THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF CHANGE
How do Individual Faculty Manage the Instructional Change Process?

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Objectives

Just as the ultimate responsibility for learning lies with students, so the ultimate responsibility of instructional change rests with faculty members. No colleague, administrator or faculty developer can make changes that will improve an instructor's teaching. Despite this central role played by teachers in the change process, very little research or literature addresses the issues involved when faculty implement changes in their instructional policies, practices and behaviors. The purpose of this paper then is to explore the dimensions of the instructional change process that pertain when individual faculty act as change agents.

Knowing what motivates individual faculty to change, how they go about selecting, implementing and assessing change, and how change is sustained and diffused would benefit individual faculty as well as those who work with them. For example, faculty developers could increase the effectiveness of their interventions if they knew how to address the personal dynamics of the change process, how many changes can be successfully incorporated at once, or how long a faculty member should try a new strategy before making judgments about its effectiveness. Administrators and colleague mentors who seek to intervene could develop approaches to instructional change that make it a positive process.

Perspective

Instructional and curricular change in higher education has been studied at a macro-level change, as it occurs at the institutional, program or curricular levels. Surprisingly

little literature, research or otherwise, addresses the calculus of the individual change process. Absent from the literature are empirical analyses that establish the efficacy of actual faculty approaches versus those prescribed in the literature. It remains a mystery why so central a process has been so neglected in the instructional improvement literature.

The central dynamics of the change process can be structured around five key questions.

- How do faculty orient to change?

- What motivates faculty to change?

- How do faculty make change choices?

- How do faculty implement change?

- How do faculty assess and sustain change?

Theoretical Framework

How Do Faculty Orient to Change?

Framed broadly, the first question includes a collection of central issues that frame how faculty approach change generally. How do faculty define instructional change? We found no empirical answer to that question in the literature so for the purposes of this paper, we define instructional change as treating some aspect of instruction differently. But as Fullan (1991) observes, "educational change is technically simple but socially complex" (p. 65) illustrated only too well by the perceptual and attitudinal orientation faculty take to change.

Perceptions and attitudes about change likely affect the motivation to change and likely impact how faculty make change choices, implement changes and assess their

outcomes. Change involves risk taking, leaving comfortable roles behind and exploring

new ways of using content and interacting with students. "Change is neither natural nor

normal" (Evans, 1996, p. 25).

What Motivates Faculty to Change?

A variety of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators likely stand behind the faculty

decision to make instructional changes. The motivation to teach has been studied—most

notably in the work of Bess (1977) who explored conditions that negatively impact

motivation. This work is relevant because as Berman and Skeff (1988) document in one

of the few surveys of attitudes toward teaching improvement, "there was a significant

positive correlation between teachers' enthusiasm for teaching and their desire to

improve teaching." (p. 123) At this time, we do not know what is most likely to motivate

faculty to take action, if it makes a difference if the motivation is intrinsic or extrinsic, or

if it matters how convinced faculty members are in their own minds that they need to

make alterations.

How Do Faculty Make Change Choices?

How do faculty members choose a specific change to implement and where do new

teaching ideas come from? Where do they get the new approaches that they implement?

Few faculty (Quinn, 1994) get ideas from reading. Huber (2002) suggests that "when a

problem turns up, they are more likely to ask advice from an old friend or colleague than

to go to the library" (p. 29). Some literature (Evans, 1996) suggests that the change

choice may be based on perceptions of how do-able the new option is. For example,

faculty who perceive themselves a technological Luddites often choose technology only

when forced and only in forms that do not alter the fundamental paradigms of the

classroom (Celsi and Wolfinbarger, 2002).   Although we might assume that faculty are analytical learners who critically examine ideas, those of us who have worked with faculty on instructional change agendas have experiences that would seem to indicate that faculty approach change intuitively, trusting their feelings as much as anything else.

How Do Faculty Implement Change?

Implementing change is a dynamic process, not one frozen in time but little is known about the mechanics of implementing instructional change. A generic perspective of the change process in education from the initiation stage to the outcome phase is summarized by Fullan (1991). But this literature, like others, is more prescriptive than descriptive. Some authors (Menges, 1994 and Weimer, 1991) propose that instructional changes are likely to be more effective if they are implemented according to a process. These recommendations grow out of experience working with faculty and find theoretical justification in the literature on reflective practice (Schon, 1983, 1987).

A central issue is one of adaptation and transfer. Shulman (1987) proposed the idea that pedagogical knowledge needs to be grounded in content knowledge. When faculty acquire a new technique that they plan to use, do they change that strategy in ways that are responsive to how they teach (the proclivities of individual style), what they teach (content) and who they teach (the learning needs of individual students and collections of them grouped in a particular class)?

How Do Faculty Assess and Sustain Change?

The issues of assessing and sustaining change seem inextricably linked. If faculty perceive that the change is successful, they are likely to continue using it and they may be more motivated to change other aspects of their instruction. Those who work with

faculty know that if you ask a faculty how a particular activity went, they always have an opinion which they are more likely to state judgmentally than descriptively. Is the motivation to change affected differently when change is analyzed systematically and critically vs. when the response to it is emotional and judgmental?

As for issues of sustainability and diffusion, there is the point at which a change stops being something new and continues as a routine aspect of the instruction. Of interest is whether a change made in one course gets transferred to other courses taught by the same faculty and if when incorporated in those courses the new technique is modified further. Support from colleagues, departments, and the institution as well as the availability of resources and student reactions can influence the commitment to the maintenance and diffusion of innovation across the curriculum.

The Survey

Full-time faculty (tenure-track instructors and fixed term instructors) at 18 locations of a land-grant university were contacted by email and asked to complete an online survey consisting of 34 closed and open-ended questions soliciting information relevant to each of the five central research areas. Responses were received from 154 instructors consisting of both tenure-track instructors with course loads of 18 credits per year and full-time fixed term instructors who teach 24 credits per year.

Results

Change appears to be a constant for the majority of faculty. Three quarters of the faculty were able to give at least three examples of changes in instruction in the last two years. Changes involving technology and student engagement were most often mentioned as having the most impact on student learning. Interestingly, more than half

(55%) of the respondents reported that they have implemented *more* changes in their teaching than their colleagues. Among faculty with the most teaching experience (at least 20 years), the largest group responded that they have implemented instructional changes equally in all periods of their professional life.

Survey questions explored faculty perceptions of themselves as change agents and what emerged is a portrait of a confident, but isolated change-agent in control of the process. Ninety percent of these faculty rated their teaching as above average, well above average or exceptional. Forty-three percent reported that what they changed they thought up on their own. They decide what to change based on their own judgments, not based on feedback solicited from students. When assessing the impact of the instructional change, these respondents considered their *own* perceptions (a mean of 4.5 on a five point scale) as more important than external feedback such as student verbal and nonverbal feedback (4.1), an evaluation instrument designed to ascertain the impact (3.5), or end of course ratings (3.5). And they believed that the changes that they implement are successfully executed: 51 percent reported that more than 80 percent of the changes implemented were successful, 75 percent reporting that they were either very satisfied or extremely satisfied with the change.

In the survey, faculty responses indicate that they are motivated to make changes by three factors: dissatisfaction with how much and how well students are learning (84 percent); the need to keep teaching fresh and invigorated (88 percent); and the need to fix an instructional problem (82 percent). In contrast, they were not nearly as motivated to make changes by such extrinsic factors as student ratings (24 percent); administrator

comments made during an annual review (22 percent) or institutional support for change (19 percent).

Notions of self-efficacy appear to play a role in the decision of which change to select and implement. Ninety-one percent reported that they were strongly or very strongly influenced if "it's a technique I believe I can successfully implement;" 91 percent were strongly or very strongly influenced if "it's a technique I think will work, given the content I teach," and finally, 91 percent were strongly or very strongly influenced if "it's a technique I think will work with my students."

A significant number (66 percent) reported that they did not adapt the change they implemented in any way, although 48 percent reported altering the change when they used it subsequently (in the same and other courses).

Survey results indicate that these faculty did continue using the change they reported implementing. Ninety-two percent said it had become a regular part of the course and 61 percent reported that it had become a regular part of other courses that they teach. The majority of respondents reported that lack of time was the major obstacle to their implementing more change in their classes.

Importance of Study

This paper attempts to bring greater focus on the change process at the level of the individual faculty member. We raise a number of research questions and provide some initial empirical results for each of five core dimensions of change. Faculty appear to be quite conservative in incorporating new approaches in their teaching. It seems that much instructional change is at the superficial level such as adding technology that supports teaching methods currently in use. That is, faculty are more likely to be concerned with

tinkering with what they do at the "nuts and bolts" level rather than making fundamental changes that focus on *student learning*. (The work of Cuban (1988) is helpful here in terms of a distinction between what he calls first and second order changes.)   Finally, intrinsic factors play a major role in the decision to institute change and in assessing the effectiveness of the new instructional approach. Further examination of faculty beliefs and the decision making process involved in personal change should advance the scholarship of maximizing student learning and the growth of faculty as teachers.

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