

Change Management in Schools

What the research tells us about implementing successful innovations



Change is Challenging

Hey, I've got an idea!

That's brilliant, I'll do it right now!

I don't get it.

What I do already works fine for me.



1 year later

I still think my idea would work...

It does work! Why aren't we all doing it again?

Doing what?

Every year, another leader with a big idea.



Evaluating the success of an innovation

Before embarking on a school improvement effort, it is important to consider how to ultimately evaluate its success. Miller and Bentley (2002) suggest that an innovation is successful when it has become sustainable and institutionalised. This means it reaches a 'tipping point' at which the innovation

becomes a feature of the system as a whole. Glatter et al. (2005), on the other hand, look at the impact of the innovation as a measure of success, and urge us to consider whether an innovation has consequences that are noteworthy, highly valued and relevant.

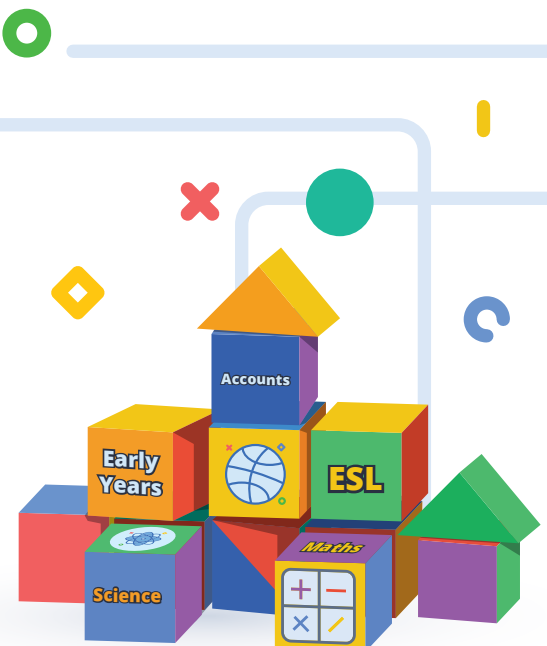
Innovations should be evaluated both in terms of their uptake and their impact on student learning outcomes.

Why do most innovations in schools fail?

The limited success of many change efforts in schools is partly due to their organisational structure. Schools are not tidy, efficient, coordinated structures. Instead, they comprise many sub-organisations which can be added, removed or changed with very little overall effect on the organisation (Weick, 1976). The internal stability of these sub-organisations means school-wide innovations often do not succeed at changing practices within each silo.

Furthermore, as described by Fullan (2001), many change efforts fail due to a lack of planning prior to the commencement of an innovation, the misconception that off-the-shelf solutions will work (as opposed to those which take cultural context into account), unrealistic or undefined timeframes, and a lack of sensitivity towards those who are apparently rejecting or resisting the change.

Plan for your innovation to succeed by setting realistic time frames, tailoring innovations to your school context, prioritising collaboration, and supporting those who are struggling with change.



Theoretical models of the change process in schools

A number of theoretical models of the change process have been proposed. Waks (2007), for example, suggests that the change process begins at the institutional level, the background educational ideas, norms and frameworks that shape and regulate an organisation. An institutional change causes frustration and protest, fuelling new ideas and innovations, from which emerge new beliefs, values and practices. The organisation then readjusts to the new institutional ideas and norms.

Priestly & Miller (2012) made use of conceptual tools derived from critical realism to develop a greater understanding of educational change. They differentiated between structure and

culture in an attempt to distinguish the contribution each makes to the change process, and found that both culture (beliefs, values, norms and ideas) and structure (relationships, resources, power, social positions) influence how teachers respond to innovation.

Spillane, Reiser and Reimer (2002) produced a framework for identifying the cognitive components of the change process and found that new experiences and information are assimilated through existing knowledge structures. They suggest that one barrier to successful innovation is the different interpretations that people can make of the same message, especially if leadership is top-down.

When introducing change, plan for a period of protest and frustration. Support teachers as they engage with and develop their understanding of the innovation by making explicit links to their prior knowledge and cultural context.



◀ Guskey's linear model of educational change

Most models of educational change start with an idea or belief that is shared with teachers in the hope that they will be inspired to change their classroom practice. Guskey (2002), however, asserts that this process needs to be reversed in order to achieve sustainable change. He argues that innovation in schools is most successful when teachers use a new tool and see first-hand the benefits for their own students.

This view is supported by Glatter et al. (2005), who state that small scale experiments are better vehicles of change than rapid large-scale interventions. Moreover, Guskey found that attitude and belief changes occur only when training and implementation are combined with evidence of improved student learning; therefore, a clear demonstration of improvement to student learning is what leads to a change in attitude or beliefs.

The model proposed by Guskey consists of four linear steps: professional development, change in practice, change in student learning outcomes, and change in teacher's beliefs and attitudes.

Support for Guskey's model comes from a number of different studies. Bolster (1983, cited in Guskey, 2002) investigated the lack of connection between educational research and educational practice and found that teachers only commit to a new instructional approach when they have seen it work for their students. Crandall (1983, cited in Guskey, 2002) found that teacher commitment takes place following, not prior to, the active and successful engagement of teachers in a new practice. Furthermore, a case study by Huberman (1981, cited in Guskey, 2002) found that understanding of the rationale behind an innovation follows, not precedes, mastery of the technique.

Many change efforts begin with an attempt to create a shared understanding among faculty; Guskey suggests we reverse our ideas and start by giving teachers the skills to implement an innovation.

Weaknesses of Guskey's model

Guskey highlights some weaknesses in his own model, stating that it is oversimplified and does not take into account the many contextual variables that impact change efforts. Moreover, he accepts the view of Huberman (1992) that the process of teacher change is more cyclical than linear, and he concedes that the model may be too superficial given that teachers do not easily change their practices.

Fullan (2001) highlights that teachers themselves must actively increase their ability to cope with change through collegiality, and that the extent to which a change effort works depends significantly on the level of interaction with others,

with frequent communication, mutual support and technical help all vital for implementation success. This assertion is not necessarily at odds with Guskey's model, as teachers do not necessarily change their practice in isolation, but it is certainly not emphasised by Guskey as a key element required for the success of an innovation.

Most significantly, perhaps, Fullan states that successful innovations must begin with a shared understanding of the proposed change, a statement which appears to directly contradict Guskey's model.

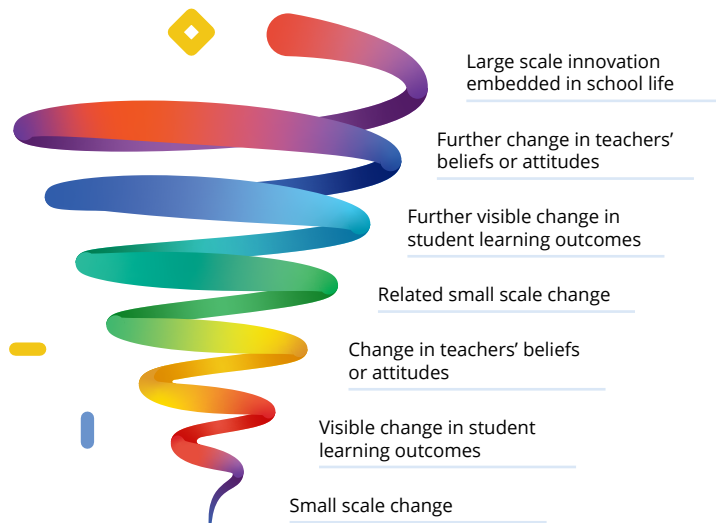
Communication, support and technical help, as well as the development of a shared understanding of the innovation, all contribute to a successful change effort.

Spiral model of educational change

Although Guskey and Fullen's ideas about change appear to be at odds, a fusion approach is possible whereby small scale changes are underpinned by professional development that supports both the development of a holistic understanding and the skills necessary to implement the change.

In the spiral model presented, small scale changes (such as professional development opportunities or changes in teacher practice) result in a visible change in student learning outcomes. The uptake of an innovation takes place in a cyclical manner as teachers experience more professional development, gain more insight and over time change their attitudes and beliefs about the innovation.

As more teachers progress up the spiral, it becomes wider, indicating the greater uptake of the innovation in the school. Eventually, the final step is reached in which the large scale innovation is embedded in school life and Miller & Bentley's "tipping point" is reached at the top of the spiral, at which point the innovation has become a part of the institution.



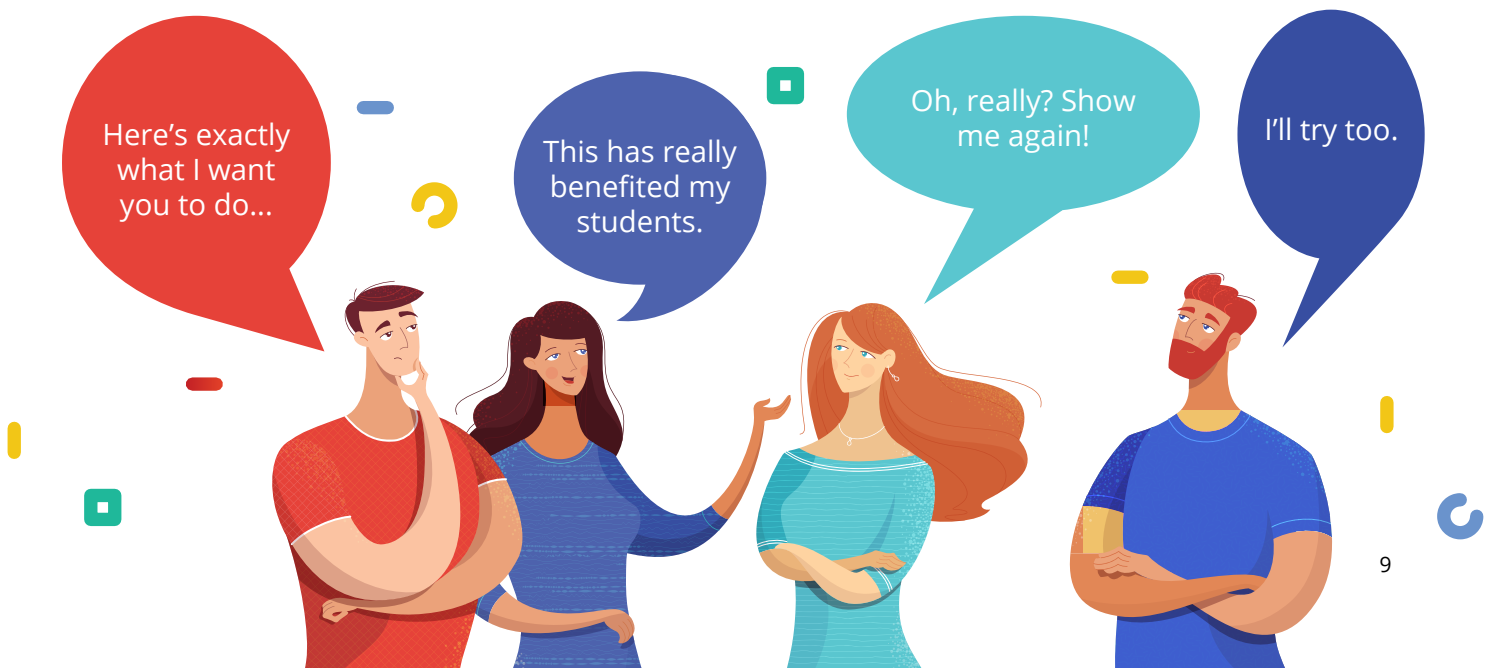
By introducing small-scale changes that simultaneously develop professional skills and a shared understanding, we combine Guskey and Fullen's ideas.

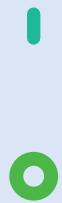
Final thoughts

At the core of successful change management is the positive impact on student learning outcomes that teachers experience when implementing an innovation.

When leading innovation in schools, keep these three things in mind:

- Small-scale, incremental changes tend to be more successful;
- Professional development is essential for allowing teachers to be successful in implementing the change;
- Facilitate opportunities for teachers to reflect upon and share the benefits of their new practice.





References

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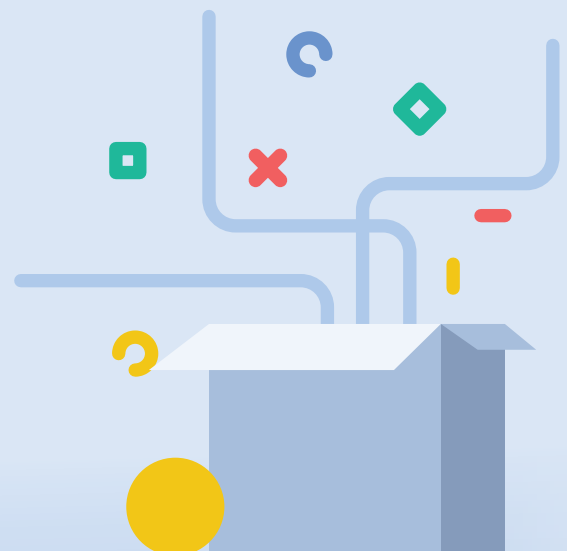
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Recommended resources

[Change Management Designed for Schools](#)

This guide for schools was developed by Faria PD and provides an in-depth and interactive guide to managing change, including questions you can answer as you read and top tips to support the successful implementation of your innovation.

[What leads to positive change in teaching practice?](#)

This report by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) presents the findings of a study in which the NFER aims to map the key research evidence about what leads to positive change in teaching practice in schools.

[Education Change Management PPTA Toolkit 2016](#)

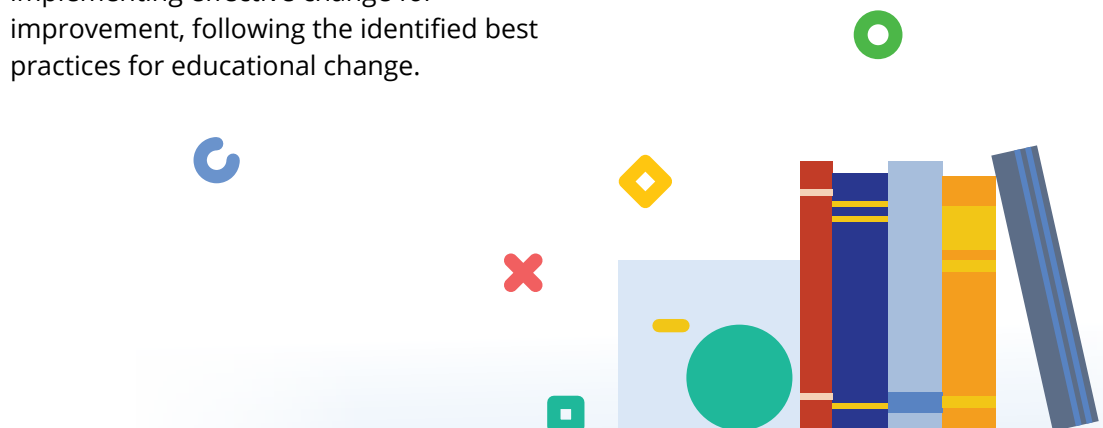
This toolkit was produced by the New Zealand Post Primary Teachers' Association to assist schools in implementing effective change for improvement, following the identified best practices for educational change.

[The Principal Training Centre Leadership and Team Dynamics course](#)

This week-long course is offered each summer and explores essential leadership skills, including how to lead change and improvement processes, including conflict management.

[Harvard Business Review - Change Management](#)

Take a look beyond education to how change management is approached in other industries by reading this compilation of articles by the Harvard Business Review.





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Leila is passionate about making educational research accessible to all teachers to support school improvement efforts. Working at ManageBac, Leila utilises her educational and academic background to ensure our products facilitate technological innovation in schools and transform the way students, teachers and parents collaborate, communicate and celebrate their successes. You can connect with Leila on [LinkedIn](#) or [Twitter](#).