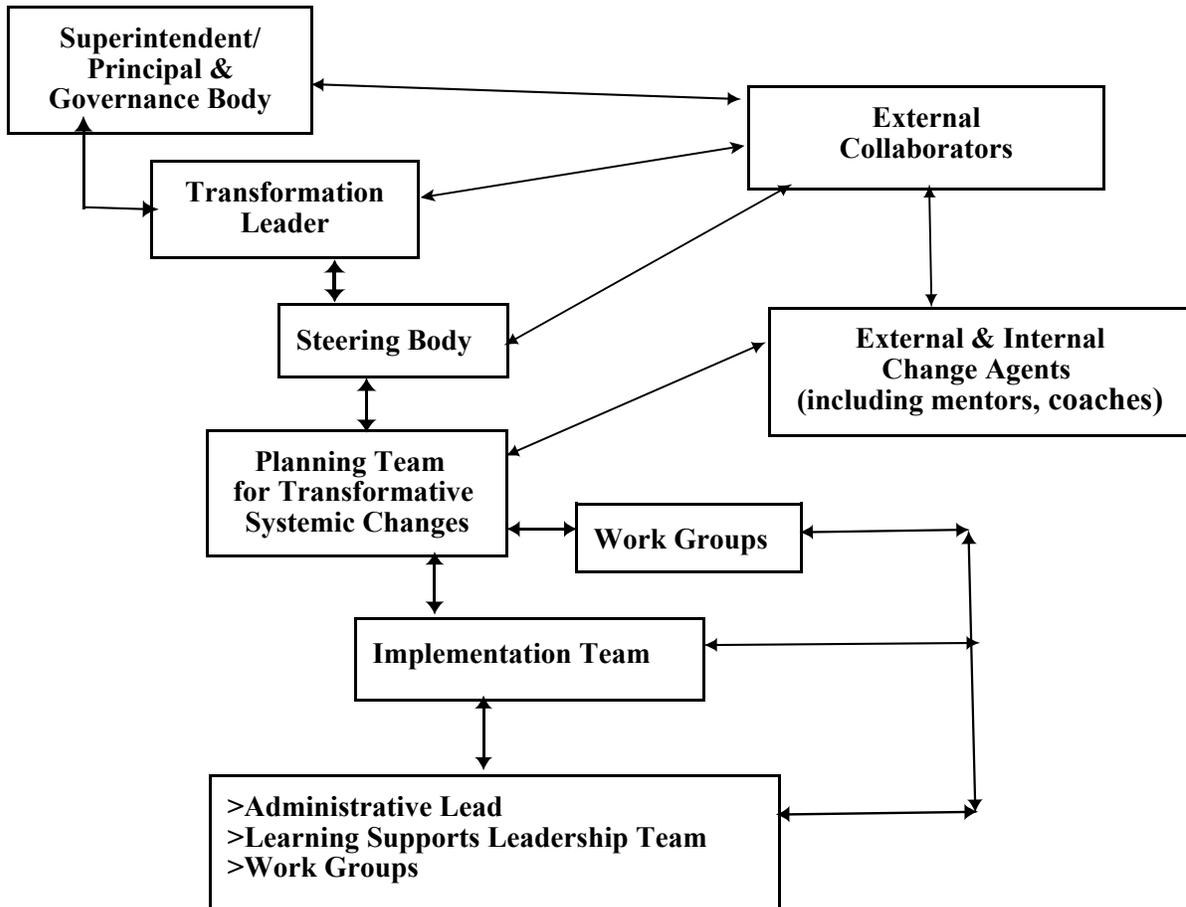
In addition to the daily implementation operational structure, effective system transforming requires a facilitative operational infrastructure. Exhibit 1 offers an example that can be customized (e.g., at district, school, state, and regional education agency levels). Customization is done to ensure that capability for accomplishing major tasks is not undermined (e.g., special attention is given to ensuring these mechanisms are not created as an added and incidental assignment for staff).

Facets of this infrastructure are temporary – put in place until the transformation is successfully made. Effectively establishing such an infrastructure requires ensuring enough resources are devoted to developing the mechanisms and building their capacity to carry out a multi-year strategic plan.

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Exhibit 12.1

Prototype for a Temporary Operational Infrastructure to Facilitate Transformation



Establishing the operational infrastructure for systemic change is an essential task for mentors/coaches guiding the work. As each mechanism is established, the focus is on

- enlisting a broad enough range of key leaders and staff (e.g., leaders directly involved with student and learning supports and others such as leaders for instruction, school improvement, data/evaluation; a given staff member may be part of several workgroups/teams)
- ensuring group/team members understand each mechanism's functions and interrelationship
- providing the type of capacity building that ensures members understand the essence of what needs to be accomplished and are committed to the importance of the work
- assisting in development of clear action plans.

Our work underscores the importance of using a significant portion of implementation resources for a temporary, but essential, operational infrastructure to facilitate the change process itself. At the same time, as discussed later, the daily operational infrastructure is reworked to continue developing and sustaining the protocol.

Note: Capacity building involves ensuring sufficient resources for the transformation (e.g., staffing; budget; guidance materials; external mentoring, coaching, development of effective of each systemic change mechanism, professional development, and TA for deepening understanding, commitment, and skills).

Well-prepared, committed, and coordinated administrative leadership is key to the success of systemic change in a complex organization. Everyone needs to be aware of who is leading and is accountable for the development of the planned changes. Those leading the way must be specifically trained to carry out systemic change. And, they must be sitting at key decision making tables when budget and other fundamental decisions are discussed. (In our experience, this often is not the case.)

With respect to staffing, it is essential to avoid just adding the work as another assignment to those who already are overly committed. It is common for leaders to start strong but given the many challenges of their jobs and the complexities of systemic transformation, they often become distracted and/or overwhelmed. It is also common to find staff who view the work as a distraction from and a competition with their current job descriptions.

Job descriptions must be modified to reflect new responsibilities and accountabilities. Professional development related to carrying out the essential functions as part of a team also requires special attention.

(See examples of job descriptions online at – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/resourceaids.htm>)

Teamwork is essential!



Sure it is; it lets you blame someone else.



Some Lessons Learned

Operational infrastructure for change. We find that the need for a transformation leader and imple Continuous monitoring is required to watch for and strategically address all this. mentation team is readily comprehended; however, the importance of establishing temporary mechanisms to facilitate systemic changes is less appreciated. In observing efforts to transform schools, we rarely find an infrastructure for *facilitating* implementation. More characteristically, ad hoc mechanisms (e.g., a coach, an implementation team) have been set in motion with personnel who often have too little training for the job and without adequate processes for formative evaluation. And, it is common to find individuals and teams operating without clear understanding of functions and major tasks. The importance of reworking daily operational infrastructures and building an effective set of mechanisms to facilitate systemic changes cannot be overstated.

Champions/advocates. A well-chosen steering group can champion, guide, and remove barriers to moving the work forward. To do all this, the group needs a core of high level decision makers. In addition, we find it invaluable to cultivate an additional cadre of influential advocates who are highly motivated not just to help get things underway, but to ensure sustainability.

Administrative leadership. There is a tendency to just tack responsibility for the work onto already overworked administrators. When this happens, we find that leaders start strong but given the many challenges of their jobs and the complexities of systemic transformation, they become distracted and/or overwhelmed. Leadership for fundamental and major transformation is a job unto itself.

Outreach to resistant parties. It is common to find staff who are resistant to change. Some view the work as a distraction from and/or a competition with their current job descriptions. Others are afraid of losing their turf. To counter this, we make continuous efforts to reach out and include such folks in workgroups so that they become invested in the changes.

Revisiting agreements. As understanding of what is involved deepens, we have learned to review and revise initial agreements and procedures as necessary.

Protecting those making change. Because they are called upon to do many things that may be unpopular with some stakeholders, it is essential to put appropriate protections in place for those on the front line of change.

Continuous monitoring is required to watch for and strategically address all this

How many change agents does it take to change a light bulb? Only one, but the bulb has to want to change!



Creating Readiness, Commitment, and Engagement

New initiatives often spend too little time creating readiness for change. Stakeholders must perceive proposed changes in ways that make them feel they are valued contributors to a collective identity, destiny, and vision. From the perspective of intrinsic motivation theory, change must be facilitated in ways that enhance participants' feelings of competence, self-determination, and connectedness with and commitment to each other.

Specific planning for creating readiness, commitment, and engagement is critical. Drawing on the literature, we stress the following as conditions that can enhance readiness for system change:

- adoption of a high level of policy commitment that is translated into appropriate resources, including space, budget, time, dedicated, respected, and accountable leadership and champions, and social marketing;
- mechanisms that ensure open and effective communication about goals and procedures, including processes for countering uninformed gossip;
- providing incentives for change, such as intrinsically valued outcomes, expectations for success, recognition, and rewards and protections for when problems arise;
- procedural options from which those expected to implement change can select the ones they see as most workable;
- systemic change mechanisms that are perceived as likely to improve organizational health, enhance a sense of community, and empower stakeholders;*
- change agents who are perceived as pragmatic – maintaining ideals while embracing practical solutions;
- formal and flexible plans for accomplishing change in stages and with realistic timelines;
- development of formal agreements (with provision for revisions);
- procedures for engaging stakeholders who enter the system after the efforts are underway.

*Empowerment is a multi-faceted concept. Theoreticians distinguish “power over” from “power to” and “power from.” *Power over* involves explicit or implicit dominance over others and events; *power to* is seen as increased opportunities to act; *power from* implies ability to resist the power of others.

Some Lessons Learned

In our experience, the complexity of communication means it is almost always the case that initial introductory presentations are only partially understood. This interferes with creating *informed* readiness. Planning for creating readiness, commitment, and engagement must account for a variety of strategies to deepen understanding and counter misinterpretations of intended changes. It is essential to do this early to minimize the problems that will arise from uninformed “grape vine” gossip. Of particular importance is ensuring understanding and commitment to the essential elements that must be implemented and sustained if substantive, rather than cosmetic, change is to emerge. Furthermore, given the inevitability of staff changes, a plan for bringing newcomers up to speed is vital.

Design Document

Development of a design document is key to communicating and guiding the work at state and local levels. See the state department examples developed in Alabama, Louisiana, and Iowa (online at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/trailblazing.htm>). For an example of work at the district level, see the overview document from Gainesville (GA) City School District (online at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/wheresithappening/gainesvillebroch.pdf>), as well as the related case study (<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/casestudy.pdf>).

A design document articulates:

- *the imperative* for the proposed transformative changes
- *policy changes* that ensure the intended transformation is not marginalized (e.g., that policy explicitly supports, at a high priority level, the development and sustainability of the impending changes)
- an *intervention framework* (e.g., that illustrates the nature and scope of a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student and learning supports)
- a framework for an *organizational and operational infrastructure* (e.g., that illustrates how existing mechanisms need to be reworked to support, develop, and sustain the transformation)
- how the systemic changes will be facilitated

As can be seen in the online examples of designs, it is common for organizations to adopt/adapt prototypes to account for situational opportunities, strengths, and limitations.

Some Lessons Learned

Mentors/coaches and working relationships. Mentors and coaches have played instrumental roles in planning and guiding design document preparation. Such professionals can be invaluable resources.

At the same time, we have found that not all mentors and coaches understand the complexity of their role. (See Appendix F for examples of major tasks for coaches/mentors; special references to coaching are provided at the end of this chapter.)

For instance, mentors/coaches often state: *It's all about relationship building.* However, many fail to understand the difference between just building a few good personal relationships and the importance of helping develop an extensive and long-lasting network of productive *working relationships*.

Fundamental and sustained system changes require effective *working relationships* among a critical mass of stakeholders. Such relationships emerge from establishing a set of steering, planning, and implementation mechanisms and weaving them into an effective operational infrastructure for systemic change. From this perspective, mentors and coaches and the relationships they establish are only one element in such an infrastructure.

It is worth remembering that some key stakeholders will not be interested in developing *personal relationships* with a coach or others involved in the transformation; this doesn't mean that such individuals won't play an effective role in working for change.

Multi-year Strategic Plan

Once the design is documented, the next step is to develop a multi-year strategic plan. A multi-year plan is essential because implementing and scaling-up a unified and comprehensive system of learning supports requires *phased-in* change over several years. Such a plan and related yearly action planning are key to effective implementation, sustainability, and replication to scale of any major transformation. (See our *General Guide for Strategic Planning Related to Developing a Unified and Comprehensive System of Learning Supports* (<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/genguide.pdf> .)

In brief, strategic planning is a systematic process that translates a desired future into (a) a broad set of goals or objectives and (b) a sequence of strategic activity to accomplish the major phases and tasks involved in achieving the transformation design. The plan spells out an answer to: *How do we get there from here?*

In general, sites need to develop a multi-year strategic plan that

- (1) provides an *overview* of how the intended transformation will be pursued,
- (2) conveys a *detailed plan for initial direct implementation and its facilitation* (with an emphasis on strategies that anticipate sustainability, renewal, summative evaluation and accountability),
- (3) delineates strategic approaches to each key facet of facilitating implementation, such as establishing a temporary operational change infrastructure, capacity building, and formative evaluation.

The multi-year plan stresses objectives, steps, and tasks for each phase of systemic change and general strategies for accomplishing them. The plan accounts for implementing the design in a given setting and facilitating replication and scale-up.

In formulating plans, keep in mind that schools and classrooms are the central focus. The simple truth is that: *If planned changes do not end up playing out effectively at schools and in classrooms, they mean little.*

Some Lessons Learned

Good strategic and action planning accounts for situational opportunities, strengths, and limitations. Such plans also address matters meant to block change – often raised by those who are reluctant or resistant to making the transformation.*

Regular reviews of plans and monitoring how they are carried out also is essential. And as noted, initial agreements and procedures often must be revised as the work proceeds and understanding deepens.

*Most fundamentally, we hear it argued that there is no money for the work. Effective responses to such challenges are essential to ensuring that the work is not undermined. Our response with respect to the financial argument is that, for many LEAs and schools, it is estimated that about 25% of the budget is expended on addressing barriers to learning and teaching. Strategic planning focuses on redeploying such resources to develop a more cost-effective system.

Ensuring Policy Facilitates Transformation

Accountability and standards for guiding practice are two fundamental policy drivers. Therefore, ending the policy marginalization of a learning supports component requires (1) an expanded accountability framework that includes leading indicators of direct outcomes and (2) standards for a learning supports component.

Finally, with scale-up and sustainability in mind, policy makers must ensure that sufficient resources are allocated for establishing and building the capacity of the temporary operational infrastructure for accomplishing systemic change.

Some Lessons Learned

Demonstrations, pilots, and projects. Transformation of student and learning supports requires policy for effective replication and sustainability that addresses the scale of need. A frequent problem is decisions to only implement demonstrations and pilots (e.g., at one or two sites) rather than establishing a policy for phasing in changes at all schools over several years. Demonstrations in a district rarely are scaled-up.

A related problem is escaping “project mentality” (sometimes referred to as “projectitis”). We find a common tendency is for those involved in the transformation process to think about their work only as a temporary project (e.g., “It will end when this superintendent/principal leaves.” “It will end when the special funding runs out.”). This mind set often leads to a general view that the work doesn’t warrant serious engagement. The history of schools is strewn with valuable innovations that were not sustained.

Of course, frequent leadership changes (e.g., superintendents, principals, other key stakeholders) do tend to reverse changes that are underway. Countering this requires institutionalizing transformation policies and procedures as early as feasible. It also calls for planning strategies to effectively engage new decision makers and shapers.

Reworking Daily Operational Infrastructure

To ensure continuing development, sustainability, and creative renewal of a learning supports component, the functions of a temporary infrastructure for facilitating systemic changes eventually are subsumed by the daily operational infrastructure. This involves a reworking of the daily operational infrastructure at school and district levels, with school needs supported by the district. In addition, enhancing outcomes, generating efficiencies, and achieving economies of scale requires establishing mechanisms to connect a family or complex (e.g., feeder pattern) of schools and building collaborations with community resources.

(For more on reworking operational infrastructure, see the Center’s Systemic Change Tool kit – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/toolkitb3.htm>).

Concluding Comments

Transforming education requires processes that facilitate substantive and sustainable systemic change. Such processes include articulating the design for innovative new directions and a multi-year strategic plan for phasing in the changes.

Supporting the work requires a temporary district/school operational infrastructure for facilitating implementation of the strategic plan. It also involves a reworking of the ongoing daily operational infrastructures at school and district levels and for connecting schools with each other and the community.

In underwriting transformation, the emphasis is first on weaving together what education agencies already allocate (e.g., pupil services, special and compensatory education and other categorical programs). Over time, increasing efforts are made to link school resources with those from home and community (e.g., formally connecting school programs with assets at home, neighborhood enrichment, recreation, and service agencies, businesses, service clubs, faith-based organizations).

Finally, well-designed and carried out leadership coaching and mentoring at every level is invaluable in making transformation a reality.

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