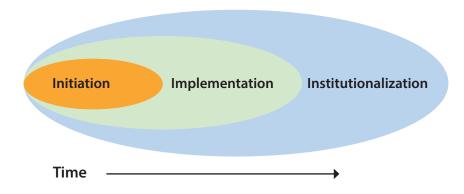# Phases of the
change process

Figure: The three overlapping phases of the change process (Miles et al.,1987)

Change occurs in three phases over time (Fullan, 2007; Miles et al., 1987). The goal of any change is institutionalization, yet institutionalization will not occur if the change has not been successfully initiated and fully implemented. Each phase depends on the prior phase's success and requires different strategies. Institutionalization means that the new practices are routine for everyone responsible for implementing them and that the practices lead to the intended results. Until that time, the change is not fully implemented.

Those who lead and facilitate change begin by working backward, with the end in mind. In other words, they start the change process by describing what institutionalization looks like.

INSTITUTIONALIZATION occurs when the innovation becomes routine practice in its frequency, consistency, accuracy, and results. Members of the organization use the change at least at the routine level of use and have resolved major issues related to its implementation, such as resources, time, materials, and so on.

Questions to ask about **INSTITUTION-ALIZATION**:

- How widespread is implementation?
- How many are not yet fully implementing the new practices?
- Have practices become routine behavior in nearly every classroom? How do we know?
- Based on the evidence of level of implementation, what needs attention from both leaders and primary implementers — deeper implementation, sustaining what we have implemented, or some combination of the two?
- How will we be able to sustain the change over time?

Leaders' actions determine whether change becomes institutionalized. Actions that support institutionalization include:

- Developing constancy of purpose by sustaining commitment to implementation over time.
- Creating a safe space to challenge and explore assumptions so that dissonance, disruption, or dissatisfaction do not derail implementation and success.
- Telling the truth about what is really going on so as to invite efforts toward continuous improvement.

IMPLEMENTATION is the second phase of the change process. Once the vision of institutionalization is clear and consistent, leaders concentrate on what is needed to put the innovation into practice by planning for and supporting implementation. For example, when leaders plan to implement the Common Core State Standards, they describe what early stage implementation looks like, what mid-stage practices are, and what full implementation is.

Another important aspect of implementation is providing constructive and supportive feedback and opportunities for continuous professional learning for educators to refine their practices and improve results. Feedback and ongoing professional learning are the primary means for developing clear and consistent understanding, expectations, and practices associated with the innovation. Clarity about what is expected is necessary in order to minimize confusion and inconsistency in practice. Occasionally, leaders set expectations about implementing innovation, yet this is a small part of what is needed. Leaders need to set clear and consistent expectations about implementation with frequency, consistency, and accuracy to produce intended results.

Only when an innovation is fully implemented can it be sustained. Leaders monitor implementation, assess the innovation's accuracy and frequency, and provide the necessary supports to refine implementation. Many innovations in education fail because those making the change place too much emphasis on the initiation phase and not enough emphasis on implementation and institutionalization.

Questions to ask about **IMPLEMEN-TATION** include:

- What is meant by full implementation of this innovation? What behaviors and practices are demonstrated at the early stage, mid-stage, and in full implementation?
- What conditions are needed to support implementation?
- What supports are in place to meet the needs of those responsible for implementation?
- How are we giving feedback and ongoing professional learning to those implementing and leading change?
- How do we monitor and measure implementation and the results of implementation to continuously improve practice and results?

INITIATION is the first phase of the change process. In most cases, those facilitating and leading change pay close attention to launching the innovation because they recognize that how well something begins affects how it ends. Yet launching an initiative is only the beginning. While initiation deserves considerable emphasis, leaders plan for all three phases simultaneously. In planning for change, leaders engage educators responsible for implementing the change by addressing how the innovation will affect both educators and students.

To plan an innovation, leaders define the results in terms of student success and adapt existing processes to support the innovation. For example when focusing on implementing the Common Core State Standards, the result is not implementing the standards. The result is achieving high levels of success and preparing all students for college and careers.

Questions to ask about **INITIATION** include:

- Have we helped implementers understand how the innovation leads to improvements for themselves, as well as for their students?
- Have we mapped out the theory of change and indicators of success to serve as benchmarks for assessing progress?
- How will we communicate with all stakeholders the goals of the innovation and the processes and strategies for achieving them?
- How will we help constituents understand the rationale and urgency for the innovation?
- What resources have been made available to support the initiation and implementation?

Adapted from: Fullan, M. (2007). *The new meaning of educational change (*4th ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.