



Tool #9: The Change Tool

*How to Create Change in the High School*ⁱⁱ

It is human nature to focus 90% of our efforts on the **what** of change—**what** it is we want to change. We believe that the wisdom of our thinking clearly communicated to the staff will leave them with no possible alternative other than to embrace the change. Therefore, tools associated with the change process frequently try to measure a school’s “readiness for change” as though one day the entire staff will have an epiphany and openly embrace reform.

The reality is that the power of a good idea—the **what**—cannot bring about the change, nor is there a level of staff “readiness for change” that can be measured with any consistency and then exploited to bring about change. Robert Slavin supports this view in his review of the literature on high school reform. Slavin found that some high schools are ready and able to develop and implement very ambitious reforms—but they “appear to be a minority of a minority.”ⁱⁱⁱ

The fact is that 90% of successful change comes from the **how** of change. The implementation of change is a purposeful decision that is carried out in a pragmatic way by overcoming resistance, motivating staff to move forward to new possibilities, and then sustaining the change.

Overcoming Resistance

How do we approach change to deal with the reality that for every change proposed or achieved, someone loses something; that every change is accompanied by the natural grief and resistance that comes from loss? Should we *force* the staff to change by providing sanctions or withholding rewards? Should we *reason* with the staff by committing to a reform or technical assistance program to provide them with the information that will help them see the wisdom of doing things differently? Or should we take a more long-term approach and identify and mitigate the forms of staff resistance and then *provide incentives for participating in school reform*?

The answers to these questions may lie in the consideration of the three approaches to change found in the research on organizational development:

1. Forced change.
2. Change based on reason.
3. Change linked to people’s needs and drives.

Forced Change

Having a powerful individual, district board, or state policy mandate change at the site level is a fast and efficient strategy for short-term change. An example of forced change is when a school is designated as “underperforming” or similar classification and must implement changes that bring about specific outcomes (e.g., increased test scores) within a short period of time.

Forced or mandated change can overcome resistance to change, but it cannot dissolve resistance because resistance to force is a natural biological reflex. To demonstrate this truth,



hold up your hand. Have someone push on it and watch what you do. Instinctively, you push back. Although change without resistance is no change at all, remember that the resistance has merely gone underground if forced change is used to overpower resistance.

Change Based on Reason

Providing staff with new information and data is the most commonly used change strategy, but probably the least effective approach to change unless all three of the following conditions exist:

1. The staff agrees on what needs to be done.
2. The goals are clearly stated.
3. There are plenty of resources to carry out the change.

Few schools lay claim to all three of these conditions.

Conditions that do exist at most schools are the result of failed efforts at change based on reason. Reflect on the graveyard of strategies provided by technical assistance efforts that never became part of the classroom curriculum or did anything to change the way teachers teach. Listen to staff members discuss school data on graduation and dropout rates or numbers of students enrolled in Advanced Placement courses and reason that these are student—not school—problems. Beyond the schoolroom, think about all the people who smoke despite the Surgeon General’s information and data on the hazards of smoking.

Change Linked to People’s Needs and Drives

Linking the change to people’s needs and drives focuses the change on people rather than on the change itself and has the greatest long-range impact. The “linking” approach takes more time, effort, and self-discipline than forced change or change based on reason. It requires the identification of the sources of resistance as well as the personal incentives that will encourage each individual to leave the status quo and move forward to new possibilities. It does not attempt to increase the number of staff members “pushing” for the change. (Remember, when people get pushed, they push back.) Rather, it attempts to do nothing more than decrease the number of staff members resisting the change.

Following are some of the more common sources of resistance and suggested strategies to overcome the resistance. In the table below, check the causes of resistance listed in the first column that may apply to your school. Consider the antidote listed in the second column and use the third column to make a note of the specific action that you can take at your site.

Sources of Resistance

Cause of Resistance	Antidote	Specific Action
Lack of ownership. The change has been imposed from outside the school. The school has been told what to do but not how to do it.	Involvement. Form a team and make people part of the process. This can be done as a whole school broken down into small groups and brought together through an accordion process. ^{iv}	



Cause of Resistance	Antidote	Specific Action
Lack of benefits. The change requires staff to do more with no new resources of psychological payoffs (i.e., money, satisfaction, self-image, affection, or power).	Payoff. A reward is provided to the “changee.” The reward must have personal meaning from the perspective of each recipient.	
Increased burdens. Even though the energy and money may be available to effect the change, time is not.	Lighten the load. Explore what trade-offs in time or responsibility can be made.	
Lack of top-brass support. Understanding, commitment, and resources have not been garnered from organizational leaders.	Top-brass support. Enlist leader support before proceeding with the change. The support must be clear and overt.	
Loneliness. The change calls for staff to leave the collegial cocoon of their peer group, and/or staff believe that they are the only ones that have ever tried this.	Collegiality. Where possible, work in teams to implement the change. Where individual assignments are required, delegate in pairs.	
Insecurity. The proposed change threatens an individual’s security or is merely perceived as threatening. For example, the change may result in job loss.	Security. Security may require districtwide support. Explore each individual’s future with the school in light of the proposed change and determine what changes or job/role redesigns are necessary.	
Inconsistency with school culture. The individual role expectations associated with the change are inconsistent with organizational norms.	Norm congruence. If the change attacks the organizational norms of the school you are taking on a double change—the change you are seeking and a norm change. Focus on changes that are consistent with the school culture.	
Boredom. The change is presented from the perspective of “we’re in trouble and have to adapt” or other such grave depictions of the change efforts.	Fun. Focus on celebrations and joy. Answer the question, “What would make the change fun?”	
Chaos. The proposed change conjures up images of chaos and loss of control.	Control. Take small steps and keep the change manageable. If the change suggests that there will be more control, more accountability, more order, or more authority, it is more likely to be welcomed.	
Superiority. The change effort is communicated through a voice of	Empathy. Emphasize that the new idea is an option, an	



Cause of Resistance	Antidote	Specific Action
moral superiority (e.g., “as you become more experienced, you’ll like my idea,” or “we’re just thinking of you”).	alternative that works to solve a problem or satisfy a need. Change is accepted more easily when it’s seen at eye level instead of having to look up, so encourage peer-to-peer recognition.	
Differential knowledge. All staff members do not receive the same information. Information is power, so unequal power leads to competition.	Equal information. Keep everyone equally informed. <i>No secrets!</i>	
Lack of recognition. Some staff members receive organizational recognition by opposing changes.	Involvement. Recognize everyone. Make them part of the solution. Opposers become part of the change team. Their differences of opinion and tough questions are productive to decision-making and change.	
Sudden wholesale change. The change is presented to staff members as a major behavioral change.	Gradualism. Try a small behavior change, then a bigger one, and a bigger one, etc. Capitalize on the theory of “small wins.”	
Failure. School leadership focuses on what is <i>wrong</i> and what staff <i>cannot do</i> so the staff is unwilling to risk change.	Affirmation. Recognize everyone for his or her positive contributions. See failure as a surprise, not personal shortcomings. Ask, “what happened here that we did not expect?” and, “why?”	
Organizational structure extremes. The organization is either highly controlled by leadership or no one provides direction and everybody does his own thing.	Structural moderation. Examine your organization for extremes of structure and move to the middle ground.	
Other Source (fill in):	Antidote (fill in blanks)	
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Cause of Resistance	Antidote	Specific Action
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Moving Forward

Overcoming resistance starts the change engine running, but additional strategies are required to move the change in a forward direction. It is difficult to get someone who is comfortable with the “status quo” to change. In fact, three conditions must be put into place to motivate people to start moving forward in a new direction:

1. A need to alleviate the discomfort created by dissonance—a feeling of pressure, strain, or stress.
2. A strong belief that the change can be accomplished.
3. A belief that there is a personal payoff inherent in the change.

Assessing the degree to which each condition is in place within the school is the key motivating change. Following are suggested strategies to create a feeling of positive stress, instill a belief that each individual and the school as a whole can change, and provide extrinsic and intrinsic “payoffs” to staff for moving in a new direction.

Alleviate the Discomfort

Dissonance can be produced by creating situations where staff perceive a gap between *what is* and what they believe *should be*. Dissonance is a useful state in the change process. Strategies to create dissonance include:

- Sending staff to visit schools that are effectively implementing the proposed change.
- Convening staff to work in groups to review school performance data, including the results of student surveys on satisfaction with their high school experience. Before beginning the exercise, have each group hypothesize what they think the data will show. Compare the anticipated outcome with the actual outcome. Compare the school performance data with district and state data.
- Organize a “whole school” planning day where staff work in groups to determine what they know about promising practices that improve student achievement and where they are personally and as an organization in implementing these practices.

Targeting staff members that appear to be the most resistant to the change means asking them to take responsibility for some aspect of the change. For example, ask a resistant staff member to put together a staff presentation on how to make the change work, including his or her cautions. Each time you see the staff member, ask him/her how the presentation is coming and convey how eager you are to hear his/her insights.

Evaluations are tied to the change. Announce that goals related to the change will be established and assessed within the employee and organizational evaluation process. Formalize the change by including change-related goals in each staff member’s evaluation. If the organization participates in organizational evaluations such as program quality reviews or regional accreditation, make sure the change-related goals are formalized in these documents.

Sanctions create dissonance by withholding rewards and/or inflicting punishment, but are only effective for short-term change. For example, a state may offer cash rewards only to staff members at schools that produce significant test-score gains. The school district may



sanction a principal whose school does not meet performance outcomes by transferring him/her to another school or position.

Even-Trade strategies are more effective than sanctions if long-term change is the goal. The “even-trade” strategy creates a form of dissonance when persons in authority are perceived by staff as individuals who never give away something for nothing. When a staff member asks for special considerations such as early departure, classroom location, etc., the person in authority asks the staff member for something in return such as participation on one of the change committees or a presentation to the staff on one of the aspects of the change.

Believe that the Change can be Accomplished

Baby steps break the change down into smaller units and celebrate one small success at a time. Celebrate each small success to reinforce each “changee’s” belief that the change can be accomplished. Keep an inventory of congratulatory cards handy and acknowledge each small victory.

Shifting personal paradigms (i.e., seeing things from a completely new perspective) opens the floodgates for change. For example, teachers who previously believed that only certain students could master rigorous coursework experience a paradigm shift when they visit a school where all students are enrolled in Advanced Placement courses. Evidence that the change can be accomplished creates the belief that it can also happen at their school.

Personal Payoff

Personal payoff involves determining what each person wants/needs to become involved in the change. Do not allude to overarching principles like, “this would be good for the students” or “this would be good for the school.” Rather, ask “what would need to be in this change *for you* to get you to do it?” In other words, what would your payoff be?

Psychologists believe that humans have degrees of orientation toward power, achievement, or social orientation. Instruments actually exist to determine the stronger and the weaker of these orientations, but it is not difficult to observe those individuals who seek power, are high achievers or like to work with other people. Appointments to leadership roles may motivate those with a power orientation. Assignments to change-associated tasks that produce concrete products may be important to those with an achievement orientation. And teamwork along with management of the social aspects of the change are likely to be of high interest to those with a social orientation.

Social theorist Frederick Herzberg identified some general classes of human needs that are helpful in identifying motivators: recognition, responsibility, achievement, money/resources, interpersonal relations, facilities, and security. Jerald Jellison suggests some more concrete examples of payoffs: special rules, scheduling adjustments, altered work assignments, independence, support for further education, perks, coalition, space and equipment, information, promotions, and praise.^v



Sustaining the Change

If a change is so important that you are willing to devote your attention and energies to its accomplishments, then it is important enough to keep around for a long time. A change cannot be kept around for a long time, i.e., institutionalized, *after* it has been implemented. Institutionalization must take place during the planning stage and

throughout the implementation stage. There are nine factors involved in the institutionalization of a change: planning and preparation, timing, congruency, environmental sensitivity, clarity and simplicity, realism, sufficient but not indulgent resources, strong central leadership, and reduced individual proprietary interest.

Planning and Preparation factors include five elements:

1. Listening. Seeking out and listening to what others have to say.
2. Involving. Including all stakeholders in defining the *what* and *how* of the change.
3. Directing. Directing the disparate work of individuals within a school, building and melding teams, and giving them focus.
4. Analyzing. Receiving, sorting, and aggregating information and ideas to make sense.
5. Crafting. Shaping the information and values into a product that satisfies identified needs and interests.

Timing is everything. Changes that last occur at the right moment in the history of the organization. If the right moment has passed or not yet arrived, hold off or even abandon the change effort. When the timing is right, then proceed.

Congruency is a reminder that changes that last are congruent with the mission of the organization. It is tempting for schools to apply for soft money for projects that may or may not be consistent with the mission or culture of the school. What do we see happen to these projects when the money goes away? They die. Changes that last—funded or not—are those which address genuine need.

Environmental sensitivity. Changes that are responsive to external demands and needs are more likely to last. School changes must reflect the volatile, demanding, and constantly changing world around us. If we rely only on school staff to determine what students need to know and be able to do to succeed in the “real world,” we are doomed to no change at all and, ultimately, to little hope for success or survival. At the same time, schools cannot react to every fad and fancy in the turbulent outside world. Changes that last walk the middle road.

Clarity and simplicity are critical in communicating the change. Conflicting interpretations arise if the change is not explained in clear and simple terms. Clarity may allow disagreements to surface, but this allows for the identification of sources of resistance. Consensus must come before implementation or the change will not last.

Be Realistic. In proposing a change effort, acknowledge imperfections and limitations. Yes, the change is important and noteworthy—it just isn’t perfect. Remember, staff are weary and skeptical of overblown, pretentious change efforts.



Modest resources support long-term change. Modest resources force invention; investment and organizational commitment and lead to lasting change.

Strong Leadership. The ideal leader for the change effort is already trusted and respected in the organization and is linked into the central mission and goals of the organization. While change may advance an individual's career, when it is used for that purpose, the change will not be sustained. The ideal change leader is not a marginal member on the make or an individual whose ego is more important than the outcome. The leader must serve as a lightning rod for ideas and activities and be able to articulate the reasons for change throughout the lifespan of the project.

Reduced individual proprietary interest. Ownership for the change must move from the few to the many. The leaders of the change must sell shares in the project to every one of the stakeholders if the change is to be institutionalized.

Readiness for Change

Up to this point, the discussion on change has focused on helping schools select the right strategies to overcome specific forms of resistance and begin moving staff toward the implementation of the desired or mandated change. What is offered in closing is a discussion on assessing a schools "readiness for change." The traditional structure of high schools presents barriers to change that can affect a staff's readiness for whole-school change.

Robert Slavin refers to schools by their developmental readiness for change by labeling them as *seeds*, *bricks*, or *sand* schools.

Seed schools are ones capable of developing and implementing their own reform models, and only need general principles and support. *Bricks* schools are ones that would be unlikely to co-develop their own innovations, but are capable of faithfully and effectively implementing well-developed models created elsewhere. *Sand* schools are ones incapable of either creating their own models or implementing externally developed models.^{vi}

The barrier to determining the developmental readiness of a high school, according to Slavin, is that within large secondary schools there are likely different levels of readiness among various departments.^{vii} For example the Science Department may be representative of a *seed* school because the staff is capable of and want to develop their own reform model. At the same time the Mathematics Department may be representative of a *sand* school because it believes that it is doing and always has done a good job. What's to change?

The result of these variances in readiness can mean that each department or any other type of organized grouping within the high school does not have enough power to move the whole school to change. But each department or grouping *does* have enough power to prevent the whole school from changing.



Slavin’s observations remind us that the barriers to change inherent in school structure must be taken into consideration in determining a high school’s true readiness for schoolwide reform.

The first consideration is the impact of the structure on interdepartmental communication. The communication required to develop common norms—agreement on values, what is important—among staff members is difficult at best in an environment that isolates teachers by both classroom and department.

Second, teachers, like students, require the support of others to participate in the change process. Just as student tracking results in different levels of student achievement and beliefs about one’s academic abilities, departmentalization or other subgroupings of staff members can result in different levels of readiness for change and beliefs about the need for and approaches to change.

A final consideration is the flexible use of resources. Effective change requires that all school resources move in the same direction to achieve the agreed-upon outcomes. The small budgets allocated to individual departments or categorical funding that provides resources to a particular subgroup within the school is usually not enough to support schoolwide change. However, it is enough to inhibit change if each department or group fights to maintain the status quo in order to claim and control the resources. Long-term change is more likely to occur when each department and group commits its resources (including time, expertise, technology, etc.) toward attainment of the same or complimentary goals.

So what is a strong, easily observable indicator that a school is ready for or already involved in change? The entire school staff is working together toward common, agreed-upon goals. In established schools, staff is working across departments. In some newer or already restructured schools, departments are replaced with interdepartmental groupings based on curricular or career themes. Following are some indicators that a school is likely to be ready for change based on observable evidence that staff is working together toward agreed-upon goals:

- A staff-adopted vision exists for high school reform that meets at least two conditions:
 1. Each staff member is able to articulate the vision and discuss his/her role in attaining the vision.
 2. Evidence exists that the entire school has come to agreement on at least one critical aspect of the vision (e.g., union barriers have been overcome as evidenced by a two-thirds vote for block scheduling). Or, in the case of a new school, evidence exists that teachers were selected based on their commitment to the underlying philosophy of the reform approach.
- A formal process is in place that allows teachers to meet across content areas to monitor data on student achievement.
- The schedule allows time for interdisciplinary groupings of teachers to meet on a regular and frequent basis.
- A formal process is in place for developing teachers as leaders.



- Standards/competencies are taught across the curriculum. If not fully implemented, staff development and/or release time for development is readily observable.
- The adoption/implementation of a reform philosophy or specific reform initiatives are already in place and involve a significant part of the school (e.g., Breaking Ranks, School-to-Work, Coalition of Essential Schools, High Schools That Work, Partnership Academies, etc.).
- A “coach” or some type of expert is working with the school on reforming some part or all of the system. (The coach/expert could be a county/regional office of education employee, a university-based program representative, or an individual associated with a state or national reform initiative.)
- The principal is actively engaged in the role of curriculum leader.
- Strong district support for the change is evinced by board policy, district leaders’ involvement in site meetings/activities, etc.

References

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- ii. This tool is based on the work of Thomas R. Harvey, *Checklist for Change* (1995); Robert Chin and Kenneth Benne, *The Planning of Change* (1984); and Eileen Warren, *The Process of Change in Two Successful Tech Prep Consortia in California* (1997).
 - iii. Robert E. Slavin, *Sand, Bricks and Seeds: School Change Strategies and Readiness for Reform* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University, Center for Research on Education of Students Placed at Risk, April 1997), 9.
 - iv. Like the movement of an accordion, small groups “move out” to complete their work. The groups then “move in” to share their small-group progress with the larger group. The movement in and out continues until all of the work is completed and consensus is reached within the larger group.
 - v. Jerald M. Jellison, *Overcoming Resistance* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993).
 - vi. Robert E. Slavin, *Sand, Bricks and Seeds: School Change Strategies and Readiness for Reform* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University, Center for Research on Education of Students Placed at Risk, April 1997).
 - vii. Ibid.