

SETTING THE STAGE FOR SUCCESS IN IMPLEMENTING NEW PRACTICES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Even the most well-intentioned agencies can stagger when implementing a new management information or case management system. Implementation problems have been noted repeatedly in risk assessment and case management, with implementation failures documented in systems serving both adults and youth. The success of implementation is highly sensitive to the organizational readiness of the agencies involved.

These implementations involve significant investments of time, money and staff, so correctional organizations have an interest in making them as successful as possible. Yet relatively few studies on implementations in the criminal justice system have been done. In the interest of promoting a successful implementation experience, Northpointe has developed a generalized model that outlines the sequential phases, tasks and challenges when managing complex change. The model aims to clarify the many management actions, tasks, and staff roles needed at key phases of implementation. The development of this general model of implementation was influenced both by Northpointe's field experiences and by several prior models of strategic change: the strategic approach of Pettigrew et al.; Walton's process framework; the work of Harris and Smith and Ellickson and Petersilia in criminal justice implementation; and Bushe and Shani (1991) in clarifying the "learning capacity" of an organization.

MAJOR PHASES OF IMPLEMENTATION AND THEIR KEY TASKS

The following implementation strategy was developed based on lessons learned from projects across the country. This framework identifies four main stages that exist in any implementation challenge:

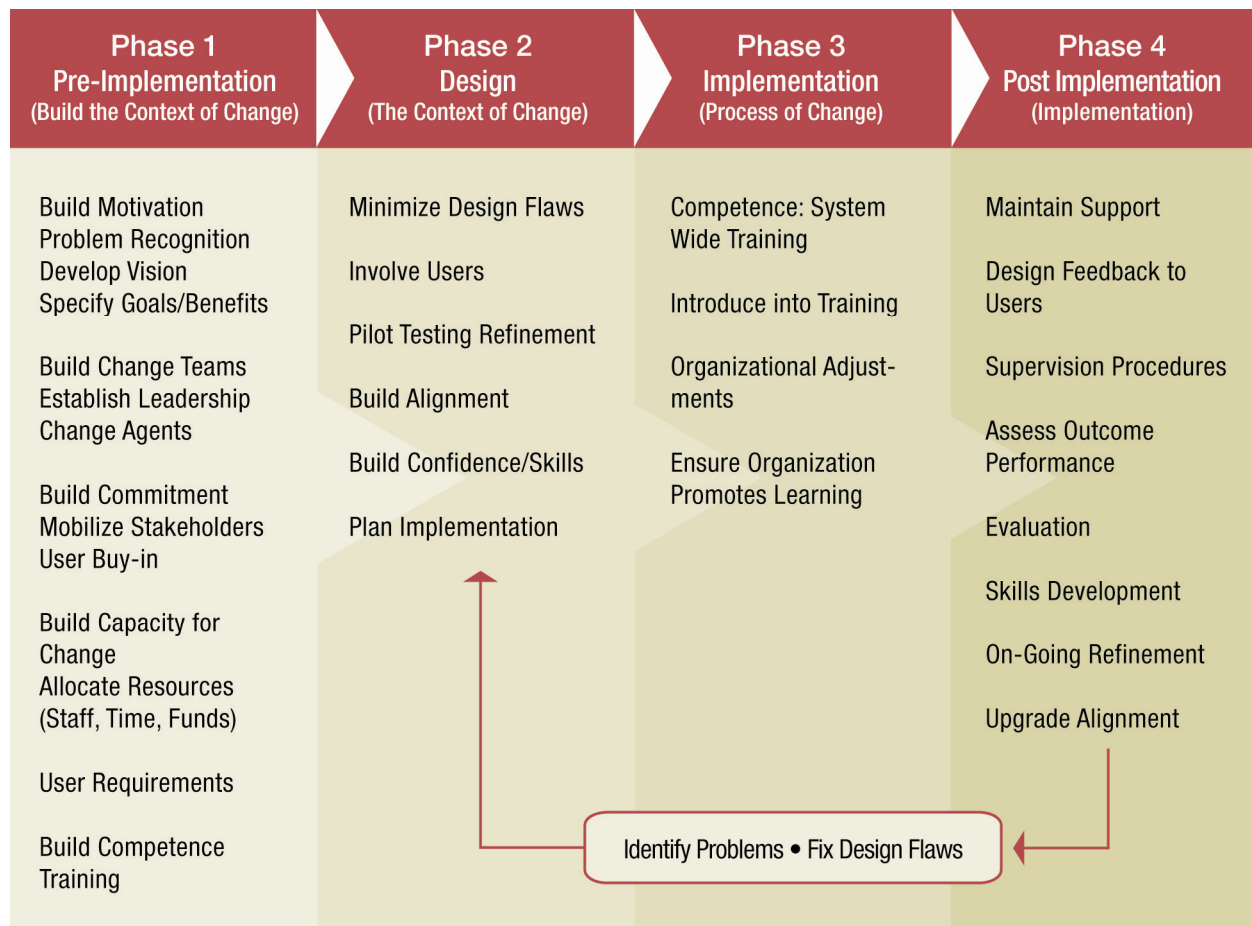
1. Pre-Implementation – building the context for change.
2. Design – the content of change.
3. Implementation – the process of change.
4. Post-Implementation

Each stage entails specific skills, challenges, and roles. The stages are only approximately sequential in the sense that an agency may have to loop backwards to upgrade or strengthen a particular task that may have been overlooked or was only weakly accomplished at an earlier stage.

All skills and techniques to be learned during implementation will require regular practice and review of staff proficiency levels to ensure high quality intervention, implementation fidelity and sustainability of the effort. The model integrates Walton's three-stage model and Pettigrew's domains of strategic change, and also aims to incorporate the lessons learned from the few available prior criminal justice studies of implementation.

The model is shown schematically in Figure 1. A detailed explanation of each task in these phases follows.

■ **Figure 1: Major Phases of Implementation and Key Tasks**



PHASE 1: PRE-IMPLEMENTATION

The first phase of virtually any change process involves problem recognition, capacity building, political acceptance, and other early tasks that must be accomplished before finalizing the design of the new assessment program. Several political areas should be tackled here, including: placing a problem firmly on the policy agenda (problem recognition), forming a supportive coalition, mobilizing resources, developing a compelling vision to motivate and guide change, and building a capacity for change. More specifically, here are the tasks included in this first phase:

- Recognizing the initial problem/challenge
- Building and mobilizing a supportive coalition
- Developing a vision of desired goals and benefits
- Building a leadership structure to handle change
- Building competence in key skills
- Specifying performance requirements for the new procedure
- Selecting or developing provisional designs
- Developing (and continually updating) a project plan
- Identifying barriers to successful implementation and how they might be overcome/removed

PHASE 2: DESIGN: PRELIMINARY TESTING, VALIDATION, AND EVALUATION

In the second major phase of implementation, provisional designs of the new procedures are tested, compared and refined. This must occur before any incorporation into routine use. For

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most corrections agencies, pilot tests are used to determine whether a proposed assessment design could achieve the desired goals, to locate design flaws, and to determine whether refinements are needed. The innovation design phase typically involves:

- Finalizing performance requirements
- Finalizing a "provisional" design
- Providing training in the provisional procedures
- Identifying fertile ground for a pilot test
- Conducting a pilot test
- Assessing alignment between the new procedure and the organizational context
- Making refinements as necessary
- Developing an on-going implementation activity plan

PHASE 3: IMPLEMENTATION

In this third phase the new policy, program, or procedure is introduced into standard operations; the emphasis shifts to detailed project management. The major challenges – building a suitable design, building competence and building commitment – are still deeply involved. The following tasks are critical:

- Developing mechanisms to monitor progress
- Allowing adaptive problem solving and design flexibility
- Converting from the old to the new system
- Maintaining commitment and buy-in
- Building competence and skills
- Making needed organizational and workload/staffing adjustments

PHASE 4: POST-IMPLEMENTATION

This final phase of implementation focuses on consolidation, problem monitoring, evaluation and on-going development of the procedure. Corrections managers cannot assume that the goals of the new assessment will be reached automatically and the procedures will be used as formally designed. Program integrity must be monitored carefully. The following tasks and skills are required at this phase:

- Assessing the impact and effectiveness of the new system
- Monitoring the integrity of implementation through process evaluation
- Continuing to develop and revise the assessment design
- Building the management's change skills
- Maintaining skills and competence
- Designing management reports
- Identifying "latent dysfunctional" elements of the implementation (burnout, turnover, morale, regression)

CONCLUSION

By following the model outlined above, corrections agencies will have a better degree of success when implementing new systems and practices. Completing each task before moving to the next stage – and building in regular reviews and practice and returning to earlier stages if needed to refine the work – will help agencies and staff have the best possible chances for achieving their implementation goals.