

Challenging Culture and Managing Change in Higher Education

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To effect systematic change in higher education requires a sophisticated blend of management, collegiality and simple hard work over a prolonged period of time.

In addition, our findings suggest that change begins gradually and that it is important that strong leadership continues to support the change over a sustained period.

Our presentation outlines a three phase model of change recently published in the Journal of Management in Education (Vol 23 Issue 1, January 2009). It includes data from interviews with participants in the change process and also presents the change model.

Literature Review

Our title refers to Challenging Culture and Managing Change. Both of these are complex and require early focus.

Culture is defined in many ways however in this context we focus on Morgan's (1986) description:

' shared meaning, shared understanding and shared sense making . . . an active living phenomenon through which people create and recreate their worlds'

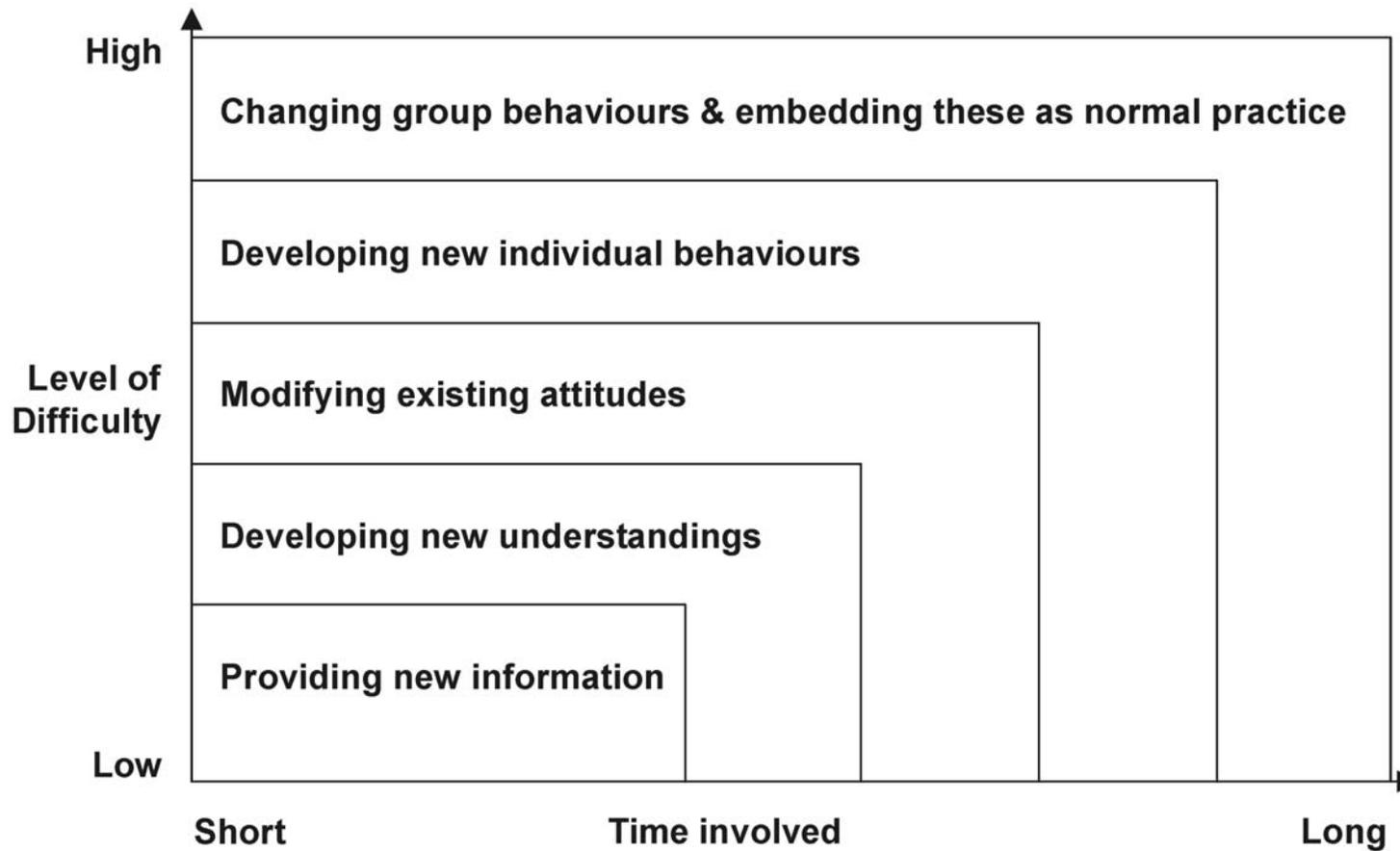
The definition of **change** that most suited us is Pennington (2003)

‘In a context of Higher Education where the volume, scale and complexity of contemporary change creates a sense of almost continuous “white water”.’

Our intended **culture change** incorporated both of Dearlove’s (1997) top-down and bottom up approaches.

‘top down . . . invariably resisted and bottom up approaches . . . slow and partial.’

Stages in a change process



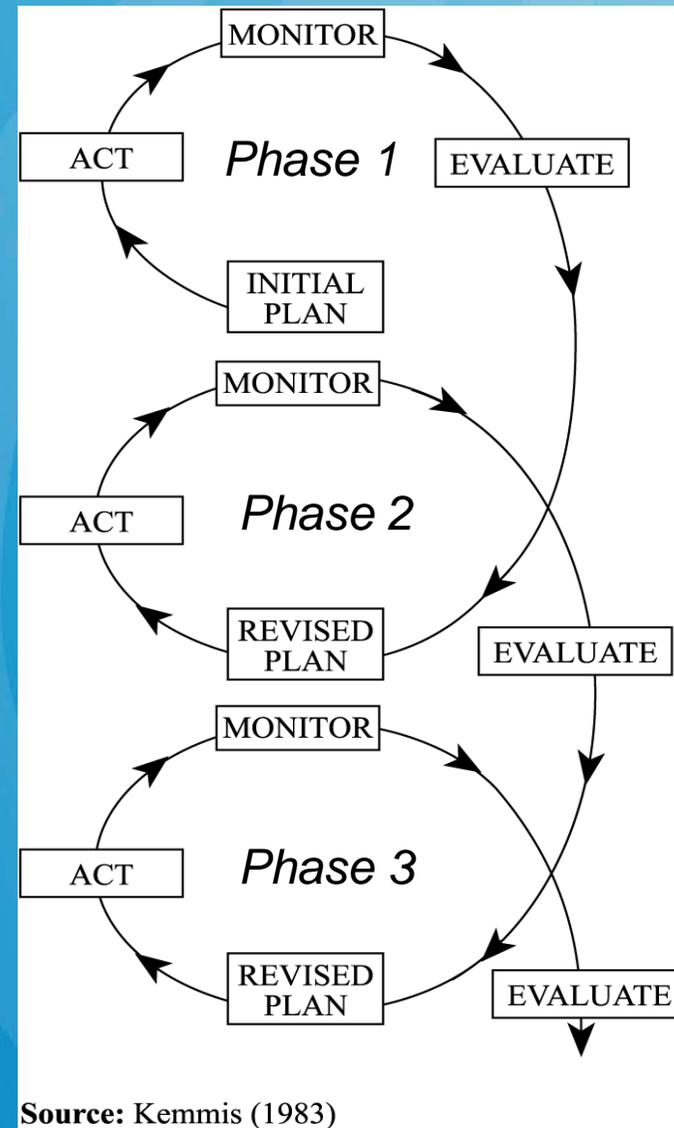
Pennington, 2003

Research methods

Interviews with members of the Institute management team were conducted and transcribed. The emerging themes noted and discussed by the research team.

During these discussions a recognition that the reflection process was a form of action research became apparent.

Further reference to Kemmis and McTaggart's "collective, self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order improve the rationality and justice of their own social . . . practices" (Kemmis & McTaggart 1988: 5)



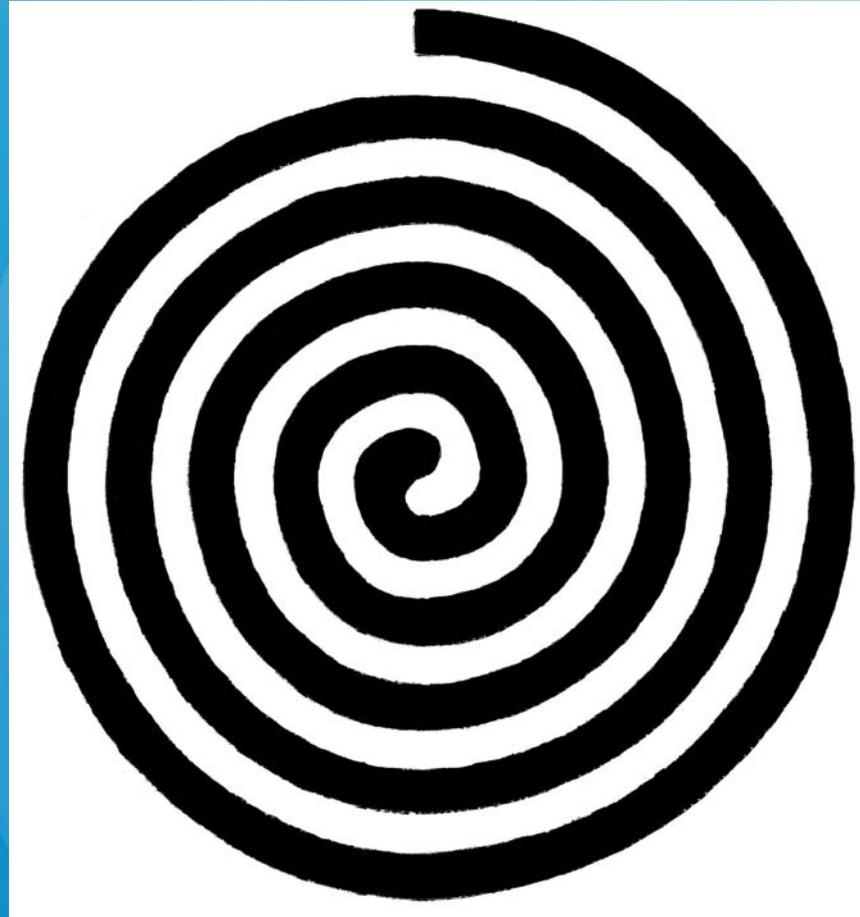
Spiral of act, monitor, evaluate, revise plan and act continues ...

The three phase process

The use of metaphor . . .

- The tight spiral of change
- Loosening the spiral of change
- Galaxy-like spiral of change

The tight spiral of change



- *'Providing new information'*
- *'Developing new understandings'*

Pennington, 2003

- Focus 'inclusive education'
- Staff development
- Team projects
- Identifying issues, barriers and how to overcome
- Identifying features of a change process

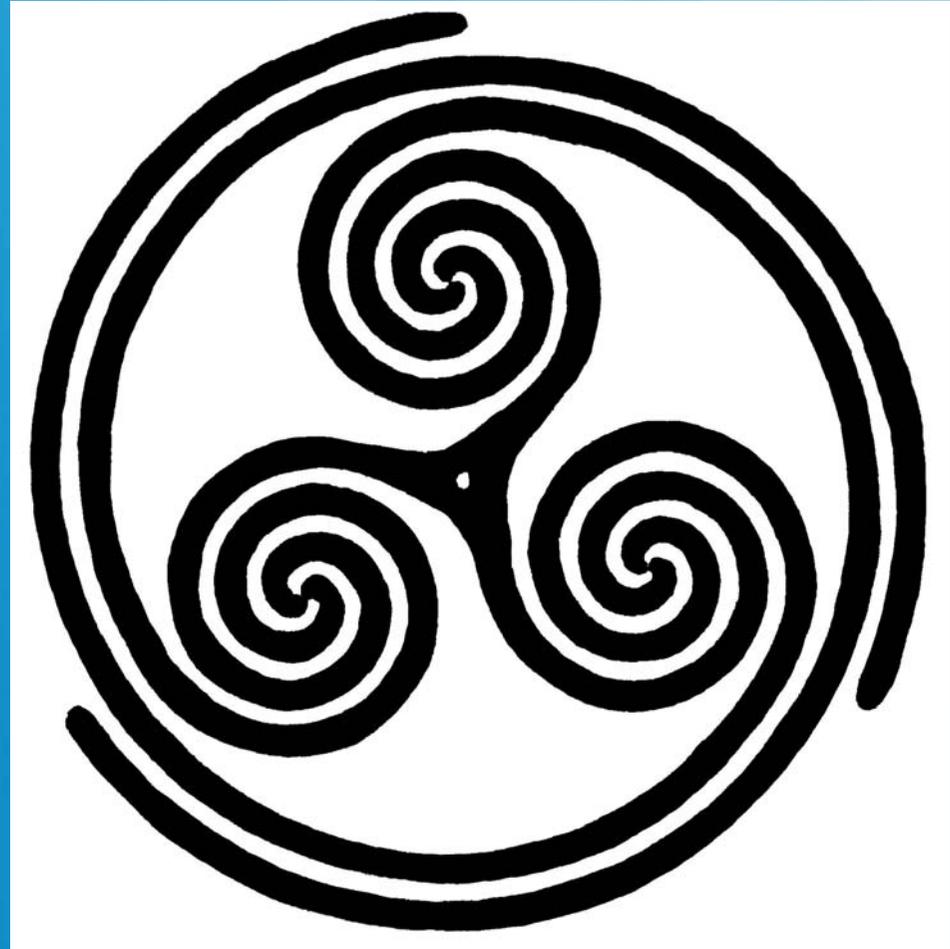
Loosening the spiral of change



- *‘Modifying existing attitudes’*
- *‘Developing new individual behaviours’*

- ‘staff beginning to question more’
- ‘staff are coming up with issues increasingly and equality and diversity are being discussed more and more as part of the things we naturally talk about’
- ‘people appear more accepting...need to keep up the momentum’
- ‘Issues .. focused on at institute level.. puts them into a different perspective’

The galaxy- like spiral of change



*‘Changing group behaviours and
embedding these as normal practice’*

Pennington, 2003

- We see this third phase as being energy-driven, not just from its core as it was initially, but now with energy being generated by the teams themselves, self-perpetuating and to some extent self sustaining, though still benefiting from the energy emanating from the core
- The whole moving more in unison towards a common goal

And is this sustainable change?

- 'Work between us became better linked'
- 'Staff are more aware of wider issues of equality of opportunity'
- 'like stones being thrown in a pond or a rumble underground that starts a wave – ripples or waves are spreading and beginning to affect more people'
- 'Making a difference in a subtle and more focused way'
- 'Energised some staff to do even more'

Key points observed from theory and practice

- Clear vision and rationale for change
- Identify leaders of change team
- Clear planning, objectives, responsibilities
- Reflect at all stages
- Acknowledge/celebrate milestones
- Embrace unexpected outcomes
- Communicate constantly
- Be pre-emptive in dealing with resistance
- Be patient and resilient
- Review and evaluate effectiveness

Where next?

- ‘What next? To embed practices in everyday work and consciousness’
- ‘Also to make sure it’s not forgotten – keeping these issues in the conscience and making sure they’re part of everything we do and not an ‘add on’.’
- ‘but it will take time’.

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