

## Educational Reform: Change Implementation, Support and Management

Meryem Krimi ([meryem.mk.krimi@gmail.com](mailto:meryem.mk.krimi@gmail.com))

Ph. D. Research Scholar, Faculty of Letters and Humanities, Sultan Moulay Slimane University, Morocco



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**Abstract:** *Change management is defined as the process through which an organization introduces and implements change at both, internal and external levels. Every organization requires constant change and innovation to meet the continually changing demands of its customers. This process includes reforming the organization's objectives, strategies, and tactics, as it includes supporting members, providing the necessary requirements for innovation, and assisting change activities to ensure successful implementation. Nevertheless, more theory and research are required for a better understanding of the complex process of change implementation and management. Thus, this paper examines different theoretical approaches to innovation and change implementation. It also introduces a model of educational reform through the implementation of technology in the educational context.*

**Keywords:** Change, Educational Reform, Implementation, Management and Support

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### Introduction

Education is generally considered as the promoting stimulus of social, economic, and cultural transformations during times of global change. Similarly, educational change is thought to be the common theme in different educational systems, and the panacea for the development of educational contexts. According to Seymour Sarason, educational reform's history was always characterized by failure in attaining the desired goals and adopting innovative ideas. Since the 1960s, educational reform has undergone different phases of development. In the first phase, most Western countries mainly based their educational reforms on large-scale changes, such as redesigning curricula and renewing instructions. The second phase was a period where attention to fundamental reforms was lessened. Government officials and the public were so dissatisfied with schools and public education performance, which led to a decrease in reform's financial support initiatives.

Consequently, in the third phase of reform, educational change gradually shifted and became an issue that triggered the attention and interest of both, education authorities and the local community. The fourth phase of educational reform started when it became evident that management, financial support and interest were not enough to obtain the desired results and efficient changes in education. Moreover, more emphasis was placed on organizational learning and systemic reform initiatives, rather than on redesigning materials and restructuring single components of educational systems, or promoting isolated fields of education. Likewise, the understanding of educational reform has evolved from linear to nonlinear approaches, which emphasized the complexity of change processes.

### Educational Change

Educational change is a general term that refers to both, reshaping perspectives and innovative initiatives within the educational context. However, these aspects of educational reform are interrelated, where the former is always a part of the latter. Change within education is oftentimes carried out for the development of the institution. Similarly, substituting perspectives within the institution is the outcome of the recognition of new needs and innovative ideas. The efforts and attempts taken to meet those needs and adjust to those innovations can be identified as educational change. According to the educational researcher Robert Marzano, educational change can be categorized into two main categories: First-Order and Second-Order change. First-Order change can be defined as the superficial change that is an attempt to adjust to new ideas. In this category of educational change, the attempts, as well as the new ideas, must conform to the actual conceptual

framework of the institution, if not, the change is rejected. This surface-level change is only valid if it is compatible with the accepted standards.

Second-Order change refers to the actual change and reform within the institution. Similarly, this category is concerned with the current conceptual framework and valid norms, but it also operates with these predetermined standards in order to bring change rather than change to conform to these norms. This paradigm is part of the change process, but compatibility with it does not necessarily determine the success of the reform. The findings of the study, conducted by Marzano, claim that the Second-Order change is adequate and more substantive than the First-Order change. These findings also suggest that failed reform is generally the result of the inability to adopt Second-Order change. In addition to orders of change, change can be categorized according to different levels. Change at the Local Level handles the daily demands and needs of education. Although this level of change is limited to specific location, it can yield prosperous reforms, since this type is directly tailored to a particular institution. On the other hand, change on the National Level is a broader variety. The educational reform at the National Level encompasses governmental mandates and innovative ideas which often originate from different fields. However, this level of change is likely to fail in bringing genuine reforms, and may instead fall into the category of First-Order change.

According to teachers and educators, educational change is inevitable and educational institutions are liable on the continuous demands of developing everyday practice. The improvement of these practices includes the change and development of ‘(1) curriculum materials, (2) teaching practices, and (3) beliefs or understandings about the curriculum and learning practices’ (Fullan, 2007, p.85). However, many institutions failed to change and remained stable in the face of reform (Priestley, 2011).

### What is Change?

Change is constantly required for the development of every institution. Innovations and change processes have always been perceived as being complex and problematic, given the fact that it is not the nature of change itself, but the knowledge, the perceptions, and the attitudes of interested parties, and how these factors are employed in the process of change. Reform is a long-term process that involves many aspects like human resources, efforts, skills, potential and finance. Every progress in history is in fact the result of change and innovation. There are almost as many definitions of change as there are scholars and researchers on the subject; however, there are some mutual conceptions of it. According to Carlopio (1998), change is “the adoption of an innovation, where the ultimate goal is to improve outcomes through an alteration of practices” (p. 2). Fullan (1992) perceives change as the “process of learning new ideas and things. It is learning to do and learning to understand something new (p. 22)”. Likewise, Robbins & Delenzo (2001) define change as “an alteration of an organization’s environment structure, technology or people (p. 230)”. Of all of these perceptions, change can be defined as the innovation and the process of improving a particular practice. Change is a difficult process that requires the implementation of a number of complex strategies, with the success of these implementations being highly variable.

### Implementation of Change

In education, as is the case in most spheres of our daily lives, innovation and reform have become inevitable. However, most educational institutions are failing in preparing their students adequately and in teaching them the necessary skills for today’s evolving world. Change is therefore seen as both, a necessity and an opportunity. Throughout the years, many thinkers and scholars have conducted an important number of research and studies concerning educational reform, and have brilliantly succeeded to capture the key connection between innovation and improvement. Unfortunately, their insights remained vastly under-applied in the actual practice.

Educational change is a process that is “technically simple and socially complex” (Fullan, 2007, p.84). The complexity of change lies in the fact that different factors affect its implementation, as it requires planning and coordinating a multilevel social process. Many change attempts failed for they have focused on the development of products, and ignored the fact that “what people did and did not do was the crucial variable” (Fullan, 2007, p.85). Educational reform initiatives aimed to improve

students' learning are typically dependent on teachers for effective implementation. However, teachers have always been notably resistant to making changes in their teaching practices (Evans, 2001; Ravitch, 2001; Thornburg & Mungai, 2011). Therefore, innovations come and go, but little has actually changed in the classroom over the past decades (Ravitch, 2001). Supporting this view, Evans (2001) states that educational leaders and policymakers oftentimes ignore the main problem that hinders educational change, which is 'implementation'.

Implementation is of paramount importance since it is the means of attaining the desired aims. It is the "process of putting into practice an idea, program, or set of activities and structures new to the people attempting or expected to change" (Fullan, 2007, p.84). Furthermore, Fullan (2007) highlights the multidimensionality of implementation by pointing out that educational institutions are more likely to "implement superficial changes in content, objectives, and structure than changes in culture, role behavior, and conceptions of teaching (p.79)". In this respect, he claims that an effective implementation "depends on the degree and quality of change in actual practice (p.85)". Thus, stakeholders and advocates for change should not neglect the practical strategies, and they need to take into consideration how, when, and why change is not implemented effectively in actual classroom practices (Evans, 2001).

Historically, effective educational reform has always hinged on teachers' implementation of change in their teaching processes (Garner, 2011; Thornburg & Mungai, 2011). However, the factors that influence teachers to adopt or resist change remain unclear. Previous research indicates that internal factors or teachers' emotional characteristics influence the effective implementation of change, but the research in this area is inconclusive (Brackett, 2010; Hall & West, 2011; Kaniuka, 2012; Kocoglu, 2011; Ripley, 2010; Tait, 2008). Other studies point to the external factors that are likely to hinder or support teachers' active implementation of change in their teaching practices, such as leadership, risk-taking culture, and professional development (Dingle et al., 2011; Melville, Bartley, & Weinburgh, 2012).

### **Barriers to Implementing Change**

According to Heraclitus's maxim, "no man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and he's not the same man". We all hope for change, for our careers, our conditions, and our lives to be better. Yet, when it comes to reality, things are not so simple. Oftentimes, change causes duality and ambivalence. As conservative creatures, we naturally resist change when it occurs, especially when it is imposed on us by others. Whether a change is planned or unplanned, professional or personal, whether we adopt the reformers' perspectives or attitudes, the likely result is always resistance. At the core, we are controlled by a vigorous preference for predictability, thus, we always try to preserve continuity and familiarity (Jossey-Bass, 1996). Another powerful synonym of change is to threaten competence. An educational institution promotes change to reinforce teachers' competence and improve learners' learning, but the reform typically begins by threatening the teachers' already-existing competence. Ultimately, alternations in practices and routines would certainly make teachers feel insecure and inadequate, especially if they considered their performance exemplary. Innovation requires abandoning the familiar and embracing the ambiguous. Nevertheless, clarity is never served on a tray, but it is attained through the process of implementation (Fullan, 2007).

However, if reform is perceived as the progress through which new skills and abilities are developed and acquired, then, it may be accepted. But this is nearly impossible at the outset. Change cannot be implemented without persuading the involved parties of its necessity, which is a task of daunting dimensions that often starts by questioning people's self-appreciation and their capacities. For a better understanding of organizational change management, Kurt Lewin, a social psychologist, introduced a three-stage model of change management known as the "Unfreezing-Change-Refreeze" model. Wirth (2004) explains that Lewin's model "requires prior learning to be rejected and replaced" (p. 1). Likewise, Pennsylvania State University (2020) claims that Edgar Schein's change model is more comprehensive, and "is a slightly more detailed version of Lewin's (1952) change management model, as it is one of the most widely accepted and supported by empirical evidence" (p. 3).



Figure 3: Kurt Lewin's Change Model

This approach begins by recognizing people's tendency for sustaining continuity and homeostasis. Since change requires adopting innovation and naturally abandoning the known, it causes anxiety and indecision. Thus, the first stage of this three-step model, unfreeze, is mainly about preparing for change. It is built on the theory that culture and past observational learning mark human behavior. This step of change management includes motivating group members to realize the necessity of change and encouraging them to accept its inevitability. The Unfreezing process involves three mechanisms, which are disconfirmation, creating discomfort, and creating psychological safety.

According to Pennsylvania State University (2020), disconfirmation is "the process of showing organizational members that their current behaviors or attitudes are incorrect and that continuing to behave in those ways will not only harm the organization but themselves as well" (p. 3). Through this step, individuals become aware that present conditions and behaviors are invalid and no longer acceptable. However, the larger the gap between what is believed and what needs to be believed, the more likely change will be resisted. Thus, the second mechanism, creating discomfort, encourages leaders to compel group members to embrace change by creating discomfort. The former mechanism merely helps group members see that present behaviors are invalid, while the second mechanism pushes them to adopt change. The third and last mechanism in the unfreezing stage, creating psychological safety, is a crucial step that is oftentimes overlooked. After applying pressure and creating levels of discomfort and anxiety, leaders are required to present positive solutions, and appealing goals, as they are required to assure group members that the new practices will obliterate their discomfort (Pennsylvania State University, 2020).

The second stage of change management is the Change stage, which identifies exactly what needs to be changed. This is the critical stage where the process of change is initiated. At this point, group members are supposed to be convinced that the current conditions are inadequate, and they should be sufficiently motivated and ready to embrace change. This stage consists of two more mechanisms: identification and environmental checking. Identification encourages group members to collaborate with a change agent to help implement the new practices. The change agent must possess responsibility and authority, as he has to be a role model respected by all members (Hussain et al., 2018). Yet, leaders themselves must identify the knowledge the change agent shares with the group members. Likewise, leaders have to scan the environment, and understand that they are not the only source of information presented to their group members. Family members, peers, friends, or neighbors can also communicate information when members seek further clarification which raises the risk of receiving contradicting notions, thus, generating anxiety and ambivalence. In addition, the leaders must make sure that the first stage, unfreezing stage, is successfully established, and that the members are motivated to alter their behaviors and implement the desired change, for it is "easier to control the message if everyone sees the need for change in the first place" (Pennsylvania State University, 2020, p. 4).

The third and last stage of change management, the Refreeze stage, is the final step where the new behaviors and practices become the new norm. It is the process whereby the old attitudes are replaced by the new desired ones. Change must be tested to make sure that the new behaviors and attitudes are suitable for all individuals and after the implementation, the members must continue to be supported. Additionally, the leaders must ensure that the testing environment contains no negative consequences for failure, as they must reinforce change within group members where the new practices become the new standards. Sometimes, even if individuals accept reform and implement change, over time, they

are likely to withdraw innovation and regress to their old habits. To lessen the probability of this regression, leaders must ensure that the environment remains supportive and positive (Pennsylvania State University, 2020).

In a nutshell, Kurt Lewin introduced a three-step model about change management, Unfreeze – Change – Refreeze, which has been very influential since the 1940s. This model explains that the change process occurs through three main steps: unfreezing the old behavior by preparing group members for change, moving to a new level of behavior by making changes, and finally refreezing the desired behavior by normalizing the change within the organization. The Unfreeze-Change-Refreeze approach comes from the analogy of transforming an ice cube into a different shape, an ice cone. The ice cube cannot be transformed into a cone of ice without breaking it. Instead, the ice must be melted to be amenable to change (Unfreeze), the melted water must be put into a cone-shaped mold (Change), and finally the new shape must be solidified to maintain its new form (Refreeze).

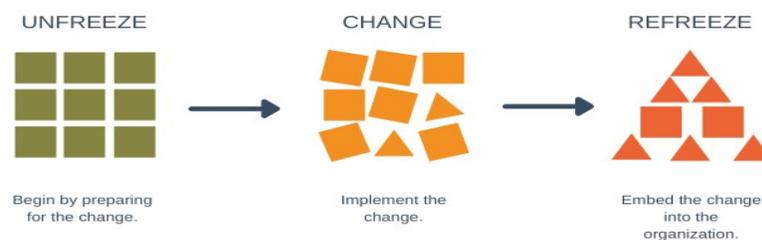


Figure 4: Lewin's Change Management Model

### Change Management: Pressure and Support

People tend to cling to their current behaviors, and the fear to try new things. To accept change, people must first understand its why, what, and how. Why do they have to alter their present practices, what changes they are supposed to implement, and how they can achieve the desired goals. Unless they are dissatisfied with the current situation and realize their role in maintaining it, they will have no reason to take the risks of change and endure its costs, thus, they will resist it. As Schein (1980) explains, reform is about creating a willingness to implement change, by establishing the fear of not trying and lessening the anxiety of trying. The first one requires applied pressure, and the second, support.

Pressure makes preserving the old harder. Undoubtedly, it involves the assertion of power. Pressure can go from questioning the way of doing things to intimidating individuals if they keep doing these things the same way they always did. Every instance of effective change implementation involves powerful and vigorous leaders, who can prepare the atmosphere for change and initiate innovation. To set the stage for change, a leader must first "disconfirm people's reading of their situation and their satisfaction with their present practices. This does not mean castigating and blaming them, but it often means challenging them to face realities they have preferred to avoid" (Evans, 2014, p.3). Thus, effective implementation starts with the leaders' clarification of the desired changes they suggest. Ultimately, this process implies some sort of pressure, mainly by defining the challenges and the risks of preserving the current practices (why), outlining the old behaviors that must be substituted and the new ones to be embraced (what), and finally, stating the concrete support that will assist the implementation process (how).

The "why" is the most important step, but it is oftentimes overlooked by many leaders. Explaining why the current practices are no longer valid and why the status quo can no longer continue is usually where anxiety is engendered. However, this phase is inevitable, and without it, there will be no willingness and no motivation for change. Presenting the "why" is more difficult in educational institutions than it is in any other organization, especially in schools whose students are performing well, and who consider themselves successful and usually believe that there is no need for change. Yet, presenting the "why" always causes discomfort in any school, exemplary or plain. It

challenges the school with its deficiencies and shortcomings, usually by raising awareness about the gap between the school's goals, teachers' performance, and students' outcomes.

Reform always generates discomfort and is often met with resistance, let alone if the desired goal of the reform is a change in beliefs and thoughts. Forcing a group of teachers to work together will surely put them under pressure, but it will never make them willing to team up or collaborate. However, the teachers will never realize the utility of teaming unless they try it. Thus, change initiatives must target practices instead of assumptions. Eventually, changes in practice redefine beliefs since experimenting with a new behavior is a prerequisite to new learning. There is no denying that applying pressure can result in various costs, stress, discomfort, anxiety, and dissatisfaction, but it also stimulates the innovation process, and promotes the reshaping of our learning patterns. Nevertheless, disconfirming people's beliefs about their abilities and their current state has never been enough to prompt change. If you only pressure people, they are likely to engender negative feelings about the change initiative, like fear and hatred, which makes them resist in all sorts of ways, consciously and unconsciously, and thus, reject the information. Therefore, to promote change, pressure must be accompanied by support.

If pressure is defined as anything that makes preserving the old harder, support can be defined as anything that makes experimenting with the new easier. It goes all the way from simple encouragements, to professional training, to financial rewards. Support generates what Schein (1965) defines as psychological safety, which makes group members feel secure and more likely to change their behaviors by reducing discomfort, lessening the fear of embracing the new, and fostering reassurance. Unless sufficient psychological safety is ingenerated, the disconfirming information will be denied, and consequently, change will be resisted. The key to effective change management then is providing group members with the various types of tactics that would serve the function of reducing learning anxiety, and thus creating genuine motivation to learn and change. The role of leaders in boosting psychological safety and anticipating change is of paramount importance. Supporting this view, Priestley (2011) claims that "strong leadership is important in the promotion and sustaining of change, being a source of both impetus and support" (p.3). Likewise, administrative support is important for school reform. Fullan (2007) states that "when teachers do get help, the most effective source tends to be fellow teachers, and second, administrators and specialists" (p.133). Hence, for teachers to implement change effectively, they need change agents to help them fuse in a community of new learning. Moreover, research has shown that educational institutions that succeeded in implementing change effectively are the ones that supported their staff through purposeful interactions, professional learning communities, and collaborative work (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991). Viewed in this way, we can say that in successful innovations, pressure and support are complementary. As Michael Fullan (2001) puts it, "Pressure without support leads to resistance and alienation; support without pressure leads to drift or waste of resources" (p. 91).

## Conclusion

This article has discussed different theoretical approaches to change implementation and management within an organization. From an educational perspective, the present paper has explained the nature of educational reform and addressed the questions of what, why, and how can we implement change in education more effectively.

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