



Dirty Work...

but someone's got to do it!

You left the meeting with a sense of excitement about all those excellent ideas. Yes, some of them are really unusual, and they could work! They'd make a difference. Optimism exists! Three months later... nothing. Did the meeting really happen? Why isn't anyone talking about it? What happened? **Rob Sheffield's** final article in a series of 3 looks at the final stage of problem-solving. How can we implement ideas for change so they gain acceptance from others and improve our lives at work?

Birdi¹ reviewed three creative thinking programmes to analyse the effect they'd had on idea generation and implementation. He concluded that the courses had clear and positive impacts on delegates' motivation and ability to generate ideas. Their implementation was a different matter. For successful implementation, we need the support of key people where we work. It's a social and political process.

"It must be remembered that there is nothing more difficult to plan, more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to manage, than the creation of a new system. For the initiator has the enmity of all who would profit by the preservation of the old institutions, and merely lukewarm defenders in those who would gain by the new ones."

NICCOLO MACHIAVELLI,
ITALIAN POLITICAL THEORIST
(1469-1527)

Generally, implementation skills aren't valued as highly as the imagining stage of generating ideas. Covering the walls in flip-chart paper and lists of possibilities can make us feel the job's half-done. But getting it done requires planning and organising, persistence, political sensitivity, self-control, focus and resilience. The implementation stage will likely arouse the anxieties and angst of those with different

interests. You may need the resilience to bounce back from criticism and maintain your self-belief. Many initiatives have foundered on the craggy rocks of creative opposition and unclear authority to act. Of course, there are smaller and bigger changes, some more disrupting than others. But, generally, getting unambiguous support from the relevant authority figure helps. It also helps to clarify the limits of your own authority. Do you have the authority to implement? Do you have to do this in collaboration or consultation with others? It may help to distinguish between the task and the process.

The task is what has to be done. If you like, the content of the change: how to set up the new management team; how to introduce a new subject into the curriculum; how to ensure we spend time on our own development; how to introduce techniques of brain-friendly, accelerated learning into the design of lessons...

The process is how we plan and implement this, and work with others (or not), to do so. How well do we communicate our intentions to others? How soon do we involve others in the change? How clearly do we seek support from key people? How open are we to their views, as they perceive it?

From my experience with organisations, people often get

fixated on the task, plough on with it, hit the buffers, try harder, get more “resistance” and stop. Too little time is spent planning the process of how to manage the change. When timescales are tighter, and expectations from others are high, this is even more likely. The social and political aspects of implementation require a change in thinking which doesn’t happen. Some techniques will help us think of things we otherwise may not:

1. Force field analysis²

shows the promoting and restraining forces present in a situation. It can help to identify the forces that could help you get where you want; plus those that could get in the way.

The process is:

- List the promoting and restraining forces.
- State the current position in the middle of the page. Draw in the restraining forces on one side and the promoting forces on the other. Use length of line, or thickness of line, to denote its importance, as in the diagram below. Unlike in this diagram, list each force to describe what it is.
- Use a copy of the diagram below (and on page 32), to generate ideas on how to make the change happen. How can you reduce the restraining forces? After this, look at how to

increase the promoting ones. Try to reduce the restraining ones first, because they’ll probably increase to match your efforts if you do it the other way around.

2. Implementation checklist³

A simple list of factors to consider before trying out a favoured idea. It’ll give you confidence that you’ve thought of the things you should.

People:

- Who does this idea help within and outside school?
- Stakeholders: which key people do we have to convince of this idea?
- Power: are there ongoing power struggles in school that could block needed co-operation?

Organisational factors

- Scarce resources: are people, time, money, equipment, information needed for implementing this idea?
- Motivation: Do others possess the necessary commitment for successful implementation?
- Structures: Are there structural obstacles to overcome? E.g. school structures or communication channels that could help or hinder?
- Policies: are there policies that need to be taken into account?

Reducing risk

- Trialing: Can we trial or test the idea to reduce the risk?
- Learning from experience: how can we learn from practice so it works better next time?
- How can we encourage adopters to try this?

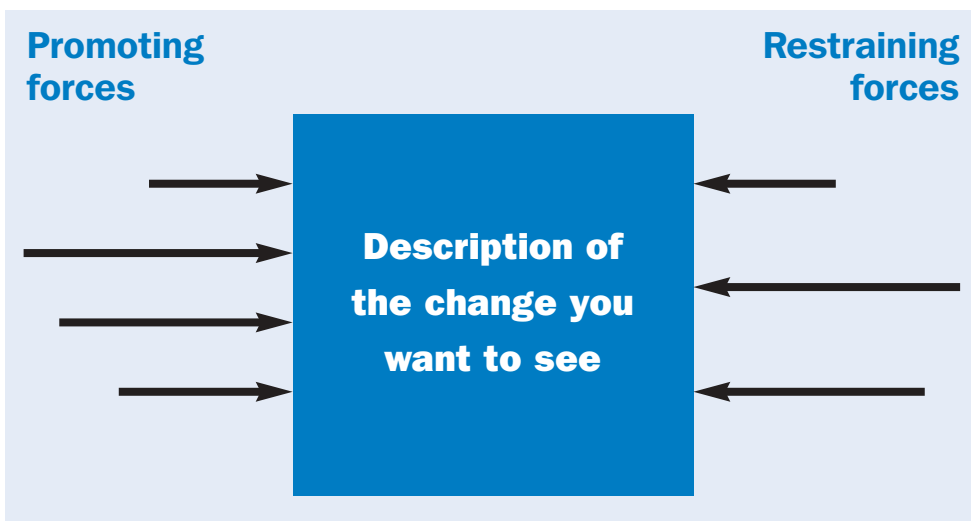
Communication

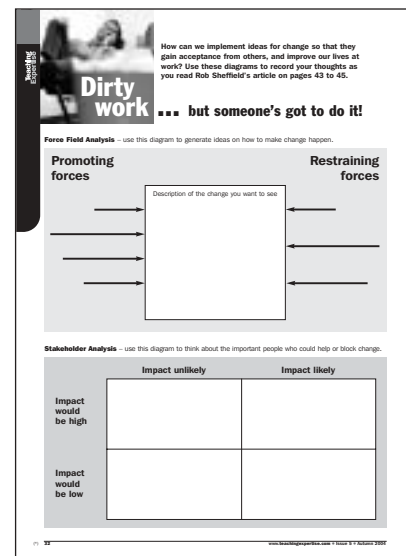
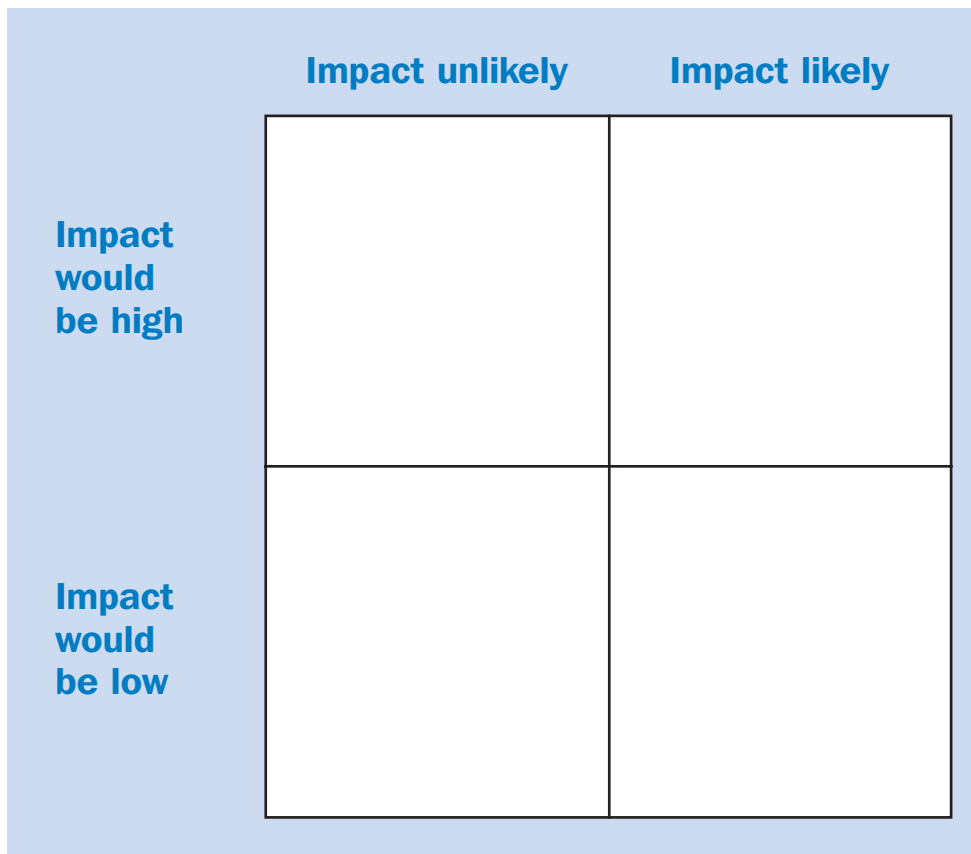
- How and when can we communicate the plan for this?

3. Stakeholder analysis⁴

Useful for thinking about the important people who could help or block a change.

- Think about who will be affected by the change, who could stop it, who’s interested in knowing about it. Ask a number of





Both diagrams are reproduced for you to use in page 32.

questions: who are potential sources of discontent? Who has relevant positional responsibility? Who are influential in your organisation? Who are regarded as 'important' by others? Who have formal roles in areas affected by the change?

- Consider the chance of each person or category affecting the change. What's the likelihood of them affecting the change? What would be the impact if they did? Plot them onto a diagram like the one above (reproduced for you to use in page 32).
- Once you've done this, it'll give you clarity of where to prioritise your attention. Some people will need occasional information; others will require much more time, face-to-face, early in the process.

Using these techniques will help you in practical ways in the short term. But what makes the difference between teams and departments which introduce lots of productive change, and those that are more stagnant? Why do

some parts of where you work have more 'buzz' while in others you feel you have to tiptoe across the room...? The situational outlook questionnaire (SOQ, 5), looks at the climate in which we work. Climate has an impact on our decisions, learning, communication, problem solving, motivation and conflict-handling. Specifically, the SOQ measures a team or organisation's climate along a number of dimensions:

- How much challenge is present to raise energy?
- How much freedom is there for people to make decisions about how to do their work?
- What quality of trust and openness is there in relationships?
- How much time do people use to elaborate new ideas?
- What spontaneity is there in the workplace?
- How much personal/emotional tension is present among us?
- How well are new ideas treated or supported?
- What degree of productive debate exists, for us to share viewpoints?

- Finally, how well do we tolerate uncertainty and ambiguity here, and still get the right things done?

When I've used the SOQ with teams, it has raised uncomfortable issues, but ones that have to be discussed to create more long-term sustainable change. It helps team, department and organisation leaders to understand that part of their role is to create a suitable climate to support their people in their work. That's worth doing. **TEX**

References:

1. Birdi K: "Evaluating the effects of creativity training on employee innovation" IWP/ESRC Centre for Organisation and Innovation, working paper 321
- 2, 3 and 4. Adapted from Open University course notes: Innovation, Creativity and Managing Change, MBA module
5. www.cpsb.com/cnk/soq.html

Rob Sheffield is a self-employed consultant, working in team management and leadership development. He is also a visiting lecturer at the University of the West of England on a range of undergraduate and postgraduate business courses.

