



Changes that Work: Helping Initiatives Grow in a System

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How often do we experience this scenario in different areas of our lives?

We realize something in our system is not working as it should, and we decide to make a change. We do due diligence, checking out all options. We conduct cost-benefit analyses of various options. We explore the latest research- and evidence-based options. We make a decision and begin to implement the chosen solution. But implementation feels so difficult—like pushing a huge boulder up a very steep path. Time after time we run into barriers and bumps that cause us to go off the path. Over time, as we deal with each of the challenges, we generally make one of two choices. We either give up altogether, declaring that this was not the right solution after all, and resort to checking out new options. Or we go ahead with the change, muscling our way through to declare implementation, compromising and bending the new initiative until it really is not so different from what we had and probably isn't much of a solution.

Either way, we have lost ground. People are frustrated with our efforts toward implementation. We have spent way more resources than we intended, with way too little overall improvement in functioning. Employees begin to see each new initiative as a “fad” and believe if they wait long enough, this too shall pass from their lives.

How familiar is that scenario? What makes this phenomenon of implementation so difficult across all areas of our lives? Whether we work on health or fitness challenges in our personal lives, look at community change in our neighborhoods, bring about political change in the government, or implement new procedures in our work places, this story of change plays itself out in multiple ways. What options do we have for writing a whole new story?

Human systems dynamics (HSD) offers an alternative scenario through an implementation process we call the Change Maturity Model. Created by HSD Associate Dennis Cheesebrow, this model offers a path for more effective change processes in any complex system.

This model offers four “zones” of implementation, and each zone represents engagement in very specific work. This precise naming of zones makes this appear to be a “neat and tidy” model for change. We know, however, that the diversity and ongoing change in a complex system can mean that different activities will be going on in some or all the zones simultaneously. That is not a bad thing—in fact it is a necessary and important thing to remember. It is important to remember that with a model like this that helps you track the many paths, sustainable system-wide change is neither so overwhelming nor mysterious.

I will take you through the model in the way we would move through it in a system, including a scenario that may feel familiar.

- The first phase of change is pictured in the lower left corner of the model. It is the place where the day-to-day work of the system gets done. We labeled this phase as ongoing **Practice**. It's where we are when we realize we need a new solution.

*In my ongoing **Practice** of life as an adult, I have my day-to-day activities of exercise and*

diet, including what I eat and how much. I also have my habits about where and when I eat, and how I pay attention to my intake and exercise.

- As my own system is moving along on its daily path, I begin to sense that something is not working as well as it should, and I anticipate some change may be necessary in the future. At that same time, there are others in the greater environment that are working toward solutions in the exact areas that are beginning to bother me. Because I am not paying attention yet, and they are doing work that is not mine, this is the area of **Unknown Work**.

***In Unknown Work**, I function from day to day with a not-so-healthy life style, eating fast food that is high in salt, fat, and cholesterol; drinking too much coffee and not enough water; and counting the walk across the three lanes of parking to my car each day as the major efforts of my exercise regimen. As I live this lifestyle, I am oblivious to work being done in health, nutrition, and exercise. It is vital work, but completely unknown to me.*

- Ultimately I decide that whatever is not working well in my system has to be addressed, so I begin to look around for new options. I explore new research, ask my colleagues what they are doing, benchmark against my competitors, and look for new approaches. It's at this point that I do the "due diligence" work to figure out what is out there and what will best address my challenges. I seek answers in this zone referred to as **Learning Work**.

*In **Learning Work**, I get am warned by my doctor that I had better begin taking better care of my body. I find out what my health challenges are and get recommendations about what to do. I go online to see what options are there. I talk to friends about how they take care of themselves. I check into joining a health club and/or diet program. I try to learn all I can, comparing prices of programs, required efforts in terms of time and other resources. I look at what programs match my particular needs and lifestyle. I make judgments about what I will really do and what will be more than or different from actions I am willing to take.*

- Finally I move into the most critical zone of planning—and one that gets very little attention in most instances. **Adaptive Work** represents my efforts to prepare my system to accept, work with, and use the change in productive and effective ways. People in my system may need to learn new skills. We may need to re-tool, re-organize, or re-align the ways we do our work, both together and separately. I take the time to adapt the initiative as I can to fit the system's needs, and adapt the system to meet the requirements of the initiative.

It is essential at this step to identify what must leave the system to make way for the initiative, identifying and taking steps to clear the way for the change. What old habits, procedures, relationships, even attitudes, will not work as I bring the new initiative into the system? Then, only when the system is fully prepared, I am ready to fully implement and make the initiative part of the system's ongoing Practice.

Once I find a diet and exercise program that seems to be the one for me, I take time to buy appropriate equipment, learn to use it, build my schedule around the changes, purchase the food I need to eat, and engage the rest of my family and friends in supporting my commitment.

I identify and eliminate old habits that will limit my success in this new lifestyle. I can no longer snack in the middle of the night just because I am awake, or eat fast food three times a day because I am on my way to or from meetings. I have to schedule time to exercise and make sure I have what is required to live up to that commitment.

As I work with my system to transition from one zone to the next, at each stage I create an explosion of communication, making sure that information about the change—starting with the decision to find a new way of working—is transparent and accessible to all. Sometimes that will entail engaging people in decision making; sometimes it will mean considering their perspectives;

sometimes it will mean just sharing information once a decision is made. The communication is critical, however, to the full implementation so that people know what's coming, why it's needed, and what will replace the pieces that are leaving the system.

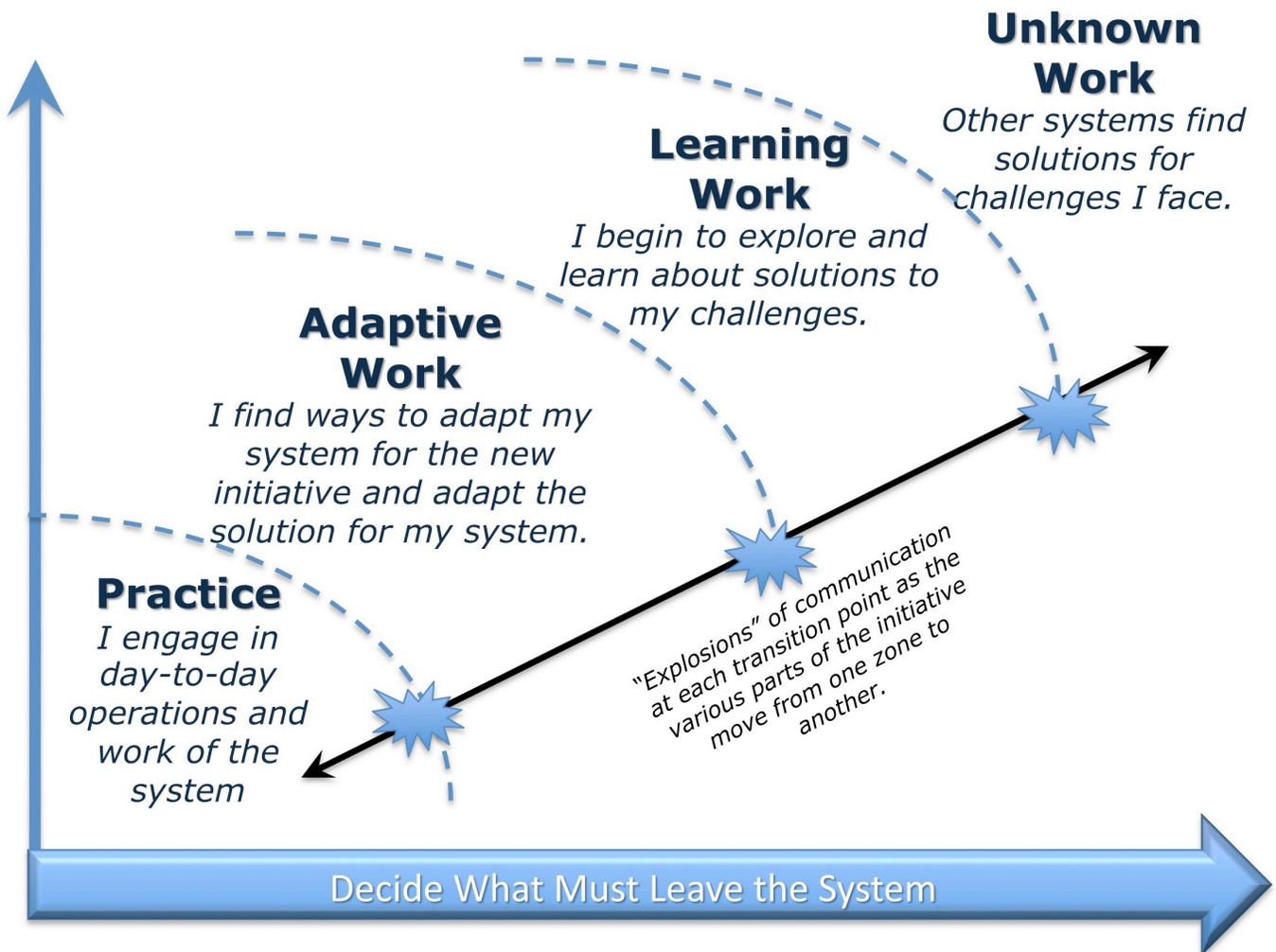
As I go from my old ways of eating and exercising and move to new ways of taking care of myself, I know that I will do much better if I engage the support of my family and friends. They will know what I will or won't eat; they can know what my new schedule will be; and they understand when I won't grab a burger, fries, and shake with them as we start home.

I have a client who works in a huge organization and is in charge of a very complex change process that spans multiple departments over the next few years. When the leaders in her organization began to sense a need to change their model of service delivery to be more client friendly, they began by moving from the **Practice** zone out to the **Learning Work** zone. They read the literature, talked with experts, and visited a number of other similar organizations who had already been functioning in the **Unknown Work** zone. As they selected the solution that seemed to meet their needs, they assigned her to lead the implementation. Having attended a training session where she learned about the Change Maturity Model, she stepped into her role and began to function in the **Adaptive Work** zone. Over the past couple of years she has continued to attend to the adaptive work, across the system, moving some parts more quickly into Practice than others. She carefully choreographs action across the system to attend to adaptive concerns. She now carries a laminated copy of the model around with her to help people understand where they are relative to others in the initiative and to help coordinate and connect different parts of the change process.

The Change Maturity Model is a multifaceted tool. I work with some clients who use it to plan their initiatives from the beginning. I also have clients who use it to explain and justify requests for support and resources. Whether the change is huge or just a small shift in practice, the Change Maturity Model is a helpful guide to identify options for action and to communication with others. We hope you find it helpful as well.



Change Maturity Model



created by Dennis Cheesebrow, Teamworks International