

Ten Do & Don't Assumptions for Successful Educational Change

1. **Do not assume that your version of what the change should be is the one that should or could be implemented.** On the contrary, assume that one of the main purposes of the process of implementation is to *exchange your reality* of what should be through interaction with implementers and others concerned. Stated another way, assume that successful implementation consists of some transformation or continual development of initial ideas.
2. **Assume that any significant innovation, if it is to result in change, requires individual implementers to work out their own meaning.** Significant change involves a certain amount of ambiguity, ambivalence, and uncertainty for the individual about the meaning of change. Thus, effective implementation is a *process of clarification*. It is also important not to spend too much time in the early stages on needs assessment, program development, and problem definition activities—school staff have limited time. Clarification is likely to come in large part through reflective practice.
3. **Assume that conflict and disagreement are not only inevitable but fundamental to successful change.** Since any group of people possess multiple realities, any collective change attempt will necessarily involve conflict. Assumptions 2 and 3 combine to suggest that all successful efforts of significance, no matter how well planned, will experience an implementation dip in the early stages. Smooth implementation is often a sign that not much is really changing.
4. **Assume that people need pressure to change (even in directions that they desire), but it will be effective only under conditions that allow them to react, to form their own position, to interact with other implementers, to obtain technical assistance, etc.** It is all right and helpful to express what you value in the form of standards of practice and expectations of accountability, but only if coupled with capacity-building and problem-solving opportunities.
5. **Assume that effective change takes time. It is a process of “development in use.”** Unrealistic or undefined time lines fail to recognize that implementation occurs developmentally. Significant change in the form of implementing specific innovations can be expected to take a minimum of 2 or 3 years; bringing about institutional reforms can take 5 to 10 years. At the same time, work on changing the infrastructure (policies, incentives, and capacity of agencies at all levels) so that valued gains can be sustained and built upon.
6. **Do not assume that the reason for lack of implementation is outright rejection of the values embodied in the change, or hard-core resistance to all change.** Assume that there are a number of possible reasons: value rejection, inadequate resources to support implementation, insufficient time elapsed, and the possibility that resisters have some good points to make.
7. **Do not expect all or even most people or groups to change.** Progress occurs when we take steps (e.g., by following the assumptions listed here) that *increase* the number of people affected. Our reach should exceed our grasp, but not by such a margin that we fall flat on our face. Instead of being discouraged by all that remains to be done, be encouraged by what has been accomplished by way of improvement resulting from your actions.
8. **Assume that you will need a plan that is based on the above assumptions and that addresses the factors known to affect implementation.** Evolutionary planning and problem-coping models based on knowledge of the change process are essential.
9. **Assume that no amount of knowledge will ever make it totally clear what action should be taken.** Action decisions are a combination of valid knowledge, political considerations, on-the-spot decisions, and intuition. Better knowledge of the change process will improve the mix of resources on which we draw, but it will never and should never represent the sole basis for decision.
10. **Assume that changing the culture of institutions is the real agenda, not implementing single innovations.** Put another way, when implementing particular innovations, we should always pay attention to whether each institution and the relationships among institutions and individuals is developing or not.

Source: Fullan, Michael (2001). *The New Meaning of Educational Change*. New York: Teacher's College Press, p. 108-109.