

Diffusion: In Pursuit of Action

Good ideas and missionary zeal are sometimes enough to change the thinking of individuals; they are rarely, if ever, effective in changing complicated organizations (like the school) with traditions, dynamics, and goals of their own.

Seymour Sarason

While the terms *dissemination* and *diffusion* often are used interchangeably, those seeking to influence action are involved in two distinct but interconnected formal or informal processes. Formal efforts require well-designed interventions. In particular, they involve application of strategies that address recipients' interests and capabilities.

Dissemination is the process of distribution or circulation (e.g., of information, materials, analyses and recommendations). This is accomplished through various delivery mechanisms (e.g., in person and online presentations, hard copy mailing, email, webinars, websites). Dissemination alone does not guarantee that recipients will do anything with what they receive. And, widespread dissemination does not increase the likelihood of this. Thus, while dissemination is a necessary precursor, it is insufficient with respect to facilitating learning and eventually mobilizing action.

Diffusion is the process by which recipients are mobilized to learn and use what is disseminated. The focus of formal diffusion efforts may be on motivating and facilitating (a) acquisition of information and knowledge, (b) adoption/adaptation of a specific innovation (e.g., a new practice, a new policy), and/or (c) pursuit of major reforms and transformative innovations requiring systemic changes.

Note that the complexity involved in *diffusion* is exacerbated by contextual variables. For example, neighborhoods, schools, agencies, etc. all are *organized settings* with well-established institutional cultures and infrastructures that usually must be accounted for and which are not easily changed.

Major Examples of Focus

		Information/ Knowledge	New Practice	New Policy	System Change
<i>Process</i>	Dissemination (distribution, dispersion)				
	Diffusion (mobilizing recipients to learn and use)				



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