



Link PARTners: Leading the journey of evidence-informed practice

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Planned and Strategic Implementation

We know from experience and research literature that the **planned and strategic implementation of evidence-informed practice (EIP)** increases the chances of the organizational and sustained use of EIP. Change management models in child welfare are in the early stages of development. It is important to evaluate change management strategies in order to increase the opportunities for success in the future. The literature indicates that individual behaviour is typically a function of the group environment, further reinforcing the importance of an organizational perspective for managing significant change.

Child welfare organizations are constantly subjected to change as a result of internal and external influences. “Change fatigue” is a reoccurring theme in many organizations, regardless of whether change is voluntary or mandated; change is a process that can dramatically affect individuals and organizations as a whole.

Leaders in the field have recognized that working from an evidence-informed perspective, even on an organizational level, increases the probability of **positive outcomes for individuals and organizations**. In turn, successful outcomes contribute to the success of individual staff members, leaders, teams, and most importantly, the service users.

The Organization as a System

Organizations are composed of a variety of parts (e.g., individuals, teams, departments) that work together to form a wider system. The relationships between individual parts create the overarching system, culture, and climate as a whole. Individual parts of an organization operate according to their own cultures and climates, which may or may not correspond to other parts of the system. Changes in one part of the system are generally experienced in different ways throughout the organization.

Individual Reactions to Change

Key factors of a successful change implementation include **individual responses and reactions to the new environment**. Individual reactions to change are personal experiences informed by:

- Position within an organization
- Role in the change effort
- The way in which information about the change is communicated.

Although individual experiences can differ widely, organizational leaders often underestimate the impact of change on employees. Leaders often feel isolated and may underestimate the importance of communicating change efforts, perhaps due to the limited amount of contact they tend to have with practitioners and supervisory staff. Supervisors are pulled in different directions during organizational change operations; not only are they under pressure to implement lasting change, but supervisors are often blamed by practitioners for the upheaval they experience. Practitioners are frequently caught off guard by major changes and innovation, responding with resistance, confusion, ambivalence, or fear.

Resistance and acceptance

Resistance is a normal reaction to change. However, resistance in the face of change may also be viewed as an expression of perceived loss and a desire for the known and understood. Experiences of loss are intensified as one organizational situation ends and another has yet to begin. The sense of balancing between two stages promotes anxiety and stress, whether individuals feel negatively or positively about the impending change.

Understanding how individuals experience and react to change promotes leadership and increases recognition of the need to plan carefully for any major organizational change.

THE SENSE OF LOSS IN ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

A lack of security

- A lack of security is a common response when individuals experience a loss of control and lack of transparency in their environment. A feeling of incompetence frequently overtakes people when they do not know how to proceed, or what to do in their new role or responsibilities.

Sense of direction

- The organizational vision, mission, and meaning of an individual's work may have changed or become unclear due to new organizational directions. Feelings of loss may negatively influence organizational climate and individual perceptions of their role in the organization. Although leaders cannot control individual responses, planning for change and implementing strategies that have been successful in the past will increase the likelihood of promoting positive change experiences.

Relationships

- The relationships that people once shared may be transformed because of change in an organization. People may feel powerless over the directions that are being taken as they lose team members, supervisors, or the overall sense of security in their professional relationships.

(Proehl, 2001)

Leading Change

The roles of leaders in an organization are varied. A successful leader must undertake the roles of change agent, planner, collaborator, communicator, and motivator. The importance of understanding change management extends to all forms of leaders. **Formal leaders plan change, but informal leaders maintain it.** Individuals in non-leadership roles seek guidance and support from both

formal and informal leaders during difficult times. Leadership that fosters self-efficacy and skill development is key in any change management strategy.

How to Create Successful Change

There are various models of change, although most share common features. While the stages of change will appear different in each organization, a key factor in producing effective change is developing a rigorous plan that allows for flexibility in its implementation. The following outlines Kotter's (2012) **essential steps to implementing change in an organization**.

1. A Sense of Urgency

Establishing a sense of urgency is critical to the change process. Complacency and the desire to “be in the know” result in a resistance to change. In order to engage people in change, they must understand and be invested in it. Urgency should relate back to service users and how the change will positively influence outcomes. Supervisors and their directors will play a key role in communicating the urgency of change. Leaders must solicit feedback about the urgency level, especially from those who may be at odds with the leadership and organization.

2. Creating a guiding coalition

The guiding coalition is a driver for change. Four characteristics are vital to a strong coalition:

- 1) **Power**: a coalition requires a sufficient number of influential players on board, especially supervisors, who will play an important role in maintaining progress;
- 2) **Expertise**: the coalition requires various points of view, in regards to expertise, experience, and roles in the organization. These differences will ensure that informed and intelligent decisions are made;
- 3) **Credibility**: the coalition requires individuals with positive reputations and strong characters in order to be taken seriously by those who are not directly involved with the change;
- 4) **Leadership**: the group should include formal *and* informal leaders with proven leadership qualities in order to drive the change process forward. The guiding coalition will be most effective when they are built based on trust and a common goal.

3. Vision and strategy

Developing a change vision or goal is a key characteristic of change management. The change vision is distinguished from the overall organizational vision, although the two must correspond. Many change efforts overlook the vision; however, a vision provides compelling information, such as:

- Reasons why an organization has developed specific goals and is setting out plans to accomplish them.
- Clarity about the decisions individuals make; one may ask themselves whether their decision is based on the organizational vision or not.

Effective visions acknowledge the difficulty in change, but also the beneficial outcomes that can result because of it. A vision should be concrete, imaginable, desirable, feasible, focused, flexible, and communicable. A measure of an effective vision is whether it can be communicated within a few minutes and gain interest.

Strategy development should illustrate the 'logic' for how the vision may be achieved. Strategies should be concrete, specific, achievable, flexible, short-term, and staggered in order to maintain efforts toward the long-term goal. All systems within the organization must be included in the vision and strategy; their inclusion recognizes the various parts of a system and gives equal weight and importance to them all.

4. Communicating the change vision

An effectively communicated vision breaks down the structures that maintain the status quo and allows for effective change. It is the role of the **formal and informal leaders** to communicate the sense of urgency and vision. Neglecting to clearly and effectively communicate the vision will undermine the change process. Unless dedicated communication and discussion time is built into organizational processes, the change vision will become lost in emails, phone calls, and other daily routines. The following table outlines key elements of an effective vision communication strategy:

KEY ELEMENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE VISION COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Simple	▪ Reduce jargon and technical wording.
Metaphor, analogy, and example	▪ Images and graphs that are clear and easy to understand.
Multiple forums	▪ Large and small meetings, discussions, newsletters, formal and informal meetings.
Repetition	▪ Complicated ideas solidify only after many encounters in different forms. These encounters must be accompanied by opportunities to individually assess the message.
Lead by example	▪ Behaviour from formal and informal leaders that is inconsistent with the vision undermines the message and deters effective change.
Inconsistencies	▪ Unaddressed inconsistencies destabilize the credibility of change efforts.
Give-and-take	▪ Two-way communication is most effective and much more powerful than a one-way message.

5. Empowering broad-based action

Once the vision has been effectively communicated and the majority of the organization is on board, leaders must ensure that formal and informal barriers for participation are removed. For example, people may require additional skills or training in order to implement the required change. There may also be formal structures such as policies or informal structures such as a “culture of fear” that inhibit adoption of the new vision. In order to carry out change all personnel must be afforded the responsibility, means, and capacity to create the change.

6. Generating short-term wins

Short-term success is as important as long-term success in a change effort. When people get caught up in where they are going they frequently forget how to get there. Major change in organizations takes a lot of time. Without short-term successes people lack evidence that their actions are making a difference and that they are moving closer to their ultimate goal. Short-term successes validate the existence of the vision and goal, and must be tangible,

related to the change effort, genuine, staggered, and well timed; if too many short-term goals are achieved all at once their potential impact is likely to be diluted.

7. Consolidating gains and producing more change

Momentum must be built from and maintained after short-term and small-scale successes. Entire programs of organizational change usually require more change and time than initially anticipated, resulting in an extended series of projects. Once the enormity of the change effort becomes clear, many will feel overwhelmed and want to give up. The communication of short-term successes by the guiding coalition is key in moving the change forward. Change processes often fail because they become a series of complex, over-centralized, and micro-managed projects. Additionally, a lack of vision results in misalignment and inability to proceed past one or two short-term successes.

Leadership from senior management provides clarity of vision and strategy while anticipating potential conflict and challenges. A key point in maintaining change is the **constant evaluation of implementation and progress**, which may be built into supervision, teamwork, and feedback systems. The monitoring of change is critical to ensure the new initiative is on top of the agenda.

8. Anchoring new approaches in the culture

Anchoring new approaches in an organization's culture will ensure that changes will be maintained and supported by all levels of staff.

ANCHORING CHANGE IN AN ORGANIZATION'S CULTURE....

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|---------------------------------------|---|
| Comes last, not first | ▪ Most changes in norms and values occur at the end of a change effort, not at the beginning. |
| Depends on results | ▪ New approaches are maintained in the culture usually only after it is clear that they are superior to the old ones. |
| Requires a lot of talk | ▪ People are usually reluctant to admit the validity of new approaches without opportunity for discussion. |
| May involve turnover | ▪ At times, the only way to change culture is through staff change. |
| Makes decisions on succession crucial | ▪ Promotion and development of staff must be aligned with new practices, or else the old culture and behaviour will reappear. |

Summary of Steps to Effective Change

