Scaling Transformative Change

Transformative Leadership

Equity and Outcomes

Strategic Capacity Building

Policy Change

Partnerships and Networking

Data Utilization

Intentional Communications

Transformative Change Initiative Overview

The Transformative Change Initiative (TCI) is dedicated to sustaining and scaling change that closes equity gaps and improves student outcomes in the community college education context.

Guiding Principle for Intentional Communications: Transformative change happens when individuals with deep knowledge of change communicate to help others change in their contexts.

The classic idea for scaling innovation across organizations calls for replication, meaning implementation consistent with the original innovation. Whereas this simple idea is attractive – follow the recipe, fix the problem – increasingly, scholars and practitioners question whether replication is feasible or effective in complex settings with their dynamic variables and unknowns. Community colleges having multiple missions, varied settings, different funding streams, comprehensive curricula, and diverse learners, more than qualify as complex organizations (Bragg, 2014; Patton 2011). Therefore, community colleges that undertake the scaling of change are best served by taking into account the complexities of their settings as they consider how, when, and with whom to communicate about the change.

Telling others about the change will not on its own bring about the adoption of that change, even with organizations that indicate a readiness to change. And, changes are not adopted or sustained simply because they are shown to be effective. Most individuals serve their organizations to the best of their capacity based on deeply held beliefs and personal experiences. Transformation is difficult unless the change process is made meaningful to them, and they can connect to it (Kezar, 2013).

Intentional communication is essential to the transformative change process because it takes into account the local context, focusing on how the change can be adapted, rather than replicated. Intentional communication is that which is done with intent, with awareness of the purpose and potential effect on others (Motley, 1986). Careful attention to communication activities throughout the change process can contribute to its success. In communicating about change, leaders reflect appreciation for the differences that exist between units or departments within the organization and sometimes also differences across organizations. Communication activities that are well-targeted, frequent, and clear generate understanding, convey meaning, and perhaps influence others to engage with the change process.

Transformative change that spreads and endures is due to two individual and organizational processes: learning and sensemaking. Both learning and sensemaking attempt to support change through engaging individuals to examine underlying assumptions and beliefs. The learning and sensemaking process enables individuals in community colleges – faculty, students, staff, administrators – to connect the change to college culture, context, and outcomes, which is essential for making improvements and bringing about more equitable outcomes (Bensimon, Rueda, Dowd, and Harris, 2007; Kezar, 2014).

Transformative leaders associate innovation with core values and key practices, and they listen with compassion and purpose.

Transformative leaders hold deep knowledge of the culture of their organization, representing different aspects of their organization (e.g. administration, teaching, student services). Leaders intentionally communicate in numerous forums and at multiple times to help individuals wrestle with the change. These leaders facilitate learning and sensemaking by creating opportunities for interaction, introducing new ideas, and using various communication activities to encourage other people's thinking to evolve. They share data and encourage inquiry processes to help individuals understand the change, they tell stories and provide relevant historical examples to contexualize the change, and they facilitate social interactions to help individuals engage in the sensemaking process. They ask and answer questions and explicitly address seeming inconsistencies in the plan for change. The leaders associate innovation with core values and key practices, and they listen with compassion and purpose. These intentional communications are effective when they are frequent and sensitive to the needs of targeted groups (Kezar, 2014; Kotter, 1996).

Throughout the change process, the need for intentional engagement of others continues to evolve. We understand all too well that a lack of understanding of local culture and context, combined with over-simplified ideas about how change is spread, lead to disappointing results (Schorr, 2012). Therefore, community colleges that undertake the scaling of change are best served by considering how, when, and with whom to communicate about the change. Early on, the learning and sensemaking processes are more focused on understanding and contextualizing the change, than undertaking the change. Groups of stakeholders including networks and partners become intentional communicators as they learn and make sense of how the change impacts them and how they can contribute to its advancing over time. Their knowledge of change in their settings enables them to engage with others to think about change in additional contexts. New insights come about by expanding communications beyond the local setting, which can facilitate and accelerate transformation and learning on a wider scale.

Intentional communication can involve the dissemination of information, such as publishing marketing materials and making presentations at internal or external meetings, as well as the deliberate engagement of targeted groups of stakeholders (e.g. employers, policy makers, advisory board members, faculty, and students) in the change process (Escalfoni, Braganholo, and Borges, 2011; Kezar, 2014). Communication can be verbal, non-verbal, written, visual and graphic, formal and informal and can originate from an organization, as well as a group or an individual. The method of communication about change and the intent of that communication vary depending on the provider and the participants. The methods include electronic messages, documents, websites, webinars, meeting agendas and notes, published and informal stories, and more.

The following table identifies several communication methods focused on how people learn, how they bring about change, and how they make sense of change in higher education (Escalfoni, Braganholo, and Borges, 2011; Kezar, 2014). The categories are not exclusive in that multiple intentions can be met through various methods.

Communication Method	Intent
Ongoing and widespread conversations • Retreats, seminars, symposia • Storytelling	• Help adopt new mental models; recast concepts • Explore how change fits • Develop common language • Build trust and capacity to engage in change
Working groups or teams • Members across the organization • Consortia • Policy makers • Employers • Faculty • Partners • Networks	• Break down silos • Encourage exchange of ideas • Challenge assumptions • Foster development of new models • Use data to consider impact of change
Professional development • Webinars • External speakers/consultants/experts • Storytelling	• Build skills and knowledge about change • Reflect on past and challenge current ways of knowing • Encourage rethinking of current roles and identity
Dissemination • Conferences • Board meetings • Open resource sites • Professional associations • Concept papers and documents	• Engage wider group in understanding the change • Articulate direction of change • Foster development of new models • Respond to questions about change process • Provide specific information on new policies, products, or processes associated with the change

The need for intentional communication continues beyond the adoption and adaptation of the change. For the innovation to endure, communication activities must continue, and the methods and intent will likely shift from those used during the planning and implementation of the change process. Leaders who tend to be the ones who bring about enduring change are those who continue to attend to the local context as it evolves, and use data to understand what is and is not working and why. They continue to use multiple methods of intentional communication to perpetuate a culture of learning and sensemaking.

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