Managing Innovation in Educational Organisations[*]

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Abstract
The purpose of this paper and the talk it references is to look at the idea of change and innovation in educational organisations, and suggest ways in which the inevitable process of change can be managed in such a way as to ensure that it is carried with as much success as possible. The tools and issues discussed can then be applied towards the goal of introducing a multilingual programme in an educational organisation.

"There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the instruction of a new order of things."

Nicolo Machiavelli (1469-1527)

In all walks of professional life, innovation and change is, paradoxically, an unavoidable constant. It is also quite possibly the hardest thing to manage, as change can provoke resistance and even fear in many people, while at the same time being, almost by definition, a journey into the unknown. No field has been more subject to innovation than education, although educational innovation is not necessarily successful simply because it is in the context of an educational institution.

Attitudes to Change

Change seems to come at us from all directions and our response to it may be partly determined by whether:

- we think the change is a good idea
- the reason for the change is clear
- we feel we have the resources to deal with the change
- we are involved in the process
- we are confident that the change will be introduced successfully.

All these factors play into our attitude to change and innovation. And, of course, into the attitudes of those that, as managers and leaders, we are charged with winning over in the need to introduce innovation. Given the above, there are a number of reasons why people might resist change:

- there is a lack of support from key people
- the purpose of the change is not made clear
- the details of the change are poorly communicated
- people affected by the change are not involved in the planning of the change

- the change is introduced too quickly or too slowly
- key job characteristics are changed
- fear of failure
- people affected feel change reflects badly on their past performance
- lack of confidence in people's capacity to implement the change

Strategies for dealing with resistance to change

In the light of all this, Jeff Hiatt proposes the "ADKAR model" (Hiatt, 2003) for dealing with resistance to change. He argues that change will inevitably meet resistance, however well-meaning and positive the change appears. There are a number of strategies that can be used to reduce or overcome resistance, depending on the situation.

The acronym ADKAR stands for:

Awareness: How aware are the people affected by the change of the need for the change?

Desire: Do those affected support the change. Are they in favour of it, neutral towards it or opposed to it?

Knowledge: Do people have the relevant training to perform the tasks for their new role as a result of the change?

Ability: Do people have the necessary skills and knowledge to make the change itself

Reinforcement: Are people getting the support they need. In what areas do they need additional reinforcement?

To make innovation successful, all of the above factors have to be taken into consideration.   Those affected need to be clear about the reasons why the change is taking place, and once aware they have to want to make the change. At that point, they then have to know that they will get the necessary training and support in moving forward (and also they need to believe that others will get the same support). Communication is key. Different people want to know the answers to different questions when they are communicated with/learn.

1. What is this about?
2. Why is this important?
3. How can this be done?
4. What are the implications for me and others?

Educational Innovation

Michael Fullan has spent decades researching and writing about managing change in education, and has reached some thoughtful conclusions on factors that influence success and failure in what he calls 'educational reform'. He concludes that among the reasons for failure are the following:

1. Believing that complex problems can be solved quickly

Complex problems, by definition, do not have a simple solution. There is also no linear solution, which will just "cure" the problem, and leave nothing else changed.

2. Adopting innovations which have only symbolic benefit

Sometimes it seems that we undergo change for change's sake. The change itself is superficial and in fact has no real benefit to the organisation. This will not only lead to possible failure in the innovation at hand (people will realise that it is only symbolic gesture) but is also likely to lead to greater cynicism and reluctance in future innovations.

3. Responding too quickly to fads and fashions

There is a fine balancing act between being quick to respond to the changing world and making sure ones organisation remains at the cutting edge, and responding to fads which turn out to be nothing more, leading the organisation up blind alleys, and causing frustration.

4. Misunderstanding resistance as an attempt to block, rather than as indicating a need for help and support

This one is arguably the most crucial. The resistance of staff or others to a particular innovation should not be read as an attempt to block. It much more frequently indicates a need on their part for some help and support. Go back to the ADKAR model and try and work out where the lack is.

5. Allowing pockets of success to fail through lack of support

It can happen that through a change process, some people or departments seem to move more quickly and successfully than others. This does not mean that they can be safely ignored while resources and time are directed at those who seem to be struggling. People continue to need support and reinforcement throughout the process (and beyond!)

He goes on to suggest strategies for success, including an understanding and realisation of the following truths:

- Change is a learning process (and therefore needs to be regarded as such)
- Change is a journey, not a blue print – it involves not just one-off solutions, but continuous planning and adjusting
- Problems arise from the change process; these are natural and expected and must be identified and solved
- Change is resource hungry (to be successful, this fact must be recognised, and, implicitly, provision must be made)
- Change requires local power to manage it; it can't be managed by remote control from a central power source
- Change is systemic: it involves linkages and interconnections among many systems and issues in the organization.

Complex problems, such as setting up a new course, introducing or changing coursebooks, or developing a multilingual programme cannot be dealt with quickly. Ultimately, successful innovation results in an improvement in relationships and the ways of doing things in an organization, outcomes which should not be underestimated.

Managing a change effectively

Based on some of the above mentioned criteria and ideas – from Fullan and the ADKAR model, as well as from other sources, outlined below is a three step process to introducing a multilingual programme in an educational organisation.

1. **Planning**

    As much as possible the process of establishing the vision should be carried out collaboratively, with as many stakeholders involved as possible. As with all planning activities, it is important not only to establish the vision or goal but also to ensure that the current situation is accurately analysed. So, to take our multilingual programme, with as much input as possible and in as participatory way as possible, envisage the future state – the one with the multilingual programme already established. What does it look like? What languages will be included?   How does it benefit the organisation and the working lives of those who are part of it? How does it benefit and impact the wider community and other stakeholders? With that in mind, look at where the organisation is now along the road to such a future state. What is the current situation in detail? What languages are already taught? A SWOT – strengths, weakness, opportunities, threats – analysis is often useful at this point).

    Having done this, and having made sure that benefits of the proposed change outweigh the costs, it is time to plan in a more purposeful way. Set as many SMART objectives as you need to reach the ultimate goal. (SMART objectives are specific, measurable, agreed, realistic, and timebound). Be clear about the outcomes you hope to achieve. If people within the organisation who will be expected to be involved in the process were not involved in the initial vision work, then ensure that you have communicated clearly the rationale for the plan, the benefits it will bring, and the role that people will play. Together, draw up a plan to achieve the objectives – what tasks will need to be carried out, what is the timeline, who will be responsible for each?

    Finally, think about monitoring and evaluation. What standards and benchmarks will you set? How will you measure the success of your activities?   What will be done with the results of your evaluations of the process. At a basic level the monitoring and evaluation plan should answer the

following simple questions: What will be evaluated? How will it be evaluated? When will it be evaluated? Who will evaluate it? And what will be done with the results of the evaluation?

2. Implementation

Having planned your activities thoroughly, the implementation stage takes care of itself, to some extent. But it's important to be sure that you (the manager/leader of the change process) are constantly on hand to offer support, training where needed, encouragement, resources as required and reinforcement.

It may be that during planning you as a group decided to pilot one new language course in your envisioned multilingual programme. Then the pilot is an initial step in the overall implementation. What was learned from the pilot? How can it inform the plan going forward?

The plan's sponsor (in this case, this is likely to be the person who is ultimately responsible for the project – the director of the organisation, for example) needs to be active and visible in his/her support for the project. Coaching and training needs to be offered – support, encouragement, training and particularly time are all essential. Resistance, as we have seen, is to be expected. When it arises, review and analyse it. What can we learn from this resistance? What lack is it highlighting? What help or support is actually needed?

Above all it is essential to communicate. To make sure communication and feedback is endemic throughout the organisation and to ensure that you, the leader, are constantly in touch with those who are critically involved in the process, and to ensure that any important information you have learned through this contact is communicated on through the organisation.

3. Reinforcement

As you go forward with the change, make sure that people are reinforced in their successes and supported with any problems that arise. Establish short term wins – make sure that short term goals are visible and quickly achievable, such that there is clear and visible progress. Having achieved these milestones, ensure that they stick – that they are not forgotten in the rush towards the next one. As we saw before, make sure that pockets of success are not ignored to focus resources on areas which seem to need more support.

Keep evaluating the process – make sure you follow the monitoring and evaluation plan and keeping track of what is happening, how successful the change is proving to be, and what indicators there are.

Are things going so well, that you want to consider expanding the scope of the change, for example, perhaps to include other languages, or other sites? If things are not going so well, why not? What needs to change? What unforeseen obstacles are you facing? How can you overcome them?

And finally recognise and reward success - the successes of the team, of individuals and of yourself. It's important to acknowledge your successes and achievements.

Following these three steps will, as much as possible, give your change process the best possible chance of success. Nothing, of course, is guaranteed, but a well planned and well communicated process will make it more rather than less likely.

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