Using Positive Psychology to Create Cultural Change for Flourishing Schools

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Positive Psychology

“[W]e have scant knowledge of what makes life worth living. For although psychology has come to understand quite a bit about how people survive and endure under conditions of adversity, we know very little about how normal people flourish under more benign conditions... I look to a new social and behavioral science that seeks to understand and nurture those human strengths...” Seligman, 1998.
What is Positive Psychology

• Positive psychology is the scientific study of what makes life most worth living. It is a call for psychological science and practice to be as concerned with strength as with weakness; as interested in building the best things in life as in repairing the worst; and as concerned with making the lives of normal people fulfilling as with healing pathology.
  – Dr. Chris Peterson, 2008
Cultural Change

- Culture: the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution or organization
  - (Mirriam Webster)

- Change
  - (Kurt Lewin)

Unfreeze
- Ensure that people / org are ready for change

Change
- Transition to the new state
- Execute the change

Refreeze
- Ensure that the change takes hold, becomes permanent
Models of change

Lewin’s Change Management Model

AWARENESS OF THE NEED FOR CHANGE
DESIRED TO SUPPORT THE CHANGE
KNOWLEDGE OF HOW TO CHANGE
ABILITY TO DEMONSTRATE SKILLS & BEHAVIOURS
REINFORCEMENT TO MAKE THE CHANGE STICK

Kubler-Ross Model

Implementing & sustaining for change
1. Create urgency
2. Form a powerful coalition
3. Create a vision for change
4. Communicate the vision
5. Empower action
6. Create quick wins
7. Build on the change
8. Make it stick

Our Change Management Model

Sustain
Support
Communicate
Measure

Lewin’s Change Management Model

PLANNING
ACTION
RESULT

Unfreezing
Changing
Refreezing
Flourishing Schools

• Measured by:
  – PERMA
  – Student retention
  – Well-being (staff, student, faculty)

– Satisfaction with life scale (SWLS)
– EPOCH (Peggy Kern)
– Measures of meaning / purpose
– Physical health metrics
– Others (school specific)
Building on the best of “what is”

Appreciative Inquiry

Positive Psychology

Organizational Change Management
Framework for (Positive) Change

- Assess
- Plan
- Implement
- Sustain / Transfer ownership
Framework for Positive Change

• Assess (Prepare):
  – Why are we changing? What is our initial state and what does success look like? How will we measure it?
  – What is already working? What can we learn from that success?
  – What is our sponsorship / governance structure? Who has the strengths / skills to fill certain roles?
  – What is our positive change vision? Who is impacted and how? What will it look like / sound like?

• Plan:

• Implement:

• Sustain:
Key Positive Psychology Tools

- Future best self – for the school / organization / culture
- Positive deviance – learning from what already works
- Hope and optimism – create a positive vision
- Meaning / Purpose – bigger picture / vision
- Empathy – what do we know about our stakeholders?
- Strengths (throughout)
Activity

• What is working well?

• Think / pair / share
  – What is one aspect of your current school culture that is working well and you would want to keep as you move forward.
  – What do you believe makes this work well?
  – How do you know it’s working?
  – What would it take to preserve it and even enhance it as you move forward?
  – What can you learn from this element that’s working well?
Assess → Plan
Framework for Positive Change

• Assess:

• Plan:
  – Change team – who will help us? What are their strengths? How do we form a positive, effective team?
  – How ready are the stakeholders? Where are their strengths?
  – Contingencies and resistance plan – how do we leverage the good to mitigate the difficulties?
  – Communication and engagement plan – how do we keep everyone in the loop as needed?

• Implement:

• Sustain:
Key Positive Psychology Tools

• Kindness – how do we plan for kindness, generosity

• Curiosity / collaboration as you build plans, learn about stakeholders

• Mental Contrasting = WOOP
  – Wish, Outcome, Obstacle, Plan

• Strengths (to create Change Team)

• Goal setting and getting / agency
Activity

• Mind map – stakeholder identification
• With a partner or small group
• Who are the stakeholders you can identify in a school system?
  – Broad groups and then more discrete groups
• Assess: what strengths do these stakeholders bring to your school / organization / community / change?
Framework for Positive Change

• Assess:

• Plan:

• Implement:
  – Do what you said you would do.
  – Monitor feedback – what channels are working? Where do we shift our attention to the good?
  – Sharing positive stories and successes
  – Real-time resilience / Positive community support
  – Celebrating successes

• Sustain:
Key Positive Psychology Tools

• Emotional / social intelligence
• 3 good things
• Gratitude
• Resilience / Grit / Self-efficacy
• Mindfulness / Self-compassion
• Self-care
• Community building
• Intellectual humility
Activity

• Real-time resilience practice:

• Identify a difficult scenario that matters to you – you are “about to”....
  – What are your counter productive thoughts in that moment? (3-5)
  – Then:
    – What is the evidence to show that counter-productive thought isn’t true? “That’s not true because…”
    – Reframe – draw on optimism – “A more helpful / better way of seeing this is…”
    – Plan – create a solid contingency plan (e.g. take a breath, relax) “If X happens, then I will Y…”
  – Create a real-time resilience plan for each thought – get help from a partner if you would like!
Framework for Positive Change

- Assess:

- Plan:

- Implement:

- Sustain:
  - Lessons learned – what did we learn from what worked AND what didn’t – a focus on the successes also leads to learning
  - Transfer ownership to new roles / responsibilities
  - Celebrate the Change Team
  - Recognize and build on new strengths, insights, learnings
  - Codify the “new way” in the culture through cultural levers, stories
Key Positive Psychology Tools

• Savouring – remembering the good times
• Gratitude – expressing gratitude for those who helped along the way
• Peak-end theory
Activity

- Expressing gratitude
  - Turn towards
  - Speak from the heart
  - Be as specific as you can
  - What was important about this act for you?
  - Say "thank you"

- Receiving gratitude
  - Do not deflect – just accept
Framework for (Positive) Change

- Assess
- Plan
- Implement
- Sustain / Transfer ownership
Discussion

• What’s one take-away?
• What is one question that you still have?
• What is one thing that you will be doing differently?