Scaling Transformative Change

transformative change

Leadership

Adoption and Adaptation

Evidence

Storytelling

Networks

Dissemination

Technology

Spread and Endurance

Transformative Change Initiative Overview

The Transformative Change Initiative (TCI) is dedicated to assisting community colleges to scale-up innovations that improve student outcomes and program, organization, and system performance.

Guiding Principle for Dissemination: *Scaling of transformative change will occur when dissemination is led by individuals with deep knowledge of their settings.*

Community college efforts to improve pathways, programs, and practices are stimulating recognition of the need to innovate, the need to scale innovation, and the need to transform themselves. The innovations that are being adopted and scaled include programs, practices, or processes within individual organizations and across larger systems (state, regional or national).
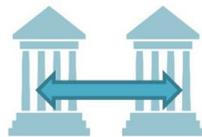
Transformative change takes place through two individual and organizational processes: learning and sensemaking. Both require faculty, staff, administrators, students, and others to rethink existing understandings in order to engage in the change process. Most individuals serve their organizations to 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). For people who seek to change, learning is social, cultural, and contextual, and it stimulates sensemaking that connects theory to organizational context, to action, and finally to outcomes (Bensimon, Rueda, Dowd, & Harris, 2007).

Dissemination is essential to the transformative change process because it influences others to engage, and to adopt their innovations in ways that grow impact. It facilitates learning and sensemaking about the relevance of an innovation to an organization, and also sometimes to larger systems. Dissemination can include a range of activities such as the pushing out of information at meetings, on websites, or in publications. It also includes the planned engagement of target groups to encourage them to adopt and adapt innovations within their settings.

There are two distinct types of dissemination: internal, or vertical, dissemination and external, or horizontal, dissemination.

Internal (vertical) dissemination is concerned with scale and endurance as an innovation is understood, adapted, and valued within a single organization. For community colleges, this includes scaling across programs, disciplines and departments, or across an entire college.

External (horizontal) dissemination is concerned with spread and communication with other organizations. It ensures that key discoveries and practices associated with an innovation enable other organizations to benefit from the original innovation and the innovation process. This type of dissemination occurs through professional associations and networks, through a state system, or through consortia.

At the heart of dissemination, whether internal or external, is attention to inclusive change processes, distributed leadership, and meaningful learning (capacity-building) strategies. Dissemination, on its own, will not bring about successful adoption of an innovation, even with organizations that indicate a readiness to change. Innovations are not adopted simply because they are shown to be effective at the originating home of the innovation. Rather, there has to be concerted effort to engage in the change process.

The innovative process in complex organizations such as community colleges is uncertain and unpredictable, with too many dynamic variables and unknowns to make recipe-like replication predictable (Patton, 2011). Because major differences exist between units or departments within a college and between one college and another, dissemination that gives attention to translation and not merely replication contributes to the success of the innovative process. Translation answers key questions about what appears to work in one context, starting with the home of the innovation (department/unit/college), and extending to the new context, meaning the organization adopting the innovation (department/unit/college).

Translation requires the engagement of users at multiple levels and at multiple points in the learning and sensemaking processes. Translation means moving from focusing on replication to focusing on principled adaptation that calls for the adopters (translators and users) to identify the essential core elements (ideas, principles and practices) of the innovation and consider how to maintain their fidelity as adoption occurs in the different context.

Transformative change leaders facilitate learning and sensemaking, including the development of tools and guides or protocols. They engage in subtle or not so subtle contextualizing or framing of the innovation, including the use of idioms, stories, or historical examples, and they associate the innovation with important values and key practices of the organization (Bradley, 2011). This association of the innovation with important values or practices is essential for the translation to occur. With internal dissemination, this work occurs through task forces, cross-divisional inquiry teams, presentations of data, robust and inclusive planning processes, responsive professional development, and inclusive dialogues that span the organization. For external dissemination, the work also occurs through similar systems, with attention to including appropriate users from all target organizations.

Three stages of dissemination should be aligned with the environment and experiences of potential adopters:

Dissemination Stage	Activities of Leaders and Translators
Raising awareness: Learning	Distribute information on the innovation, its aims, and its outcomes
Building knowledge and understanding: Learning and Sensemaking	Facilitate understanding of the core elements of the innovation and begin translation to new contexts
Encouraging adoption: Translating	Support uptake through building capacity and will, identifying ways to adapt innovation in accordance with context

In translating an innovation to a new context, the organization adopting the innovation needs to make a connection between the innovation, its needs, its potential outcomes, and the implications for individual practice (Eckel & Kezar, 2003). Leaders need to collect feedback during the dissemination process to gauge how different groups see the changes as necessary in the context of their own practice and attitudes (Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002). The engagement of reflective users that facilitate the translation of the innovation can break down structures that create rewards to resist change (Tagg, 2012). Support for innovation can dissipate if dedicated adopters do not have the necessary resources, staff time, and knowledge to carry the innovation forward.

Throughout the scaling process, the need for engagement of others in dissemination continues and changes. Engagement evolves and deepens as both the innovation and context supporting the innovation change over time. Endurance, referring to the ability of a program to maintain core beliefs and values and use them to guide adoption and adaptation over time requires the continued participation of members (administrators, faculty, staff, evaluators, and students) in learning and sensemaking. This work involves using evidence to understand the experiences of the organization's members with the innovation, to consider what is happening with the innovation that is different from the original intention, and what adaptation needs to be made.

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