

The Human Agenda: Critical Variable in Innovation



ROBERT HETZEL*
DOUGLAS BARNARD

THERE have been more attempts at fostering change in education during the past decade than have occurred in the past century. Ask any superintendent, principal, or teacher, and he or she can reel off the many changes in the school district with great enthusiasm. Unfortunately, most of the changes have been concerned with altering organization and/or methodological styles, with little concern given to the critical variable—the people implementing the innovation. Although our intentions have been admirable, all too often the change has not affected the learning of children—our entire purpose for existence.

The impetus behind these changes has stemmed from public dissatisfaction as parents feel they are paying more and getting less in return. Consequently, legislatures, school boards, and concerned parents are bringing pressure to bear on the schools for improvement—not just change. The leadership, reacting to this pressure, has instituted a multitude of changes in program, structure, and methodology, with little difference in the public perceptions of schools. The failure of such changes rests not in the merit of their content, but rather in the process used to implement them, particularly the absence of concern for motivating the people charged with the responsibility for making them work.

Leadership is a process, and it is the contention of the authors that the process or *how* of change is as important as the content or *what* of change, if not more so.

It is the purpose of this article to offer a process for motivating people for change based upon specific strategies. In essence, this article attempts to operationalize the vast amount of theory and rhetoric concerning group process, involvement, and decision making. It is not a “fail-safe” process for all people; it is a strategy found successful by the authors in effectively improving services to children.

The strategy or process to motivate staff members can be illustrated by the model shown in Figure 1.

Motivational Process

It is our contention that there are five critical steps in the process of motivating people for effective change. They are:

1. An awareness of the need for change
2. Identification with need and problem ownership
3. The generation of solutions, selecting

* Robert Hetzel, Principal, Whitman School, Mesa, Arizona; and Douglas Barnard, Director of Reading, Mesa Public Schools, Mesa, Arizona

goals, and assuming of responsibility with freedom

4. Evaluation and closure by staff and leader

5. Assuring that recognition/reward is provided.

Although the words and concepts are common to us all, the basic premise upon which this process is based is that unless teachers are "turned-on" and motivated toward an idea or concept, there will seldom be lasting change.

Let us consider each step of the strategy as it relates to operationalizing the process.

Awareness

To attempt solutions or changes without a real awareness of the problem or the need for change is wasteful energy and results in nothing but frustration. All too often awareness is approached strictly from an impersonal, cognitive level using hard data, such as test scores, ethnic groups, etc. In essence, awareness is superimposed rather than emanated from the individuals directly involved. Strategies for creating staff awareness on an emotional level are (a) use of group consensus and (b) individual interviews.

Group Consensus. One alternative to create awareness is to divide the staff into teams of three to five, depending upon staff size, and present to them the task of listing the three key concerns they have that prevent them from improving services to children. After allowing 10 or 15 minutes, have one group present its list, then the next group, until all groups have presented. Record these on a blackboard, checking those problems repeated by the groups.

By this process, a consensus of opinion and a severity level for the key issues are secured. Do not be surprised if staff concerns are different from what the leader perceived to be the concerns. Nevertheless, these identified problems—the hidden agenda—must be dealt with before one can successfully deal with what the leader perceives the problems to be. "People act on what they

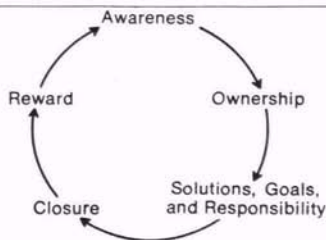


Figure 1. Motivation for Change

perceive and this is what makes the difference."¹

Individual Interviews. Another method for creating awareness, especially if one is new to a position, is to conduct individual interviews. From these interviews the problems can be identified, tabulated, and presented to the entire staff as being the key issues they have identified. Although this is time consuming, it does afford the leader the opportunity to let each person know that his or her input is valued.

If time does not permit this approach, an open-ended questionnaire would serve the same purpose. Examples of open-ended questions are:

1. The three most critical problems facing the school are . . .
2. Students are not achieving at grade level because . . .
3. In order to help students, we need to do more . . .

Ownership

Once the awareness phase has been accomplished, the next step is to have the staff identify with the need, accept ownership of the problem, and secure commitment for solving it. Too often, we tell the staff what the need is, and even though they may agree, they are not committed to solving it because they do not have ownership. The problem must be personalized: it must be moved from

¹ Richard L. Foster. "Poise Under Pressure." In: Robert R. Leeper, editor. *Supervision: Emerging Profession*. Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1969. p. 17.

an institutional to a personal level. The individual must realize that since he is part of the institution, he is also part of the problem. A leader can begin by approaching the staff with appropriate questions, such as:

1. What are the components/factors of the identified problem?
2. What are we doing about the problem?
3. What is getting in the way of our solving the concern?
4. What can you as an individual do about the problem?

At this juncture, a needs assessment is appropriate and could be the vehicle for staff participation. The leader, or perhaps a staff member, might suggest that more background data are needed to determine the status of the problem: Where are we? Where do we want to go?

It is important that not much time elapse between strategy steps, as staff members need to feel that something is going to be done, and their involvement is important in working out a solution. One of the ingredients of motivation is that the person feel important, and this is the responsibility of the leader. He can fulfill this task by making the issue a high priority on his agenda, with adequate time and resources available.

Rarely will 100 percent ownership of a problem be achieved by any group. It is important during the needs assessment phase to assign the larger tasks to those teachers who demonstrate greater ownership, and lesser tasks to those teachers who are less committed; however, everyone should be involved. By utilizing this strategy, those who accept ownership are rewarded with recognition, a sense of self-satisfaction. By assigning lesser tasks to those not as yet committed, they are kept involved and not rewarded by isolation. Ignoring or isolating individuals is one sure way to decrease ownership, commitment, and productivity. Logic would say that a dissenting person has needs not recognized by someone, and consultation would provide the opportunity for him to ventilate his concerns.

Solution, Goals, and Responsibility

Once people have ownership and commitment, they will naturally seek to solve the problem. After the needs assessment is completed, the goal to work toward should be stated and understood by all concerned. "Feelings of achievement or self-accomplishment can be harnessed productively when the participants in an organization have a clear conception of one another's goals."²

After goal selection, the best strategy to arrive at alternative solutions is the problem-solving approach: ". . . all emotional states are potentially harnessed through taking a problem-solving orientation to organizational life."³ The possible alternative solutions and combinations thereof must be analyzed and ramifications discussed openly as they relate to changes in student behavior.

It is at this point in the process that "pet" solutions from staff or others may be presented for consideration. It is also the proper time to utilize district and outside consultants to offer innovative ideas, to react to solutions, and to discuss the advantages and disadvantages for the staff to consider. After all alternatives have been studied, a potential solution should be selected and reasons stated for the choice of one alternative over others. System analysis techniques can be used to map the detail steps for solution of problems.

In this process, it is critical that the leader accept the decisions of the staff. By having the staff select the possible solution within the given constraints of time, space, personnel, finances, and curriculum, the responsibility to resolve the problem rests with the staff, not with the leader. This responsibility adds to their feeling of importance; effort is greater and morale is higher because there is direct and real involvement. It is critical, after identifying the solution and assuming responsibility, that the implementors be given the freedom to fulfill the respon-

² Richard A. Schmuck and Philip J. Runkel. *Organizational Training for a School Faculty*. Eugene, Oregon: Center for Advanced Study of Educational Administration, 1970. p. 31.

³ *Ibid.*

sibility assumed. Guidance may be needed but staff members must feel free to pursue their solution, and even to fail. "The only failure that lacks dignity is the failure to try."⁴

Closure

The group should have a time line with evaluation checkpoints and a terminal evaluation, because it is essential to assess the results of the efforts as they relate to the problem. There must be closure. Nothing is more demoralizing than to initiate a project and never have it concluded or evaluated. If nonclosure is repeated, further efforts to motivate for innovation will be received with skepticism, negative reaction, and a "why bother" attitude.

Reward

After the evaluation and closure phase, regardless of the significance of the results, it is highly important that the efforts be rewarded. As McGregor states, "... commitment to objectives (and future endeavors) is a function of the rewards associated with their achievement."⁵ The strategy is to publicize the achievement or staff efforts at every opportunity within house and within the community. This recognition will make staff members feel that they are satisfied with their efforts, that the task was worthwhile (and the next tasks will be also), and that they are worthy members of the profession.

Strategies To Avoid

Most projects or efforts to change have died or faded away for numerous reasons,

⁴ Anonymous.

⁵ Douglas McGregor. *The Human Side of Enterprise*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1960.

but the following are possible means to decrease motivation, to lessen respect, and to create distrust.

1. Nothing turns people off more than if they feel the solution is determined beforehand or that they have been manipulated. This is telling staff members that you do not respect their judgment and that they really are not important. This has a boomerang effect on the leader.

2. Along the same line, the leader can impose a solution on a group by using cue words to indicate his obvious desire. If this occurs, the leader has accepted ownership of the problem and motivation will decrease where it is most needed.

3. If the solutions and steps of the process are one-way, then there is no commitment or ownership. All decisions need to be arrived at jointly, by staff and leader—neither should withdraw from any step of the process.

4. Imposing unreasonable burdens in terms of time and energy can result in decreased staff motivation. The leader must demonstrate consideration for the staff members and the total scope of their role. They undoubtedly have responsibilities and duties in addition to working on the problem at hand.

In summary, Kirkpatrick defines motivation as "creating a climate in which a person will want to do his best."⁶ The authors believe that the process provided does create this type of climate and the mutual respect necessary for innovation to occur. By using these strategies to motivate staff and by giving teachers a sense of importance and achievement, leaders will find teachers more willing to try new ideas and go the extra mile for success. Teacher success ensures leader success; but more important, it will result in greater success for children. □

⁶ Donald L. Kirkpatrick. "The Training Managers and Motivation, A Review of Basic Literature." *Educational Technology*, Training Technology Supplement; September 1969. p. 1.

Freedom, Bureaucracy, & Schooling

304 pp., clothbound

Price: \$6.50

Stock No.: 610-17508

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
1201 Sixteenth Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036

Copyright © 1973 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.