Sabbatical Report

Roger Goulstone
Valley School - Term 2, 2008

I would like to acknowledge the support of the Board of Trustees and staff of Valley School.

The sabbatical was an opportunity to continue work on my Professional Development plan that I put together at the Principals Development Centre in 2006. The centre was a wonderful professional experience but the follow up actions were difficult to maintain once back in the work environment.

It was also an opportunity to revitalise and have time for myself to place work issues in perspective.
The sabbatical allowed me time to reflect, spend time with my family and create the space to re-establish myself as an individual away from the principal role.
It allowed me time to complete family projects that I had been putting off due to pressures of work. It allowed me a complete break from the school environment. This is where the greatest value of sabbatical lies, without this time I would not be contemplating further years in a principals role.

The professional goal of my sabbatical was to complete the outstanding objectives set in my plan. They revolve mostly around leadership and managing change. This goal was always going to be secondary to the need for personal refreshment.

Goal 1:

To build on existing leadership strengths by developing more inclusive leadership practises to ensure peoples ideas and beliefs are heard, valued and used as part of an informed decision making process when confronting change.

      1.1 Develop a critical friend relationship within the school.
      1.2 Begin and sustain a programme of professional reading to inform the change process.

Goal 2:

Further develop the interpersonal skills needed to enhance leadership skills and deal with challenging situations.

      2.1 Develop inter-personal skills and procedures needed to facilitate successful meetings.
      2.2 To further develop skills and procedures needed when challenging behaviours are presented by individuals.

1.1 Critical Friend

The definition of a critical friend that I most favour is one of a trusted person who will ask you the difficult questions, feed information to you to challenge your outlook and critique your work from a position of trust and respect.

A critical friend is crucial to successful reflective practice. The relationship must be regular, purposeful, informed and respected. The core qualities of a Critical friend are respect, trust and rapport.

Expectations of a Critical Friend

1. Trust is essential. Being a friend is essential. It is usually easier to accept critical feedback from a trusted friend.

2. Listen to each other. To be ready to listen you have to feel that you have been fully heard.

3. The value of a critical friend is that they offer a perspective different to yours through their observations and analysis.

Feedback must be timely and structured within agreed guidelines to avoid negative responses or unexpected directions. The feedback structure may change with different situations but a feedback model, which I have trialed and is easily adaptable to various situations looks like this:

Thoughts from your Critical Friend
I particularly liked…
You might want to look at these resources…
Did you think about?
I wondered about…
I've seen others successful in similar situations when…

These feedback notes would form the framework of a detailed discussion on the area being looked at.

Each critical friend partnership is different because different individuals are involved. There are large numbers of readings available about forming Critical Friend relationships. The ones I found most useful are detailed below. For those not wanting the expense of purchasing printed books or chasing material through different libraries the web provides many reports, seminar notes and articles on the topic.

The National College for School Leadership runs a website, www.ncsl.org.uk, with links to many leadership topics and has a very clearly set out written section on Critical Friends.

Their cover page quote encapsulates very well the philosophy of Critical Friends.

" Establishing and leading a network takes courage and resilience. A critical Friend builds confidence in network leaders to help them to take risks and to experiment with new ways of working."

The North Central Regional Technology in Education Consortium ceased operation in 2005 but their website remains operational, www.ncrtec.org, and offers a useful article on critical friends. They relate it directly to the implementation of Technology but the model is easily adaptable to any situation.

Plan for Change Developed for Valley School

"None of us know more than all of us"

This is a proposal for a procedure to be followed when change is suggested. The intention is to follow a process to ensure all interested parties are consulted and able to contribute to the change before the situation is initiated.

The area for possible change may be identified in several ways:
- By an individual (team leader etc.)
- As part of our self-review cycle.
- Following an incident at school.
- Through the appraisal process.
- Following an ERO review etc.

Once an area for possible change ahs been identified then an initial discussion should be held with senior staff.

This initial discussion will include the following:
- A decision on who should put the proposal together
- Who the interested parties are
- A timeframe for putting the proposal forward to staff for contributions and discussion.

Meeting Procedure

1. Idea for change is tabled and explained by the staff member concerned.

- The idea for change is…
- This has come about because…
- It is hoped it will result in…
- The idea is now open for discussion.

2.Discussion protocol

- People have an uninterrupted speaking time.
- Following a contribution the chair of the meeting, or other staff may ask questions of the speaker to clarify the speakers' contribution.
- The chair of the meeting may invite contributions from individuals in order to ensure everyone has an opportunity to speak.

3.When the discussion has concluded

-The proposal may need to be amended to reflect contributions.

-The chair will amend and read the amendment as necessary.

4. The idea for change will be trialed
- The length of the trial will depend on the idea and circumstances of change.
- The trial length shall be determined at the meeting.

5.After the trial period
- Staff meeting held to discuss trial
- Positives, minuses and interesting points discussed as per discussion protocol.
- **Question** - has the change resulted in the outcome we were hoping for?

Yes - Change is made permanent but reviewable as part of the normal self review cycle.
No-does the change need amending to achieve the desired outcomes or has the change been unsuccessful and should be stopped.

Important points from change research:

No single person owns the change idea -a single person may initiate the idea but the process belongs to everyone.

Critical feedback of an idea is feedback to the idea and not the initiator.

The process thrives in an atmosphere where feedback is valued and seen as constructive to developing an idea.

Everyone needs to know that his or her input is needed and adds value to the process and should expect to be supported in offering thoughts.
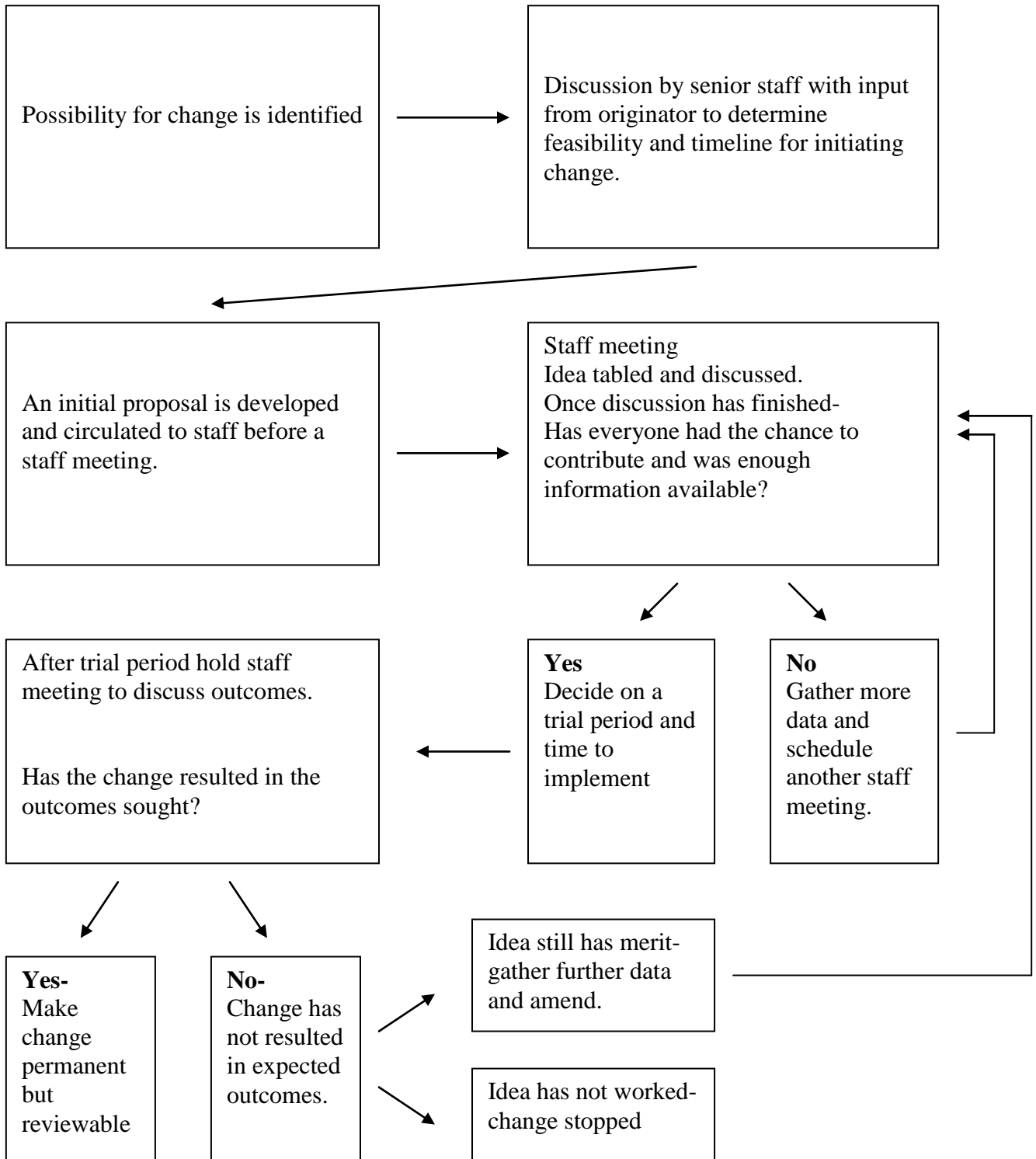
Possibility for change is identified

Discussion by senior staff with input from originator to determine feasibility and timeline for initiating change.

An initial proposal is developed and circulated to staff before a staff meeting.

Staff meeting
Idea tabled and discussed.
Once discussion has finished-
Has everyone had the chance to contribute and was enough information available?

After trial period hold staff meeting to discuss outcomes.

Has the change resulted in the outcomes sought?

Yes
Decide on a trial period and time to implement

No
Gather more data and schedule another staff meeting.

Yes-
Make change permanent but reviewable

No-
Change has not resulted in expected outcomes.

Idea still has merit- gather further data and amend.

Idea has not worked- change stopped

1.2 Readings related to a Change Process.

Fullan, M. & Stieglebauer, S. (1991) *The New Meaning of Educational Change*, 2nd ed. New York: Teachers College Press

Ellsworth, J.B. (2000). *Surviving Change: A Survey of Educational Change Models*. Syracuse, NY:ERIC Learning House on Information and Technology.

Hall & Hord (1987) *The Concerns Based Adoption Model* (CBAM)

Goal 2

Tackling Tough Issues

Adapted form a keynote address at the New Zealand First Time Principals programme by Professor Viviane Robinson, School of Education, The University of Auckland

What Makes Conversations Tough?

a) Making progress with the issue:
        -Reaching a shared understanding of he problem
        -Gaining a commitment to reach a solution.

b) Maintaining or Enhancing the Relationship:
        -Two sets of feelings are involved.
        -Need to retain a good working relationship
        -Avoiding sacrificing the issue or the relationship.

How Do People Typically Deal with this Tension?

-<u>Sacrifice the task for the sake of the relationship</u> (pussyfooting around it or giving in)

-<u>Sacrifice the relationship or the person for the sake of the task</u> (give it to them straight, put your foot down).

The Challenge

-<u>Progress the task</u>
-<u>maintain or enhance the relationship.</u>

What to do - the Process

1. Describe your concern from your point of view.

I realise that this may not be how you see it…

2.Describe what your concern is based on.

The ladder of inference

3. Invite the other's point of view.

Do you see it differently? I'm sure there is more to it than what I have said…

4.paraphrase their point of view and check understanding.

I got these important messages from that…Am I on the right track? What have I missed?

5. Establish common ground.

We both agree this is unacceptable as it is… it sounds like we see the problem the same way…

6. Make a plan to get what you both want.

What do you think we should do? Who could help with this?

<u>Questions that may be used in the process</u>

Can you give me an example of that?

What leads you to think that?

What is an example of the kind of thing you are suggesting?

What is the concern behind your view?

What information or line of thinking might change your view?

The Ladder of Inference

Conclusion

Reason

Interpret

Describe

Select

What evidence and reasoning led to the conclusion?

Information