

# **Overcoming Resistance to Whole-School Uptake of Restorative Practices**

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Paper presented at the International Institute of Restorative Practices "The Next Step: Developing Restorative Communities, Part 2" Conference.

18-20 October 2006  
Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, USA

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# Overcoming Resistance to Whole-School Uptake of Restorative Practices

## About the Authors:

Peta Blood and Margaret Thorsborne are both highly respected in the field of restorative practices for their developmental work in the implementation of restorative practices in educational and workplace settings internationally and have written a range of papers on the implementation of restorative practices in schools. This paper builds on the 2005 paper, “The Challenge of Cultural Change: Embedding Restorative Practices in Schools”. It will explore ways to think about and to manage the organisational change process more effectively to increase the likelihood of long term sustained change in the uptake of restorative practices.

## Purpose

This paper is designed to assist change agents at a District and Regional support level; system decision makers; and external consultants apply change management theory in the educational context to assist with the implementation of restorative practices. An understanding of effective change management theories is essential to better understand the scope of the change process and to more effectively manage implementation planning.

## Introduction

*Effective organisational leadership is more about managing the journey of change than announcing the destination. (Zigarmi et al:Blanchard, 2006, p.205).*

The implementation of a restorative philosophy demands, in most educational institutions, a major shift in thinking and the realignment (even replacement) of beliefs about discipline, its purpose and practice. Moving from a punitive rule based discipline system to a system underpinned by relational values requires a change in the hearts and minds of practitioners, students, their parents and the wider community. Without understanding the enormity of this task a few good people in each school will be working very hard to make a difference, with limited impact. This paper examines what it takes to help shift the mindsets of people to work more relationally. It scopes the process of whole school change. We draw heavily on the work of Everett Rogers and his Diffusion of Innovation model of change along with other noted scholars in this area to assist schools understand the change process.

*People take up change at different rates. So, what is it about those who can make the changes quickly and those who can't? Who are these groups and how can we use this knowledge to assist the school community to adopt change?*

The simple way of viewing the complex task of implementing restorative practices would be to explain that if (as implementers) we were to suggest that by operating in the WITH domain (Wachtel and McCold, 2001), by valuing relationships and working restoratively – then the change process would be simple. This way of operating suggests that we would by nature work cooperatively; collaboratively; problem solve issues together; listen

attentively; seek other voices; and allow for the free expression of the emotions that bubble up when people are confronted by change. We would also realise that people need high level support as well as high level direction in the midst of change. But we don't as a general rule of thumb. In fact, when confronted with the demands of managing this change process, most practitioners default immediately to thoughts about those members of the school community who are likely to resist the change and are want to tell them what to do or *shape up or ship out*. If you are constantly frustrated by the blockers, the hecklers, the fence sitters or those who say they are already doing it when you know they are not – then this paper will assist you to develop a useful roll-out strategy which has the capacity to harness the courage and goodwill of those who are game to give the new way a go and slowly but surely minimise the resistance of others.

## **The Impact of Change**

As this paper is designed to assist practitioners/change agents working on the implementation of restorative practices in schools, it is important to understand the stressful nature of this change as a precursor to understanding how to assist people through the change process. There is often an unrealistic expectation that people will change their behaviour overnight. Whilst we are working to help educators understand that their students cannot change ingrained behaviours overnight, we often do not apply the same leniency to our colleagues. Change takes time and, as we have mentioned in previous papers (Blood & Thorsborne, 2005; Morrison, Blood and Thorsborne, 2005; and Blood 2005), it is not an easy task.

Research<sup>1</sup> indicates that 70% of change initiatives fail because of 3 critical reasons:

1. people leading the change process announce the change and consider that is sufficient for having implemented
2. peoples concerns are not surfaced or heard
3. those expected to change are not actively involved in the change process (Zigarmi et al:Blanchard, 2006).

It is a familiar story: the principal comes back from a workshop/training all excited about the concept of restorative practices – announces that everyone will be trained or workshopped and then quickly gets annoyed when there is a small uptake rate.

For change to be successful, it needs to be strategic, well planned, incrementally implemented and take into consideration how to change the behaviour of people. Hubbard: Kingsley, 1999 states that '*a Strategic Plan for ... improvement that doesn't have an integral people component is in jeopardy from the day it is conceived*'. The implementation of restorative practices forces alignment of the system and processes in order to be congruent with what we say we do and what actually happens in practice. *To work restoratively means that we value relationships and connectedness across the school community*. This is bound to challenge the majority of staff who may share different views on the role of an educator and the purpose of discipline. Some will be tired of working hard and getting nowhere; others will have become frustrated with previous change processes. Some will have felt unsupported in the past and others will be quietly going about their business, not putting any more effort in than it is currently taking. The

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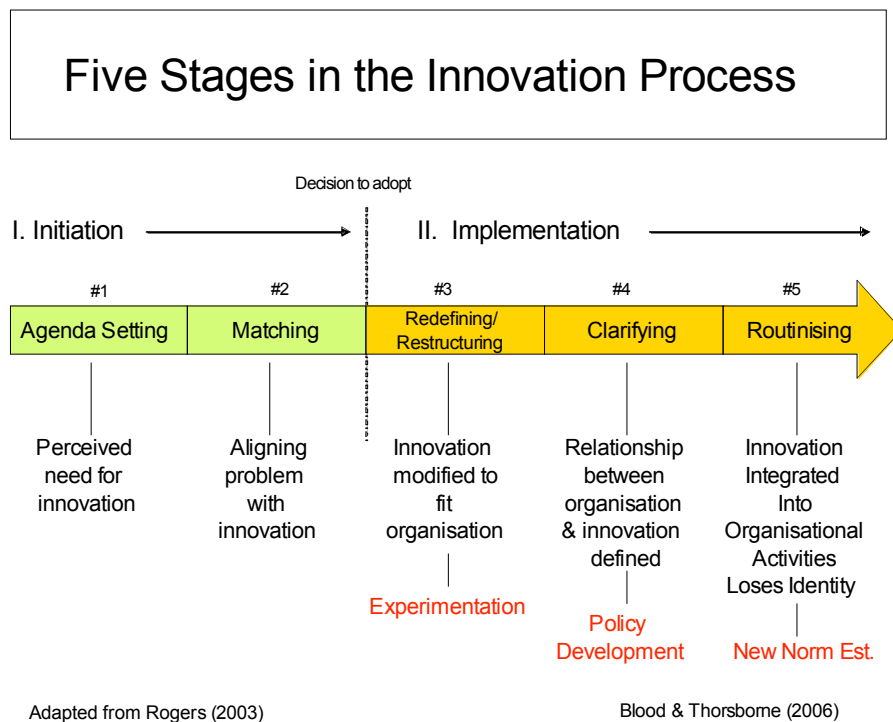
<sup>1</sup>Cited in Blanchard (2006).

clear message is that not everyone will be enthusiastic about the change process, and with good reason. Many will have seen numerous new initiatives come and go and understand if they keep their heads down, this too shall pass! We have written this paper so that change agents, consultants, administrators and trainers understand how to better engage the people involved in the change process so that it is more likely that resistance will be less of an issue or concern.

## Managing Innovation

Rogers (2003) describes the stages of involved in innovation (see diagram 1 below) and groups them into two major phases: the **initiation** of an idea and the **implementation** of that initiative. The first stage: Initiation involves setting the agenda and speaking to the perceived need for innovation. This matches what we have described in our previous paper (Blood and Thorsborne, 2005) as Stage 1 and 2: Making the Case for Change and Developing a Shared Vision of the way forward. Rogers second phase: Implementation corresponds roughly with our last three stages, Developing Responsive and Effective Practice, Developing a Whole School Approach and Professional Relationships described in detail in our previous work.

**Diagram 1:** Rogers (2003) Five Stages in the Innovation Process



**Diagram 2:** Blood and Thorsborne (2005). Stages of Implementation aligned with Rogers 5 Stages in the Innovation Process (above).

Stage 1: <b>Gaining Commitment</b>	Stage 2: <b>Developing Shared Vision</b>	Stage 3: <b>Developing Responsive and Effective Practice</b>	Stage 4: <b>Developing a Whole School Approach</b>	Stage 5: <b>Professional Relationships</b>
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## (i) Initiation Phase

It is important to understand that the point of entry for each school will be different. Some schools will turn to restorative practices because they have a perceived bullying problem or high suspension/exclusion rates. Others will have problems in the playground that need to be addressed, or a host of disrespectful relationships and behaviours. Some schools are in the process of restructuring, or taking on new approaches to curriculum. Others might have a problematic year level that is causing concern (eg entry year in to high school). Some schools will have a focus on relational practices and it makes sense for them to continue to build on existing practice. It is the task of change agents to help schools determine this need and to make the connections to the relative advantages that a restorative philosophy can offer their school. Without an identified need, schools are unlikely to take up restorative practices. And for some of those schools with an obvious need, it may well require a crisis to force them to look at changing their policies and practices.

## (ii) Implementation Phase

Rogers describes 3 stages in this larger phase of the social change process: **redefining/restructuring, clarifying and routinising**. In this phase, the innovation is necessarily modified to fit with existing organisational structures. No matter how successful an initiative has been in other places or settings, it still needs to find its own level in the new organisation. Whilst there are many models of restorative practice, no one school or organisation is the same in terms of how they approach implementation and the nature of practices they adopt for this very reason. Aspects of a particular model may be replicable within other schools with similar demographics and similar needs, but the reality is that each school will find its own level. This is also true for regional and national differences. Schools in New Zealand will need to be convinced that processes developed in Australia, or USA or UK can be successfully adapted to meet their own context. There are also different settings – primary/elementary, high, college, special or alternate schools which have their own needs which must be taken into account.

Whilst every school will be subtly different and will develop a model that best aligns with the environment and community in which they are located, we need to hold true to the values that underpin restorative practice. Hopkins (2006) reminds us of the values, principles and skills that are essential to a restorative model: ‘...*mutual respect; empowerment; collaboration; valuing others; integrity; honesty; openness; trust and tolerance. The skills include: emotional articulacy; empathy; open-mindedness; active non-judgemental listening and conflict-management skills.*’ Without these essentials, it cannot be said that what has been implemented is congruent with the philosophy and values that underpin restorative practices. It has long been our experience that some schools claim restorative practice as their current disciplinary model, but a closer look tells us that their restorative practice is thinly disguised punishment.

Experimentation with the innovation informs practice, which informs policy and the nature of relationships within a school which in turn has an impact on the values that inform the organisation. With this cyclical nature of change, a new set of norms is established within the organisation – but not without a fair share of pain and angst along the way. This is why when we talk about change taking 3-5 years (Blood and Thorsborne,

2005) we understand that it is difficult to progress this at a faster pace, unless the organisation is already partly down this path in the first place. This is not to say that schools will claim faster rates, however in our experience, they have a tendency to maintain high suspension rates, fail to engage whole staff and still have substantial behavioural issues. We will now examine the nature of resistance and then go on to describe the phases of social change and what the needs of various groups within the organisation will be and how to assist them through the change process.

## **Denial and Resistance**

*In reality, most people – “resistors” or not- are simply seeking answers to legitimate questions, albeit not always in a constructive way (Zigarmi et al:Blanchard, 2006).*

A US Department of Education Project<sup>2</sup> cited six sequential and predictable concerns that people have that need to be addressed: *information, personal, implementation, impact, collaboration and refinement concerns.*

**Information Concerns.** People require the same information that those that made the decision to adopt needed. Consider that when a Principal decides that is exactly what the school needs, do the rest of the school have information about what the problem is that needs addressing, and how this initiative will assist that problem. In the absence of quality information, they will fill in the gaps themselves. People need answers to the following questions:

- a. What is the change?
- b. Why is it needed?
- c. What is wrong with the way things are now?
- d. How do we know this works?
- e. Is it evidence based?
- f. How much and how fast does the organisation need to change?

**Personal Concerns.** People want to know how the change will affect them and whether they have the skills and resources to implement the change. It is critical at this stage that their concerns are taken seriously and they feel heard.

- a. How will the change impact me personally?
- b. What's in it for me?
- c. How will I find the time to implement change?
- d. Will I have to learn new skills?

Blanchard and others (2006) provide a great summary of the stages of concern and important questions to be asked at each stage, some of which we have included in Appendix 1.

Just as people need their concerns addressed, we need to understand that people change at different rates and that cultural change takes time. Ferris (2003) states that ‘...it is imperative that those taking the longest are given sufficient time to come on board. They should not be abandoned just because the majority are already there, or this could be your downfall.’ p.2. It is completely normal for people to progress through the following

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<sup>2</sup> In Blanchard (2006) *Leading Change at a Higher Level*. Pearson Education Ltd., New Jersey.

phases:

1. **Denial:** 'It is just another fad and it simply won't happen'
2. **Resistance:** 'I haven't got the time and anyway, we have always done things this way'
3. **Exploration:** 'OK – maybe I'll listen, but what is in it for me?'
4. **Commitment:** 'I believe in this and I am with you.' (Ferris, 2003,p.2)

We have developed a table adapting Rogers (2003) Phases of Social Change (see appendix 1) that outlines the seven phases of social change, their characteristics and critical questions to be considered within each phase. However, because resistance is a primary cause of frustration in many change processes (much which has been written about by organisational change experts such as Senge 1990), we will focus on two key aspects: *denial and resistance*.

Denial and resistance are normal responses in the face of change, and even though expected, cause a lot of frustration to those implementing new innovations. Affect theory, personality development, learning styles and the theory of discounting can all help to develop our understanding of how people adopt change at different rates. It is a mix of how change is implemented, what is happening for the person at the time, past experiences, how they learn and the nature of the environment they are working within at the time. We have all been resistant to change at times.

In their explanation of what discounting is, Illsley Clarke and Dawson (1998) describe how people have a tendency to discount their behaviour and what is happening around them at four levels: ranging from complete denial to feeling powerless to make a difference. The most significant discount involves a serious detachment from reality where the person cannot see the problem that the innovation is seeking to address i.e. what bullying? A second level discount involves a misrepresentation of the issue or not taking it seriously i.e. it is just boys being boys. The third level discount involves a mistaken belief system that there are no solutions to the problem i.e. society is the problem. The fourth level discounts their ability to do anything about the problem - a mistaken belief that they are powerless i.e. well what do you expect, the way some of their parents carry on. Identifying the level of discount is important in terms of knowing how much energy to put into changing the underlying belief pattern. It is much harder to work with people discounting at levels 1 and 2, than it is with those who believe that there are no solutions to the problem or who feel powerless to make a difference.

Thankfully, within schools, the latter two discounts are among the most common forms of denial, where educators are quick to identify and blame parents, their students/pupils, society and the media for the problems that they face, forming a mistaken belief that there is no solution or they are powerless to make a difference. We in turn cannot discount that what they are saying is not serious or not real for them. We need to find ways to work with this if we are to start altering the belief patterns, some of which are outlined in Appendix 2. Information and strategies based around engagement will mostly address this problem at the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> level.

Whilst there are many reasons that people discount, one of the reasons is the emotional discomfort that they experience. The Compass of Shame (Nathanson 1992) provides a further understanding of the nature of denial in understanding the avoidance pole, one of

four behaviours that individuals use to manage intense feelings of shame and disconnection. Denial is a form of saying ‘no’, a defence mechanism whereby the ‘*Denial implies refusal of anything asked for or desired, the assertion that something is untrue, the contradiction of the existence or the reality of a thing.*’ (Nathanson, 1992, p.337). Disavowal is form of denial, where one cannot comprehend certain information because it triggers unwanted affect. Nathanson states that ‘*We can protect ourselves by guarding the perimeters of our personal world; by making sure there is nothing within them that will embarrass us; or by distracting people so that they will forget that they were interested in what may lie within.*’ (Nathanson, 1992, p.339). When people feel uncomfortable, they push the discomfort away. The level of discount will depend on the amount of emotional discomfort they are experiencing.

*Change is inevitable: so is resistance to change* (Moorhead and Griffin, 1998, p555).

It is impossible for those implementing change to not encounter some form of resistance, reluctance or denial. Egan (1998) distinguishes between reluctance and resistance which are often thought to be the same. Reluctance being a passive form of avoidance (perhaps the outwards sign of denial) where the person is ambiguous about the change, as they know it comes at a price. Resistance is active, when people feel forced into a situation of changing or doing something they don’t want to. It can come from the organisation, the individual or both. We are all very familiar with the usual responses such as “we haven’t got the time for this relationship stuff” or “just let me get on with my job – I’m here to teach.” In some schools, disaffected, resistant staff will ferment negativity and recruit amongst parents groups with complaints about standards dropping. As change agents, we have some control over the level of individual resistance by using processes which encourage buy in and engage staff in ways which reduce the levels of anxiety and fear (see Blood and Thorsborne 2005, Blood 2005 and Morrison, Blood and Thorsborne, 2005). Interestingly enough, the more we embrace restorative practices at a whole school level, the less we should encounter resistance as we involve and work with others in these intensely relational ways.

Change by its nature involves stepping into the unknown and taking risks. This takes courage. For the majority who are risk adverse, this will be too confronting. Some will be able to comprehend this information and sit with the uncertainty, whilst others will want to deny the need for change, or deny the seriousness of the problem for a multitude of reasons which make good sense to them. Rogers’ Diffusion Model of Innovation assists with our understanding of how to work with each of the groups and overcome denial and resistance to implementation.

### **Diffusion Model of Innovation**

Rogers explains that innovation creates uncertainty, and because it is such an uncomfortable state, individuals seek information about the new idea and its capacity to solve problems from their peers: ‘*The diffusion of innovations is essentially a social process in which subjectively perceived information about a new idea is communicated from person to person*’ (Rogers, 2003).



*The main elements in the diffusion of new ideas are: (1) an innovation (2) that is communicated through certain channels (3) over time (4) among the members of a social system' (Rogers, 2003, p.36).*

(1) An innovation is any idea, practice or object that is perceived as new by those that are considering its adoption

(2) The innovation is communicated through various channels to those that are required to or considering adopting the idea, practice or object i.e. introduction, seminar, peers, a training.

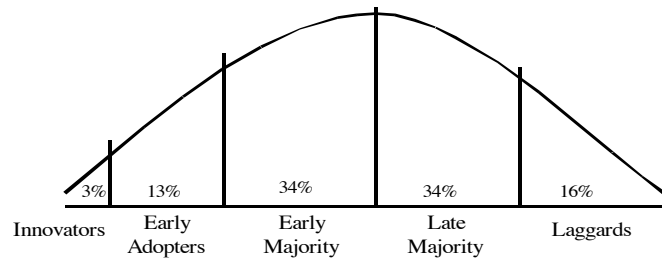
(3) Innovation takes time to implement and its rate of adoption is dependent on a range of factors. This might also be referred to as the decision making process where those considering adoption either accept the idea or reject it. Clarke (1999) outlines the five stages of the decision making process first articulated by Rogers as:

1. **knowledge** (exposure to its existence, and understanding of its functions)
2. **persuasion** (the forming of a favourable attitude to it)
3. **decision** (commitment to its adoption)
4. **implementation** (putting it to uses), and
5. **confirmation** (reinforcement based on positive outcomes from it).

(4) Each social system has its own set of norms and established pattern of behaviour among its members. In this instance, every school has its own culture and sub-cultures within it. The implementation of restorative practices will challenge these norms and established behaviours, increasing the likelihood of resistance to change when the status quo is interrupted. We already know that some people will be enthusiastic for the change, having expressed or held concerns about the established way of doing things; some will complain but be unwilling to change; others yet will adopt a wait and see approach as many change processes have gone before them, whilst others will deny there is a problem to be addressed. Rogers describes five groups of people who take up change at differing rates and how to work with them. What does this tell us then? It gives us some *science* about the change process to guide us in our strategy. Their distribution under a bell curve can be seen below in diagram 3 and is further articulated in Appendix 2.

Diagram 3: Rogers (2003) Diffusion Model of Innovation.

# Diffusion Model of Innovation



Adapted from Rogers (2003)

Rogers, 95  
Blood & Thorsborne (2006)

Whilst the characteristics of each group that we will describe are helpful in understanding some of the barriers to implementation, it is not intended that you label people in the process. We firmly believe that the more aware we are of what people need to navigate change, the more effective our planning can be. You could consider this model a bit of a continuum as people will change groups dependent on the change initiative they are asked to adopt. A teacher may be an innovator in a subject area and part of the late majority when it comes to the adoption of restorative practice. Someone else may be completely resistant to a new idea if past ideas have failed. It is all variable and nothing is fixed – especially when it comes to managing people. Finally, we have been asked if this paper could apply in any setting and the answer is yes, just the context varies. We will now describe the characteristics of each group and later explore ways of managing each group.

## Innovators

Innovators are the type of people who are on the look out for new ideas and what looks promising in their field of interest. They are visionary people and are able to grasp new concepts and apply them to their relative setting. They have a huge capacity for networking particularly outside their own organisation and are often more accepted outside their peer group than within it (a case of a “prophet in their own land”).

Innovators are risk takers who can cope with the uncertainty of change – in fact they embrace change processes with a vigour that can leave others reeling in their wake. Although this group may not hold a large sphere of influence among their peers or subordinates, *they have an important role of seeking new initiatives and bringing them back into the system.*

They have a tendency to fall into two groups: those that embrace all the latest new ideas and are almost addicted to the change process or to new ideas; and those who are constantly looking for what can make a difference in their field. The first group will often be spoken about in quite disparaging ways, whilst the latter will be admired by some for their passion and will scare the living daylights out of others. Comments of ‘*here we go again*’ ‘*what now*’ and ‘*what is she or he up to this time*’ – often follow this group. They often lack credibility among the masses. It is for this very reason that using Innovators to

convince others in their own organisation that are slow to take up new ideas and practices is a waste of time and energy.

And for this reason, innovators alone can not embed innovation. Not only do they only represent 3% of a group, but they lack credibility within their own system. However, the enthusiasm of the innovator group will encourage the early adopters to pick up with an idea and run with it, provided they are given opportunity to experiment to see if the idea has merit and will work.

### **Early Adopters**

Early Adopters are a committed group of people who are open to new ideas, particularly when those new ideas have a potential to make a difference within their area of work. They will give something a go and see effort as an investment, provided there appears to be merit in it and that outcomes are visible and measurable. They are prepared to take risks, but are also results orientated and will not adopt a new idea unless it makes sense.

This group have a tendency to be the role models within their workplace and will be admired and respected by others who will be watching closely. The respect this group is held in is important in overcoming the lack of respect that the Innovators experience from the majority of staff. Early Adopters help to decrease the level of uncertainty that new ideas raise by adopting it and sharing their successes with other members or staff.

This group will be among the first to attend professional development in restorative practice and take it back to their school to share what they have learnt and to start experimentation with the idea. After a period of experimentation, these people will emerge as the leaders or the change agents within their workplace and within the field, as their credibility and ability to make sense of practice will resonate with others. A high level of practice competency and emotional literacy is a necessity for this group, as they need to lead by example and model the very skills they are asking others to adopt. Early Adopters are more likely to be people that embrace the restorative philosophy and model the very skills that we are seeking others to adopt. Hopkins (2006) suggests that they will work 'WITH' people rather than doing things 'TO' or 'FOR' them<sup>3</sup>; they will be reflective practitioners; empower others; model working relationally; be accountable; and have empathy and compassion for others – all essential skills for change agents. It is also helpful if these people already occupy positions of some weight within the school discipline structures (eg faculty heads and year or house leaders, senior teachers) or are empowered by their leaders and supported in the implementation.

### **Early Majority**

*'Most people evaluate new ideas through the personal experiences and recommendations of adopters who are similar to themselves.'* Rogers, 1994.

The Early Majority make up 34% of staff. They are pragmatists with good will – the type that in a group meeting will agree in principle with the idea (if it makes sense) but they

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<sup>3</sup> Wachtel & McCold (2001). Social Capital Window.

won't be the ones to implement a new initiative, without first seeing solid evidence that it works. To others they may be considered fence sitters, as they will neither oppose nor necessarily support a new idea in the early phases of implementation. They will deliberate for some time before giving an idea a go and will have a tendency to look for easy solutions, rather than put themselves out on a limb.

This group may be among the quiet plodders, but they are seldom among the opinion leaders within a group. A staff member within this group may be seen as hindering the change process, because they are not putting strategies into practice simply because they have been told to do so. Early Majority will follow, but they seldom lead from the front.

Members of the Early Majority group will occasionally be sent along to training, because the boss thinks that they need a change in attitude, that they are somehow blocking the process. In fact, when something finally makes sense to them and the risk is removed to a greater degree, they will be able to reassure many of their colleagues who will be waiting to see.

### **Late Majority**

The next 34% described by Rogers (2003) were the Late Majority – a conservative, cautious and sceptical group of people who loathe taking risks and doing anything that upsets the status quo. Late Majority staff are sticklers for following policy, standards and guidelines and will happily quote this to you when it serves a purpose. They are “tricky” to deal with, because they will often be vocal and will be highly influenced by the next group – the Laggards.

The Late Majority only change in response to economic and peer pressure and when the uncertainty of a new idea has been removed and there is no risk of them failing. Since they are influenced by policy, it is more likely that they will take up new practice when it is finally and clearly defined in policy that is reflective of the restorative paradigm. Some schools mistakenly take the view that policy change must come first. It is our opinion though, that policy changes can only come *after a time of experimentation* and it makes sense then, that this group will come to the new practice when both of these things have happened – experimentation to remove the risks, and policy redevelopment.

### **Laggards**

*‘The sceptics are just waiting for a reason to NOT come on board. They are waiting for an excuse and as soon as one of your plans does not go smoothly they will jump on the opportunity to spread dissent amongst the ranks. Some of those who were just about climbing on board may now start to jump ship and it will be even harder to get them back’ (Ferris, 2004, p.2).*

Laggards are often seen as that cynical group of staff who spend their time undermining and blocking change processes. Rogers (2003) cites that they may either be very traditional in which case they are suspicious of innovation; or they are isolates who don't have the social networks to build an awareness of the benefits of the new innovation. Regardless, Laggards take time to change and evoke a strong urge in others to force them

to change with comments such as ‘*you are either with us or against us*’ or ‘*if you don’t like it, move on*’ etc. Laggards may be active or passive in their resistance. They will hold out until the end hoping that the new idea will pass over and be forgotten. After all, they are among a group of people who have become cynical about change processes and have seen plenty of new ideas come and go. Laggards have a tendency to hang out together in staff rooms or in particular faculties and will be vocal in their objections to the latest new idea. They are suspicious of innovators and early adopters and are skeptical of the early majority who look like they are sitting on the fence, although have some sympathy with the late majority who are a little opposed to risk taking themselves. It is *not* a good idea to try to influence these people by sending an Innovator into their “patch” to engage them in a debate about the relative advantages of the restorative approach.

One thing to remember about the Laggards is that their resistance is completely rational or habitual for them. They have a reason for being cynical and may fall into the following categories:

- hanging out for retirement
- needed to move on sometime ago, but are fearful of making the change
- have felt unsupported by the organization in the past
- have seen one too many fad initiatives
- overlooked for promotion and angry about the fact that they have more experience

Laggards can become your greatest leaders and advocates if we tap into the frustration that they feel for what has happened in the past. It is important that while we don’t invest all our time and energy in changing their minds, we must not write them off totally. If we pay attention to their concerns, and give them opportunities to experience restorative practice at an emotional level by involving them in restorative processes they may well become our greatest advocates.

### **How can an understanding of diffusion theory assist implementation?**

People adopt things for their own reasons – not for ours. Innovation must make sense for people in order for them to consider adopting it and they will adopt at different rates. For this reason, we need to plan implementation strategies to match the diffusion model categories. A whole-of-school training in one sitting may not be the most effective way to proceed as it will only reach/convince some and certainly not others. The Early Majority will need to see it in practice and require assistance to minimize the risk for them, whilst the Late Majority and Laggards will need further reinforcement and professional development down the track.

As consultants and change agents, we need to not only make the case for change by making the linkages and outlining how restorative practices can make a difference, but we also need to convince managers and hierarchies of the need to be strategic. We simply can’t expect people to change because we want them to. Take-up by the people in the first 2 categories must be regarded as a developmental phase in which the ideology must give way to flexible practical solutions. It is a time for experimentation and fine tuning. Flexible options must be developed. Teething problems are normal and a frank discussion about what works and what doesn’t are critical whilst risk taking is encouraged. *It is essential that funds are made available to sustain the change process beyond this*

*developmental work*. To withdraw funding after one to two years is a grave mistake and in our experience usually results in a failure to develop sustainable practice.

For restorative practices to move more towards mainstream acceptance, we must ensure that it meets and addresses a genuine need; that it does not come at a great risk to the majority; and that restorative practices becomes part of the language.

Early diffusion of innovation is often resisted by the social norm and the Innovators often seen as social deviants or misfits within an organisation. Innovation does not gain credibility until the leaders (Early Adopters) adopt the idea and start to change the norm. Most people evaluate new ideas through personal experience/recommendation of adopters who are similar to themselves. Finally it is important to acknowledge that whilst a lot of this may seem daunting, it only takes 10-20% rate of adoption to reach tipping point (Gladwell, 2000 and Chan Kim & Mauborgne, 2003) - as the majority are influenced by the innovators and the early adopters –but it takes strategic planning to reaching tipping point.

### **Tipping Point and Critical Mass**

Critical mass and sustainability occurs at a point where sufficient members of a system have adopted the innovation being implemented. For each new member that comes on board with the change process, they have the potential to bring their network of peers on board with them. This is particularly important for the Late Majority group who need to be convinced by their immediate circle of influence. This highlights the need to facilitate internal and external networking opportunities. Rogers (1994) suggests: a satisfied adopter is a '*powerful interpersonal force*' p.2.

*The theory of tipping points centres on the idea that in any organisation, 'fundamental changes can happen quickly when the beliefs and energies of a critical mass of people create an epidemic movement toward an idea' (Chan Kim and Mauborgne, 2003).*

Chan Kim and Mauborgne offer another framework for thinking about how people adopt change. They suggest there are four hurdles to overcome in the organisational change process: the *cognitive hurdle* that blinds employees from seeing that radical change is necessary; the *resource hurdle* that is endemic in firms today; the *motivational hurdle* that discourages and demoralizes staff; and the *political hurdle* of internal and external resistance to change.

In order to break the *cognitive* hurdle you need to make a compelling case for change by making key people within your organisation experience the problems within the organisation. This means, for example, having them involved in or experience the collection of data which points to the overwhelming need for change. They could be involved in research which points to the ineffectiveness of current practice. Effective *resource management* may require a concentration of resources and efforts in areas most in need of change in the most efficient way i.e. if most bullying and disruption occurs in the playground, why do we only have one teacher on duty? To jump the *motivational* hurdle – people must recognise what needs to be done and yearn to do it themselves. Don't try to motivate and reform the whole organisation – motivate key influencers and

persuasive people with multiple connections. Whilst addressing the *political* hurdle by identifying and silencing key opposition with evidence that it works – powerful vested influences resist change!

Heifetz (1994) strikes the analogy that change agents and leaders need to be able to observe from the balcony, whilst in the midst of change, resistance to change and organisational political interference – otherwise is to risk not noticing what is happening around you. *‘When you are raising a difficult issue, trying to move your community out of a comfortable if dysfunctional status quo, or surfacing a long-repressed conflict that is holding back progress, it is difficult to stand back and see the broader patterns, to look around the corner, to see what is beneath the surface. You are understandably caught up in everything that is going on around you. But nothing is more important to both success and survival than the skill of gaining perspective in the midst of action’* (Heifetz and Linsky, 2002). Organisational politics are difficult to avoid or fight against and it can be wise to be aware of the political climate that could influence or hinder the innovation process. For example: a government body was conducting a broad ranging inquiry into the use of restorative practices within its jurisdiction. This provided the ideal springboard to not only ensure the broader acceptance of restorative practices, but also an opportunity to apply leverage to the Department implementing restorative practices by raising critical concerns about its approach to implementation. Using this powerful leverage was more productive than getting frustrated about the lack of attention to concerns that had been raised previously.

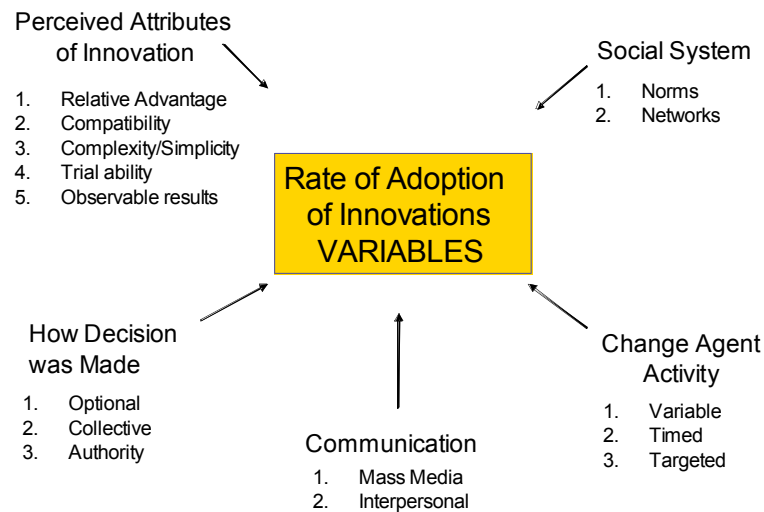
So our advice here is to look for and engage champions at all levels in government and within systems so that their influence can be leveraged to produce the awareness and commitment necessary for the change to be significant. Where does your current state or national policy stand in relation to a more relational approach to discipline and behaviour management? How can it be used to assist with the reforms you are striving for?

### **Rate of Adoption**

*Living systems seek equilibrium. They respond to stress by working to regain balance.* Heifetz (1994)

Change is affected by the rate of adoption or uptake by the members of an organisation. Rogers (2003) outlines 5 variables that affect the rate of adoption: perceived attributes of the innovation; the social system; how the decision was made; change agent activity; and communication about the innovation (Diagram 4). This highlights many of the variables within the implementation of restorative practices, referred to previously by Blood & Thorsborne, 2005; Blood, 2005; and Morrison, Blood & Thorsborne, 2005). We will refer to critical components of this model.

Diagram 4: Rogers (2003) Rate of Innovation Variables.



Adapted from Rogers (2003)

Blood & Thorsborne (2006)

## Perceived Attributes of an Innovation

As previously discussed, it will be difficult to implement an innovation if it does not make sense to those required to implement; does not align with core business; is difficult or problematic to put into practice; does not allow experimentation; and where the results are not relatively immediate and observable to the majority. Rogers (2003) details the elements of an innovation that will determine the adoption of a new idea.

### 1. *Relative Advantage*

The innovation needs to be better or more effective than what already exists. The implementation of restorative practices has relative advantage in this regard when you compare suspension rates and the impact that this has (or hasn't!) on student behaviour. Stage 1 of the implementation of restorative practices described by Blood and Thorsborne, 2005 is about making a compelling case for change to establish buy-in within schools or any environment that you may be working in. Without this, it may look like a good idea that someone else can implement, "because we don't have a need for it in our environment".

### 2. *Compatibility* (with existing values and practices)

How compatible is the innovation with existing values, the needs of the potential adopters and their past experiences? Stage 2 (Blood & Thorsborne, 2005) discusses in detail how to explore a shared vision. The restorative philosophy aligns neatly with existing values and practices within education, if we help educators to make this link (see Blood, 2005).

### 3. *Simplicity* (ease of use)

How difficult an innovation is to understand and put into practice affects the rate of adoption. Whilst the concept of restorative practices might be easy to grasp by some members of staff, they none the less need to go out and experiment with the practice to find out how it works and whether or not it is effective. One-off introduction sessions are not likely to assist the majority to take up practice. In fact, only those



who can see how it aligns with their existing practice will do this. Stage 3: Developing Responsive and Effective Practice (Blood and Thorsborne, 2005) refers to a range of responses and the need to monitor practice and outcomes. It is vital that all groups of people taking up new practice have access to training, coaching, mentoring, networking – all opportunities to discuss what's working and what's not.

#### *4. Trial ability*

Trial ability refers to the degree to which experimentation can occur. Successful implementation of restorative practices involves starting with a small section of the school that has the opportunity to experiment, to establish what works and what doesn't work and develop best practice within the school - the reinvention process that is so necessary to align theory with practice. For example, some high schools are adopting restorative practice in their entry year as their trial, but also because their feeder primary schools have adopted restorative practice. It makes good sense that students/pupils are exposed to familiar processes at a difficult time of adjustment for them.

#### *5. Observable Results.*

Finally, the benefits of the implementation must be clearly observable to others. This is where restorative practices excels, as one will be easily won over when they see and experience the change in behaviour and attitude through one of the many processes. Sharing the stories and the impact restorative practices has had on data is vital throughout implementation. Without this, the new practice is likely to remain a mystery to others. Personal stories paint a powerful image to others. For example, a teacher, student and mother sharing their personal experiences to a large forum of teachers, students, parents and community about the impact of being involved in a restorative process was very powerful. Visual images that facilitate the sharing of these stories can also be very powerful.

### **Change Agent Activity and Functions**

A change agent is someone who has the capacity to influence people and innovation. The best change agents are those located within the system in which you are trying to implement. They may be a department resource person who has the capacity to move in and out of the environment you are working with. It is important that they have enough distance from the workplace that they can observe from the balcony – or take an overall view, and that they develop good relationships with the practitioners on the ground.

Clarke, R (1999) states that change agents:

- Develop the need for change
- Establish a two way information exchange
- Diagnose client problems
- Create the intent to change in the client
- Translate this intention into action
- Stabilise adoption and prevent discontinuance, and
- Shift the client from reliance on the change agent to self-reliance

Regional and district support staff, behaviour and educational consultants and school psychologists are often well placed to take up the role of the change agent, provided they have a good role with the school and the opportunity to spend time on the ground having formal and informal discussions with people. External consultants need to look for these

people and to nurture their ability by coaching and mentoring them early on. In time, they will take over the role of the external consultant.

### **Communication and How Decisions are Made**

We cannot over empathise how important internal and external networking is to the implementation of restorative practices. Bringing people back together allows them the opportunity to share what has been happening, to discuss their successes and to learn from one another about how to address areas of concern. It is also an opportunity to top up their learning and to send them back to their school re-energised. Without this opportunity they are likely to be sitting back in their school becoming increasingly demoralised or worse still, off track with what they are implementing. Over the years, we have each used these check-ins with implementation teams as a way of topping up skills, learning about implementation issues and helping practitioners stay on track. Again, hearing it from their peers in a similar position or slightly ahead of them will carry more weight than hearing it from the consultants or someone removed from their situation.

### **Shifting each group and moving towards whole school change**

Understanding the characteristics of each group is one thing, but understanding how to assist them through their resistance to change is another. We have outlined some of the strategies that have been successful in bringing about whole school change. It should not be seen as exhaustive.

#### **Innovators**

From our experience, it can be important to develop a strategy around the innovators to ensure that they do not get in the way of the development of good practice and that they do not attempt to overlay too many initiatives on top of the existing one. This can be a tricky dynamic and more than one of us have been burnt in this process. Innovators are extremely passionate people and will constantly be on the search of new ideas, whilst their fellow peers will still be reeling from the last change. It can be helpful to acknowledge their role and to talk to them about the importance of letting things settle, before introducing other initiatives. Talking to them about the need to allow experimentation and the stages of implementation may be useful. Aside from this, it can be important to help them identify the change agents beneath them and to encourage them to hand over aspects of implementation to others. Having an implementation that is representative of the school community will assist this process – especially when the innovators occupy positions of power and have trouble letting go. Keeping them linked to support networks will be crucial, as they can be inclined to go off on their own tangent.

**Early Adopters** promote innovation through face to face contact, both with the innovators and to their colleagues. They will be the ones best placed to deliver peer education once others have introduced the school to the concept of restorative practices. Whilst we may have said this many times, we cannot reinforce enough that a once of introductory session or training will not cut it with the majority of staff. They need to hear it from their own and those whom they admire for what they achieve within the school setting. They are the true internal change agents.

It is important to create opportunities for experimentation and permit the early adopters to practice in relative safety. Start small and signal to staff that it is a trial phase to be reviewed and adapted to the relative implementation setting. Many schools have used action research to help refine the experimentation phase.

Because the Early Adopters are trialing something that is new and challenging, it will be necessary to provide networking and support opportunities for them during the experimentation phase. This will require opportunities for feedback and ongoing dialogue both within the school setting and external, providing opportunities for practitioners from outside the school system to discuss issues with others at different stages on their journeys. In Australia and New Zealand, regular professional development and networking groups have greatly assisted implementation and keeping the spirits of those involved high. Forums such as this also help facilitate feedback, acknowledgement of best practice, practice concerns, ongoing professional development and for the leaders to emerge who will ultimately take practice to another level.

The **Early Majority** need to see restorative practices in action and proof that it works in and is practical for them to put into use. They are the ones who will be influenced by observing and/or participating in a conference and by observing the actions from colleagues that they otherwise respect and who have credibility within the school/system.

Ongoing internal professional dialogue and opportunities to be involved are necessary at this stage. Articles and stories about practice that has worked in other schools will be especially useful, particularly as their interest is initiated. Have a folder of articles and stories that you can simply copy and hand out to colleagues who start to show an interest. Ask them to read and come back to you with their thoughts to continue the discussion.

Once they put their toe in the water, provide strong support through mentoring and coaching from on the ground experienced practitioners and opportunities to send to external training, network meetings or to visit other schools.

**Late Majority** staff need trustworthy information about restorative practices. They need to be convinced by those that they respect and credible others (internal and external) that this works and that they can put it into practice without much risk. Networking forums that hear from both external leaders in the field and internal change agents will help to catch the attention of this group. Ideally networking sessions will provide a balance of new material, sharing from everyone about their success stories and their challenges, and the free exchange of information to assist one another. Any one or a combination of sources is likely to capture the attention of this group in a credible way.

Experimentation and refinement of practice will also increase the convenience and ease of use. Helping others make sense of what they have to do, having the questions on laminated cards that they carry with them or attach in a prominent position will all help in the early stages as well as adapting practice to deal with a range of scenarios e.g. staff meetings that practice how to have a conversation with a small group misbehaving on the playground; with someone who is non compliant in the classroom; with parents; or with a bully.

Finally, there are two other strategies that will legitimize restorative practices in the eyes of the Late Majority group. As one of the pioneers in the field of restorative justice has

challenged many of us on is that we need to talk about the butterfly stories and the bullfrog stories as well. Firstly, we need to respond to criticism raised by the finally group to shift – the Laggards - to remove uncertainty and risk, refine practice and address unspoken concerns about the impact of restorative practice. The reality is, initially implementation will have its ups and downs as people learn how to respond in different situations. We need to be vigorous in our review of practice and honest in what hasn't worked so well. Only when this happens, can we refine practice and become better practitioners. Secondly, once we are convinced that restorative practices support the betterment of our school, we need to re-align policy and procedure so that all staff are obliged to follow policy. This will be more so important for the Laggards who need a degree of pressure to enable that shift. Properly worked through policy that involves staff, students and parents in the process will provide an air of legitimacy and the knowledge that this is not going away!

As discussed, **Laggards** need both pressure and support to change their approach. It is less about them being supportive of practice than it is about them changing the way they practice and stop blocking the efforts of others to make a difference. It is crucial that you listen to their concerns along the way and seek to address them or put the onus back on the blockers to produce evidence/come up with alternate strategies in the wake of the '*this doesn't work*' comment.

A word of caution about the laggards! Don't ignore them or dismiss their concerns out of hand. We can learn a lot by listening to the issues that they are raising. Secondly, laggards are laggards for very good reasons – a bit like DeBono's (1985) black hat, where they often raise issues that others won't or hadn't thought of. Laggards signal the health of the school and for those working in the capacity of a consultant with a school can learn from them and particularly how others around them deal with them. Don't think that they can be "cured" by sending them off to the first wave of professional development. Their path to change is a long and rather more complicated one, and you don't want them back in the school or staffroom telling their colleagues that the workshop/training was a load of rubbish. They need to be engaged in ways which signal their importance, as well as the determination of the organization to move forwards. For example:

In a recent high school workshop, one of the so called Laggards raised an issue within the group about the lack of feedback and involvement of teachers when students were referred to the executive team. The discussion was at first fruitful, but then continued on into an altercation between members of the Executive defending their position and the teacher putting up a case against this. The end result being that a member of the Executive then trod on the conversation, stating that the workshop was not the appropriate forum for this discussion and it would stop immediately. Both were right in some sense: it was not the appropriate forum for continuing the discussion which essentially only involved a few people, but it also signalled that teachers did not feel like they were part of the process and needed to be included.

A certain degree of pressure and support will in time need to be applied to the group of Laggards within the school community. Like Braithwaite's (2005) approach to building peace in war torn communities, it is important to start working with those who are sympathetic or open to the cause and then move in closer and closer to this group, to the point of disarming them, when their power base is diminished or lost. By this, we don't

mean that you annihilate the opposition, we simply mean that the more staff that come on board, the less this group will have their ear.

The more restorative/relational a school becomes the more urgency there is to align all process and people to operating restoratively/relationally. Ultimately, the executive will reach a point where they have to apply both pressure and support for the Laggards to change. At the same time, it starts to become intolerable for those that are unwilling or cannot change to remain within a relational way of operating. At this point, many chose simply to move on. However, given that they are not risk takers and tend to like certainty – even if that certainty drives them crazy – they may have difficulty doing this.

The important message here is that change agents, both internal and external must give careful thought about the processes they use for engagement, so that their energy is spent in a worthwhile manner. Get some “process” advice if necessary.

### **Case Study: From Laggard to Early Adopter**

Pamela and Anne were two primary school teachers in a challenging school environment. Both had different issues which had a major impact on the school environment, the students in their class, the parents, colleagues and community members.

Pamela screamed at her class on a daily basis, was easily stressed and very “slippery” in terms of handing in her programs for the year. In fact, on inquiry, she hadn’t done this for several years, always providing an excuse and gaining extension after extension, until the Executive team had long forgotten the program and were caught up with other priorities. There was no accountability and because Pamela was so challenging to deal with, the school adopted the attitude that there was little they could do, but hope she moved on. Trouble was Pamela had been there longer than anyone else.

Anne was a different. She was petulant, easily angered, and inappropriate with peers and community members – but a brilliant teacher by all accounts. Everyone around her walked on eggshells. There was a constant joke on whether the staffroom was clear to enter in terms of Anne’s behaviour. Anne had a major wall around her and was very difficult to deal with. Most people gave her a wide berth. Because she was so unpredictable it made people far more accepting of Pamela’s behaviour, because at least she didn’t yell at them.

The more relational and responsive the school became to working with students, each other and the community – the more the behaviour of these two staff members stuck out like sore thumbs. It was time for the leader of the school to take action and apply both pressure to lift their standard and the support to make the change. It was initially thought that both would need to be put on performance management plans. Each in turn were called in to speak with the principal and were dealt with in a restorative manner. Their behaviour was called into account, whilst their worth as teachers was acknowledged. Demands were placed on both of them in the areas they were deficit. Pamela was teamed up with a leading teacher to assist with getting the teaching program in. Dates were set and a review period established. It was not going to go away this time. The screaming in the classroom was raised as a concern and a conversation had to explore what was

happening and what could be done differently. Pamela was treated as a partner in the process, but the pressure was on.

Anne was advised to seek assistance with managing the fluctuations in moods and ultimately sought professional help. Regular meetings were established to check progress and to assist Anne to make this shift. Over time, the days in which she walked in happy and stayed happy outweighed the bad days.

Five years on both Pamela and Anne were still at the school, and were considered among the leading teachers in the school. They had immense enthusiasm, had become coordinators for special aspects within the school and were clearly well respected. Laggards are laggards for a reason and when we tap into that and help them make the change, they can become leading practitioners and advocates for the new systems. Often it is not that they themselves are unwell, but it is a symptom of the system they are working within – and they just happen to be expressing it – quite often, very loudly and inappropriately!

### **Why Change Processes Fail**

It might be worthwhile at this point to revisit the reasons change initiatives typically fail. Zigarmi et al:Blanchard (2006) provide a list of predictable reasons for the failure in change efforts which include:

- *People leading the change think that announcing the change is implementation:* a common problem with restorative practices in schools, where leaders who may be very enthusiastic (perhaps innovators themselves) who make an announcement that this is what is going to happen, often without even exposing whole-staff to the principles and practice
- *People's concerns with change are not surfaced and addressed:* as we have said early, ignore the resisters at your peril. We can learn from them and need to involve them in differing ways.
- *Those asked to change are not involved in planning:* implementation teams should be representative of the school and seek to involve a good cross section of people and representatives from each group.
- *The need for change is not communicated:* not building the case for change and identifying current issues.
- *Lack of shared vision*
- *Change leadership fails to include adopters, resisters and informal leaders:* not developing a strategic approach to implementation.
- *Lack of experimentation and adaptation:* believing that one size fits all implementation approach and there is no need for experimentation.
- *Lack of alignment of traditional/existing systems with innovation:* operating alongside, over the top of traditional values, without seeking an alignment (down the track)
- *Failure to focus and prioritise 'death by 1000 initiatives':* innovators gone mad. A common problem for schools who have an abundance of off the shelf initiatives to choose from. Often leading to a change in focus each term which staff know will pass. Believe us – we have seen way too much of this!
- *People not enabled to develop new skills* i.e. provision for training and networking not built into the budget, or access restricted to certain people only

- *Leaders who are not credible and give mixed messages:* Hopkins (2004) we must be congruent in what we do and say.
- *Progress is not measured:* don't know what we want to achieve or if we do, when we have achieved it, unless we gather and analyse data along the way.
- *People are not held accountable for the implementation:* personal whim approach to the quality of practice and what is implemented.
- *A failure to respect and understand the culture in which you are seeking to implement the innovation*
- *Other options are not explored in the experimentation and development phase:* schools that have one approach and blame the approach, rather than looking for other strategies that could build on practice, or often it is a failure to understand the nature of the difficulties they are working with (Zigarmi et al:Blanchard, 2006, p.203-4).

The above speaks to the heart of what we have been working on developing and have expressed throughout this paper. If restorative practices were just another initiative that you pulled off the shelf for a term or two – than little of this would matter. Instead, restorative practices have the potential to make a whole lot of difference to the culture of schools and more importantly the nature of relationships within the school community. We hope that by drawing together some of the work of Rogers and others, that we can help those seeking to implement change to be more aware of the complex nature and how to be strategic about addressing this.

## **Conclusion**

Diffusion theory offers a blueprint to manage some of the complexities of the change process and is a reminder that the *people* component of organisational change needs to be strategically managed. As external consultants, change agents and decision makers, it is incumbent on us that we assist others to understand the nature of the predictable difficulties, and to provide useful information that will assist in overcoming the barriers in moving towards organisational change. We are hopeful that the theories we have explored and put forward will assist in developing a more strategic approach and that our collective efforts are well spent in moving towards sustainable practice across the whole school.

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