



WHAT WORKS - A PKAL ESSAY

ORGANIZATIONAL REFORM IS NOT ENOUGH

I. ASSUMPTIONS

To effect genuine academic improvement not only the structure of the institution but the personal commitments of the members must change.

Why?

- ♦ the basic nature of the organization derives in large measure from the values of its members
- ♦ the process of education requires a great deal of autonomy, which is essential to enhance innovation
- ♦ individuals innovate as they freely adopt changes to which they have made a personal commitment, as they focus on educational alternatives that are opportunities for personal growth for themselves and for their colleagues (including students).

A. Strategies of change

- ♦ commitment is gained through participation in the decision-making process and through programs of “re-dedication”
- ♦ participant involvement requires a setting in which:
 - ♦ threats to security, acceptance, self-esteem, and autonomy may be reduced
 - ♦ values regarding the proposed change may be clarified and sometimes altered
 - ♦ competencies necessary to success in the new situation may be developed.
- ♦“management” achieves change by manipulating organizational conditions such as rewards, sanctions, sources of information, and relationships among participants.

B. Limitations to participant involvement

- ♦ institutions exist to carry out societal functions for which they are responsible
- ♦ faculty autonomy is limited to decisions regarding the implementation of these functions and is subject to evaluation by appropriate authorities
- ♦ group involvement sometimes restricts legitimate individual initiative. In some measure, therefore the organization must protect innovative faculty from other faculty.

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(adapted with permission from H. Bradley Sagen and *Change! How?* an AAC 1977 publication.)

THEN & NOW

While musing about the process of institutional transformation, Jeanne Narum, recalled this article from a 1977 AAC workshop which we believe captures the issues with which we are wrestling today. We invite you to reflect upon your own experiences with institutional transformation in light of Dr. Sagen’s insights of 1977.

— James E. Swartz, Vice President of Academic Affairs & Dean of the College and Professor of Chemistry— Grinnell College and Marlene Moore, Powers Distinguished Professor, Department of Biology— University of Portland



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II. MAJOR CONDITIONS AFFECTING THE ADOPTION OF ACADEMIC INNOVATIONS

A. Institutional support for innovations

The probability of [succeeding in] innovation is influenced by general institutional norms toward “innovativeness” as an activity. Innovation can be encouraged in a variety of ways without impinging upon the necessary autonomy of faculty and students. [It] can be recognized as a legitimate activity by:

- ♦ *Funds*: Designating funds for innovation as an important activity is an important tool not only for the direct return but for the symbolic commitment.
- ♦ *Coalitions*: Since no one group is necessarily a force for change, another major strategy is to develop coalitions of innovative participants across traditional academic boundaries ([which will be] a substantial innovation itself).
- ♦ *Incentives*: Institutions, [recognizing that rewards] for innovation are typically personal in nature, can offer incentives to faculty willing to promote or adopt innovation. Reimbursement for expenses and increased secretarial and student assistant allocations may at least ensure that those open to innovation do not have to pay an additional price for their efforts.

- ♦ *Time*: [Recognizing time] is perhaps a faculty member’s most precious commodity...reduction of competing demands is a realistic solution. For example, raising the student-faculty ratio and allocating the equivalent funds to released time for innovation may result in more significant educational outcomes than would occur from maintaining the present ratio.
- ♦ *Status*: [Giving faculty] increased status with colleagues through the visibility of an innovative program is another potential reward for faculty. Faculty should be provided with resources to evaluate their innovations and disseminate the results. Publications resulting from innovative programs provide visibility not only for the author but for other faculty and the college as well.

B. Compatibility of the proposed innovation with values held by participants

A basic reason for failure of many academic innovations...is the difficulty of constructing proposals compatible with the wide range of attitudes held by different groups and the basic values of individual faculty. [Thus many innovations are] designed to fall within the “zone of acceptance” of the major values of participants. ...this perhaps accounts for the “something for everyone” character of many proposals, but given the need for personal commitment from all participants:

- ♦ a strategic compromise usually yields better results than does annihilating the opposition.

Another step toward establishing compatibility is to make explicit the values actually held by faculty. Faculty:

- ♦ can and should be held accountable for their views. Conditions can be created in which faculty state publically their educational values.
- ♦ can be required to state course, program and institutional objectives in *operational terms* through syllabi, program descriptions, etc.
- ♦ can be requested to describe their program aims at faculty meetings and to groups of students, trustees and other constituencies of the institution.

Seminars, retreats, and individual consultations can be initiated to assist faculty in defining their educational aims and commitments. Clarification of [personal] values serves also to prepare participants for more effective decision-making which itself is a goal of many change strategies.

C. Perception of the present situation

Innovations are seldom adopted on their absolute merits. They are instead evaluated on their potential for improving the current situation. Systematic dissemination of accurate knowledge about the present situation is thus an important stimulus to innovation.



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Faculty should be encouraged to broaden their contacts with similar institutions to provide a better base for judging the quality of current practices and the potential effectiveness of proposed changes. Faculty having contact with other institutions tend to judge the quality of present practice against more cosmopolitan standards, rather than from narrow traditional commitments to the local institution.

D. The “side-effects” of the innovation

[Faculty] are influenced more by the possible “side effects” of a proposed innovation than by the possibility of significant educational improvements, [and are concerned about]: how will the adaptation of this innovation affect such things as: my chances of promotion, my workload....

- ♦ *Openness:* [Leaders] cannot ignore these concerns, but they can insist upon the norm of openness in decision-making. In many instances a major source of anxiety and increased resistance to innovation is the lack of information regarding possible outcomes. Transmission of all pertinent information about the anticipated consequences of change and an adequate discussion of their implications will reduce faculty anxiety and open what is usually a “hidden agenda” in innovation.

- ♦ *Competencies:* To faculty, a major threat is the perceived lack of competencies necessary to success in the new situation. [Leaders should commit] that every effort will be made to help faculty attain the competencies required to function effectively in a new situation.

[Such anxieties suggest] that the “target group” for change not be a unit experiencing major difficulties. Successful change is most likely to occur among faculty...whose sense of security and competence makes innovation an opportunity for improvement rather than an additional threat.

E. Communication

The importance of how an innovation is perceived [by faculty] suggests that communication is a key element in innovation. Several critical aspects of communication are the mode, credibility, and timing.

- ♦ *Mode:* Communication may be one-way or two-way. Two-way communication through conversations and discussions is crucial to the actual adoption of innovation because it provides an opportunity for faculty to express and clarify their feelings regarding the proposed change.

- ♦ *Credibility:* Communications are judged on the credibility of the source as much as on the content of the message. Successful communication about innovation, therefore, is often a two-step process: the first step involves identifying and communicating with “faculty opinion leaders” who, in step two communicate personally with others and to a considerable degree affect their decision to adopt or reject an innovation.

Several communication principles for academic institutions:

- ♦ directing opportunities for general exposure to and discussion of new ideas and proposals particularly toward those prone to innovation generally
- ♦ engaging outside consultants to generate awareness and interest, [particularly] peers who have experienced the innovation and thus judged to be credible
- ♦ directing personal communication to faculty opinion leaders to clarify perceptions and attitudes
- ♦ creating alternative communication systems, including “temporary systems” such as committees, study groups, and retreats, open new sources of personal communication and bring faculty into contact with other potential opinion leaders, [while avoiding existing “rigid” communication systems]

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- ♦ taking every face-to-face opportunity to clarify perceptions and feelings about an innovation, as faculty begin to evaluate the proposal. Memoranda and lectures alone are not likely to reduce misperceptions.

III. THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

A. Stages of adoption

[As articulated by E.M. Rogers in Diffusion of Innovations], ...the process of adoption or rejection of an innovation occurs generally in five stages:

- ♦ awareness of the innovation
- ♦ development of interest
- ♦ evaluation of the potential benefits (threat or opportunity)
- ♦ a trial or an experimental period in which the innovation is adopted without full commitment
- ♦ full-scale adoption.

In many institutions it is possible to create temporary groups which develop innovations on an experimental basis.

B. The awareness and interest stages

[Leaders responsible for developing awareness and interest should:]

- ♦ establish channels for systematic dissemination of information about potential innovations. Opportunities to broaden awareness of educational alternatives should be provided for those inclined toward innovation and for faculty opinion leaders, who will in turn influence others.
- ♦ make certain each faculty member possesses a clear understanding of the institution's goals, accurate information about the degree to which those goals are being achieved, and the best prediction of what the innovation is likely to accomplish
- ♦ direct personal communication about the present situation to make certain participants cannot "ignore" the problem. Contact those in a position to make decisions: e.g., faculty and administrators, and those who may be dissatisfied with the current situation: e.g., students.
- ♦ avoid pressuring for premature commitment, which narrows the person's range of acceptable alternatives to those most compatible with present views and precludes consideration of major changes.

C. The evaluation stage

At the stage of evaluating the innovation's potential benefits (is it viewed as a threat or an opportunity), personal and local considerations assume major importance. To achieve faculty commitment, they must perceive the innovation as more of a personal opportunity than a threat. This involves several conditions:

- ♦ *Norms*: The institution's general norms on innovativeness should be clearly expressed and understood, and the specific rewards for and constraints on the innovator determined.
- ♦ *Outcomes*: Insofar as possible, [the intended outcomes] should be made explicit. Particular attention should be given to the side-effects of innovation: e.g., increased workload, loss of autonomy, loss of influence, etc.
- ♦ *Goals and values*: Care in relating the proposal to major institutional and faculty goals (within the "zone of acceptance of participant values"), and in providing evidence of willingness to compromise at strategic points are important.
- ♦ *Competencies*: Major provisions should be made for ensuring faculty are competent to function in the new situation.
- ♦ *Opinion leaders*: Because of the importance of personal influence, personal communication should be directed to opinion leaders to clarify perceptions and attitudes.
- ♦ *Timetable*: A timetable for decision-making should be established early on, and adequate time for discussion of the proposal should be ensured.



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All should realize that during the evaluation stage there will develop a sub-stage known as “hard-bargaining” in which the innovation and its various elements will be considered for their “trade-off benefits.” All should know that both the proposal and the timetable for decision-making are flexible enough to permit incorporation of valid objections and to reconsider steps and decisions previously taken as new evidence or problems arise. Political realities cannot be ignored. ...if the norm of personal and institutional openness can be maintained, political considerations and other side effects of innovation will be considered openly rather, than carried as a “hidden agenda.”

D. The trial and adoption stages

Provision for an experimental tryout:

- ◆ encourages adoption or rejection of an innovation on the basis of experience rather than on some uninformed expectation of what might happen
- ◆ allows individuals and departments to delay full commitment to the innovation until they have some experience, which promotes greater eventual acceptance

- ◆ forces participants to operationalize their education goals (i.e., what exactly should change as a result of adopting the innovation), and to establish workable measures of success. A minimum trial period for the most complex innovations is two complete cycles. The first cycle inevitable involves working out problems, thus evaluation at this time should be focused on diagnosing and overcoming “bugs. During the trial period, participants should be provided information about their progress. Such information maintains interest and reinforces tentative commitments to the innovation.

The period following adoption of an innovation is also a period for restoration of relationships within the institution. No innovation is accepted completely, and those opposed must be given opportunity to reconcile the innovation with their own values, experiences, and often reasonable judgements. Positive attitudes towards “forced compliance” can be encouraged by acknowledging the personal integrity of those who opposed a particular change and by directing attention to other shared concerns and task which may restore patterns of personal interaction and good will.

IV. CONCLUSION

Although many of the above propositions regarding building faculty commitment to innovations—generally and specifically— will require substantial organization reform, such organizational reform will only create the climate. Organizational reform will not itself re-educate faculty and students to view academic innovation as an opportunity for further personal growth.

In the final analysis, achieving a viable and innovative college or university depends upon each participant’s personal commitment to those conditions that provide the greatest growth and self-fulfillment for every member of the campus community. ■