

Early assessment: using a university-wide student support initiative to effect real change

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Some opening thoughts

“Assessment can only be effective if it is used as a barometer for change”

Siegel, M (2003)



Assessment matters

“Assessment is about several things at once ... it is about:

- reporting on students’ achievement and,
 - ... teaching them better through expressing to them more clearly the goals of our curricula
 - ... measuring student learning and,
 - ... diagnosing specific misunderstandings in order to help students learn more effectively
- ”
...

Ramsden, 1992



Formative assessment

- Is all about feedback
- Is thus dialogic
- Mutually hermeneutic as each (student and lecturer) seek to “understand and interpret the communications of the other”
- Has a social dimension
- Potentially richer than summative assessment, and as such
- Is a crucial component for student learning.

Yorke 2001



Why *early* assessment?

There is a need for “early warning systems that alert institutions to students who need assistance so that assistance can be provided early enough to make a difference.”

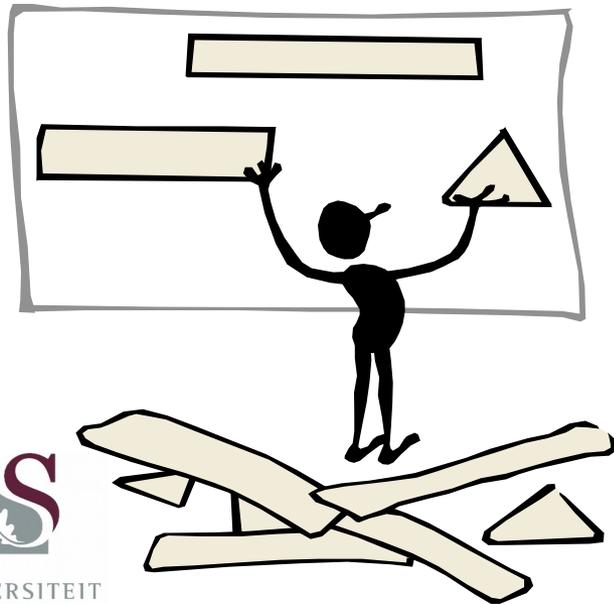
Tinto, 1996.



But this meant change ...

For change to occur, leaders need to tap into people's time and attention ... the two "scarcest resources in today's overloaded institutions of higher education".

Hirschhorn & May 2000



Institutional challenges

“Organisations are dynamically conservative, ..., they fight like mad to remain the same”.

Schön 1974

“Changing collective practices and group behaviour *takes time* and is *difficult*”.

Hargreaves (cited in Waks 2007)



The FYA Monitoring system

- Early assessment for all first-year modules
- Marks made available:
 - Via the student portal to students: individual marks
 - Via the staff portal to lecturers and AD practitioners: selected release of worksheets both detailed and summative
 - To parents



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TEACHING AND LEARNING

RESEARCH

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My profile

Manage modules

Manage Curriculum

Manage Students

Summer School

WebSTudies (WebCT)

First-year Academy
monitoring system

Exam/Test information

Timetables

Academic Support

Centre for Teaching and
Learning

University Calendar

Information Cafeteria

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Early assessment

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What happened? Year 1

- Academic staff:
 - Initially much resistance, yet unexpected compliance
 - Assessment came “too early”
 - *A meaningless exercise adding to existing workloads*
 - Unprepared and in many cases uncertain about how to approach it
- Students:
 - Wide range of reactions



What happened: Year 1 cont.

- Discussed in Teaching and Learning Coordination Points meetings. This led to:
 - Personal meetings with struggling students
 - Email contact with struggling students
 - Review of assessment tasks
 - Implementation/revision of tutor programmes
 - Channeling of students to mentor programmes
 - Reviewing curricula
 - Workshops to explore formative assessment, etc, etc.
- Extension of the system to include mid-year and year-end results
- Drawing up of a protocol



What happened? Year 2

- Better marketing
 - Rector's (Vice-chancellor) roadshow
 - Using the protocol
 - Student banner competition
- Almost 100% compliance
- A move to commitment
 - A different discourse emerged
 - Requests for support / consultations increased
 - Significant increase in SOTL
- Impact of funding took root



Theoretical perspectives on change

Change is not necessarily an ordered or controlled process, yet numerous models in the literature:

- Kotter (1996): eight step process
- Nadler (1989): key phases in the management of change
- Kirkpatrick (1998): 4 levels of change
- Ho (2000): Conceptual change
- Waks (2007): 8 stages

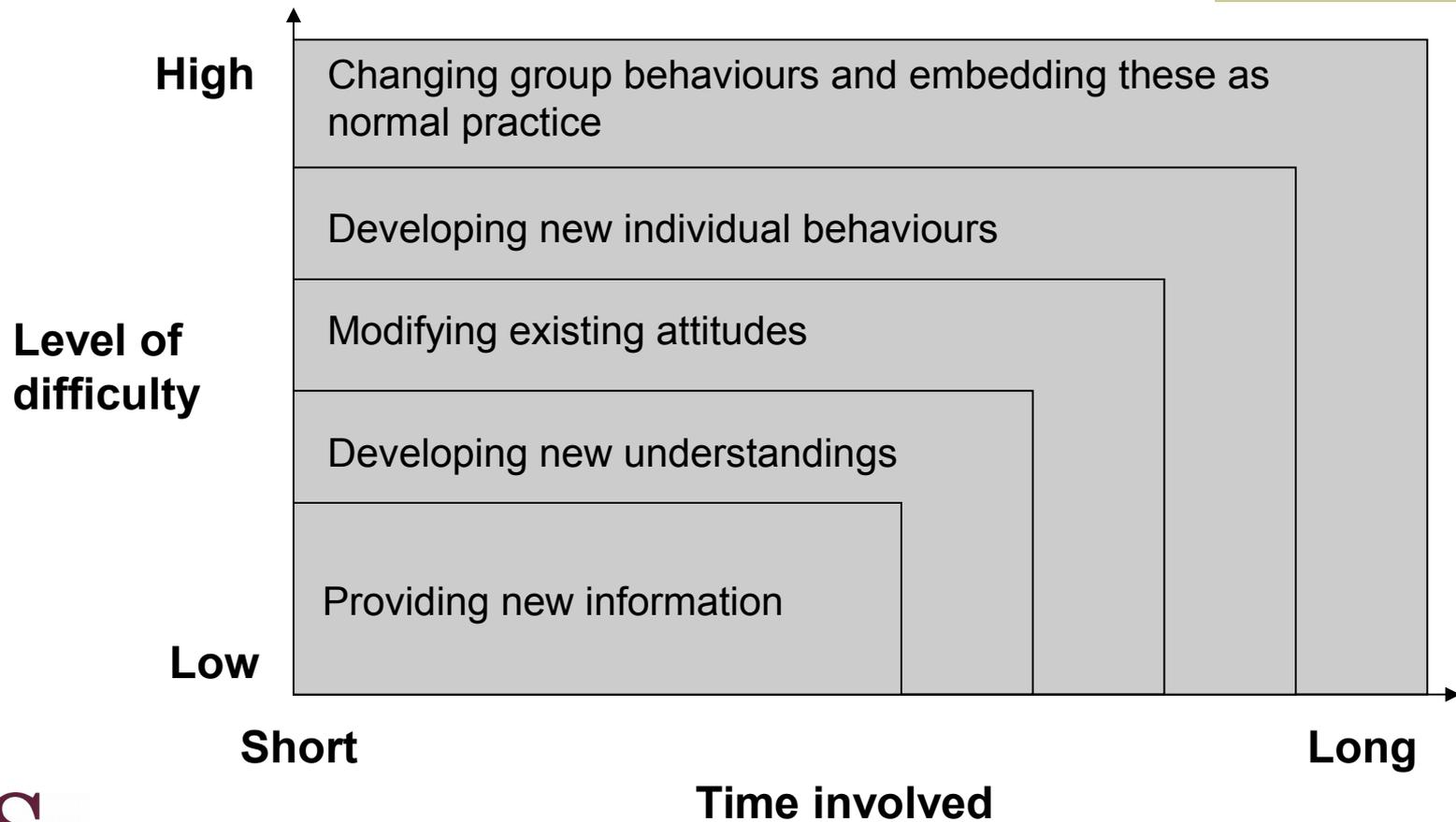


Critical success factors

- Some discomfort/catalyst
- Changes relevant
- Convinced of benefits
- Character and implications understood
- Values must link with existing participants
- Feasible in terms of resources
- Ongoing feedback



Where are we now?



Stages in a change process

Hersey & Blanchard (1988)

In closing

$$C = (D \ V \ F) > X$$

Where:

C = change

D = level of dissatisfaction with status quo

V = quality and clarity of the vision

F = feasibility of the proposal

X = cost of changing

Gleicher 1967



“Being a member of a learning organisation is not necessarily an easy role. In fact it can be distinctly uncomfortable ...”

Pedler et al quoted in Dale 1994

“In order to survive, the organisation and its people must be capable of learning and managing waves of successive change”

Pennington 2003



Your thoughts and questions



Thank you!

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jou kennisvenoot • your knowle



Prof Walt



Damn that exam was tough. Took me 1 hour to finish!



Yeah, it took me 45 min!



How long did it take you to finish?



ABR

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...2 minutes!



Be Prepared

I ♥ Harmonie

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ABR



Daar was
eerste jaar.

lank terug'n lui
Hy't bietjie te
veel baljaar. Toe loop
hy hom vas, vroeë as-
sessering was'n las, nou is
hy maak weer eerste jaar.

Nerina

www.syn.dc.za/sol



Providing new information

- Meetings with Faculty Management
- Presentations to Senate, Rector's Management Team, Faculty Boards, TLCs, Student leaders, Peer mentors, etc.
- Information in University publications, booklet for parents, on University Radio, external media, conferences (internal and external)
- Reports
- Protocol



Developing new understandings

- Ongoing discussion, focus groups and feedback sessions.
- New and powerful collaborations
- Conducting focused workshops (included as part of Assessment workshops and new lecturer orientation)
- Conducting and disseminating research
- Reflecting on the experiences of Year 1



Modifying existing attitudes

- Seeing value in early assessment
- Developing a curiosity about who is my student – leads to closer monitoring
- Acknowledging the value of using technology to facilitate good teaching and learning
- Early assessment:
 - *A positive barometer*
 - *A strategic tool*
 - *A process of identification*
 - *Students more aware*
 - *Very valuable*



Developing new individual behaviours

- Changing approach to assessment (crafting an assessment plan that incorporates early assessment as an integral part)
- Curriculum changes
- Reflective practice
- Seeking out opportunities to share my experiences



Changing group behaviours – become embedded practice

- Early days
- Discourse of change needs to be entrenched (Boxer, 2005)
- Individual passions versus organisational mandates
- What about faculties? – the importance of autonomy
- Sustainability remains an ongoing challenge
- Is all this facilitating student success?

