

The Supervisor as a Change Agent



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CHANGE and innovation are the key words of today's dynamic society. For years these words have been apparent in society-at-large and have provided the launching pad from which American business and technology have spurred to a great international lead. Recently educators have adopted the expressions as "God words" for education; they have been legitimized by federal enactments with modern beginnings (the Cooperative Research Act) and have been expanded rapidly (Titles III and IV of ESEA, for example) in ensuing years.

In this great race toward Research and Development Centers, Bureaus of Research, and Educational Laboratories, it almost seems as if the practitioner has been forgotten. The roles of the classroom teacher and the supervisor of instruction, two forces in implementing educational change and innovation—if not in *initiating* them—have not been clearly defined or understood. This article focuses upon (a) the role of the supervisor of instruction, the person in many school systems charged with the job of improvement of instruction and the adaptation (or adoption) of innovations to specific situations; and (b) some suggestions for implementing the supervisor's change agent role. If the implementor of educational

change is the classroom teacher, the facilitator of change is the supervisor of instruction.

What is the role of a supervisor of instruction? For years the literature and folkways in the professional journals have been suggesting that the supervisor of instruction (coordinator, curriculum director, supervising teacher, or whatever the title may be) is an instructional leader; a helping teacher; an agent for better teaching. Through a somewhat mystical process of visiting teachers' classrooms, the supervisor is supposed to create a better environment for the teaching process and better education in general. The dynamics of this visit, "the mystical process," have never clearly been defined—the concept just keeps reappearing in the literature with the "God word," change.

Being cast as a change agent is a relatively new role for the supervisor, but new simply because the term has only recently become popular in educational circles. The concept itself is not new; supervisors, almost by definition, have always been expected to encourage improved instruction through new

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and better methodology and techniques. This, at least, is the role that has been verbalized down through the years, even if in practice supervision has seemed only to promote the status quo.

With the popularity of the term "change agent," a light of some intensity has beamed on the supervisor. The question now being raised, somewhat guiltily and very belatedly, at one educational conference after another, by one supervisor after another, is, "How do I become one?" That is a difficult question to answer. It is a hard job to be a change agent, and it is made doubly so because of general confusion about the nature of change, as well as about the change agency itself.

What is the common view of change among supervisors? Typical responses to the question, "What is change?" indicate that change is not well-defined or understood among the professionals who are supposed to be dealing with it. Responses to that question often take the following form: "Change is the new nongraded program we have in our schools." "Change is team teaching." "Change is the new textbook series." "Change is flexible scheduling." "Change is the use of new materials and equipment."

In fact, change is none of the above mentioned. Change is *not* a thing. Change is *process*. Certainly, change may include "things" and is enhanced by proper attitudes in an open organizational climate, but it is the juxtaposition of these and other elements within an ongoing line of action which more properly describes change. Teachers' and supervisors' proclivity to think of change as a thing rather than as a process has impeded the development of a conceptual framework necessary to cope with change. If they must focus upon each discrete element or "thing" of change, they will be slow to react to the idea of change. Moreover, attention only to discrete "things" does not provide continuity, fluidity, orderly progress, or clarity of evaluation.

Research about change indicates that there is a defined *process* which any innovation or adaptation goes through before becoming implemented or institutionalized. The change process appears to have definite stages

or elements which can be studied and which lend themselves to the development of strategies to encourage the ultimate implementation of the desired outcome.

Although the nomenclature of steps in the change process differs, the basic change process has been described by Rogers,¹ Brickell,² Lee,³ and others, and has been delineated and diagrammed in the Guba-Clark change-model construct.⁴ Figure 1 presents a comparison of four concepts of the change process.

Adoption and Diffusion

There appear to be two basic steps in the spread of new concepts or ideas. These two basic steps are identified as adoption and diffusion. In the adoption process, Rogers has identified five discrete stages: (a) awareness, (b) interest, (c) evaluation, (d) trial, and finally (e) adoption. Once the adoption stage has been reached, innovation enters a stage known as the diffusion process.

For an innovation to become implemented in a school district, some people must first become *aware* of it. Next, they must explore its potentialities, that is, they must evince an *interest* in it. Through discussion with other professionals, exploration and research, and visitation or other similar means, they *evaluate* the innovation in terms of its applicability to their own situations. Once this evaluation step has taken place, there will be a trial period during which the innovation or change is tried out on a limited, or pilot, basis. Some evaluation will be made of

¹ Everett M. Rogers. *Diffusion of Innovations*. New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1962.

² Henry M. Brickell. *Organizing New York State for Educational Change*. Albany, New York: State Department of Education, 1961.

³ Allen Lee. *Conference To Develop In-Service Training Activities for Research Personnel of State Departments of Education*. Salem, Oregon: Oregon State Board of Education, 1964. Cooperative Research Project, F-032.

⁴ Egon Guba and David Clark. "An Examination of Potential Change Roles in Education." In: NEA Center for the Study of Instruction. *Rational Planning in Curriculum and Instruction*. Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1967. p. 116.

the effect, efficiency, and/or effectiveness of the new way of doing things. If the trial stage produces positive results, it will probably culminate in the *adoption* of the innovation.

Diffusion is the process through which the innovation gains acceptance and implementation in other systems or subsystems. Diffusion may be likened to waves spreading from the place where a stone is thrown into the water. Diffusion takes place at various speeds depending, in part, upon the change-orientation of the persons or systems considering adopting the innovation. Demonstration and dissemination speed up diffusion.

Demonstration and Dissemination

Once initial adoption of an innovative idea takes place in an area, other people, clients, or systems, through observation of that particular innovation, can themselves evaluate the functional use of this innovation and can essentially "speed up" the adoption process in their own systems. This, in turn, will accelerate diffusion. As people working with the innovation become more and more acquainted with its functional operation, they in turn will relate its applicability to their colleagues through professional contact.

A first step in initiating change, then, is to make people *aware* of an innovation and of a need for change through an understanding of the innovation's applicability and its superiority over past practice. One approach is to create a sense of awareness through providing professional staff opportunities to attend meetings, read literature, study and discuss the proposed innovation with others, and engage in active in-service preparation.

The Supervisor's Role

Now, what can or should the supervisor do in his role as change agent? What can be unique to the supervisor in encouraging change? Although different writers attach various names to stages in the change process, there is general agreement that change is a process with identifiable stages. (a) The supervisor should become intimately familiar with the change process and the steps in it. (b) The supervisor should identify or develop strategies to help teachers move from one step in the change process to the next.

In short, the supervisor must (a) analyze where the school and the teachers are in terms of a change process, (b) remove road blocks hindering orderly progress to the next step of the change process, and (c) develop strategies to assist an orderly progression through the remaining change process steps to the insertion of the change into the ongoing system. This role demands an acute awareness of the change process.

Using the Rogers model for an example, the real job of the supervisor becomes apparent after the teacher (school district) has reached the *awareness* stage. The supervisor must recognize the steps of the change process leading to implementation and institutionalization and *pave the way* for the teacher to move toward this goal through identification of strategies. As interest in the innovation is generated, the supervisor must encourage the involvement of other elements of the educational system.

Yet the Rogers model has its limitations in its use by supervisors. It is useful in that it provides a way of seeing innovations and change as a process, but it really does not

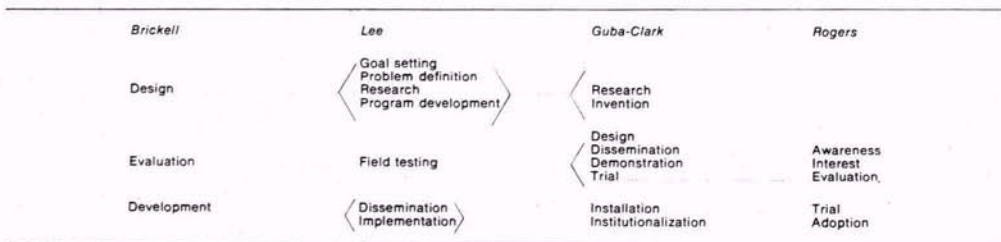


Figure 1. Comparative Analysis of Four Conceptualizations of the Change Process

Function	Objectives	Relation to Change	Criteria
Research	To advance knowledge	Provides basis for invention	Validity 1. Internal 2. External
Invention	To formulate a new solution to problems (to innovate)	Produces invention	Face validity 1. Viability 2. Impact
Design	To order and systematize the components of the solution	Engineers and packages invention	Feasibility 1. Generalizability 2. Performance
Dissemination	To create awareness among practitioners	Informs about invention	Intelligibility 1. Fidelity 2. Impact
Demonstration	To provide opportunity to examine and assess invention	Builds conviction	Credibility 1. Convenience 2. Evidential assessment
Trial	To familiarize and assess specific application	Tries out invention in specific situation	Adaptability 1. Feasibility 2. Action
Installation	To fit to individual situation	Operationalizes invention in specific institution	Effectiveness Efficiency
Institutionalization	To assimilate as part of system	Establishes as part of ongoing program; non-innovation	Continuity Valuation Support

Figure 2. Adapted from the Guba-Clark Change Model

provide a clear guide for supervisory actions.

In the writers' opinion, one of the more useful models that supervisors might employ to guide their actions is the Guba-Clark model. This model contains a higher degree of specificity and, used insightfully, may suggest certain kinds of supervisory activity at several stages of the change process (see Figure 2).

The writers feel that the answer to the supervisor's question of "How do I become a change agent?" can be found in any logical exposition of a change process, but probably can be more readily answered by examining and using the Guba-Clark model. This model seems to offer the most incisive view of the change process. By utilizing a conceptual approach to the analysis of change provided by the Guba-Clark model, the supervisor can work toward and develop an operationally defined role in terms of initiating and encouraging change. The supervisor can ascertain where and how to enter the change process and can determine what strategies are necessary to encourage the initiation of each successive step in the process.

For example, a supervisor finding a teacher in the "design" phase of the change process knows that, if the new practice is to be successful and implemented totally, the innovation must proceed from design to institutionalization, and that the intermediate

steps necessary to move in that direction (in sequential order in the process) are "dissemination," "demonstration," "trial," "installation," and finally, "institutionalization."

The supervisor, thus, is in a position to provide the kind of assistance to the teacher which is most needed at any particular stage and, through conceptualizing an orderly process of change from the theoretic model, has insight into the kinds of activities which would more nearly prepare the teacher to move from one stage to the next subsequent stage.

In summary, the change process has been defined by several researchers and theorists. Although each has identified and labeled the elements of the process somewhat differently, there are strong similarities in each conceptualization. A supervisor should become acquainted with one of the models and understand it thoroughly. The writers believe that the Guba-Clark model is more functional due to its greater specificity.

Thus, the view of the writers is that the supervisor's role is probably not one of *creating* change, but rather one of *facilitating* a change process through an understanding of the several relatively well defined stages through which an idea moves from the research and investigation stage to the institutionalization stage. □

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