

Supporting Change – Learning Points

In March 2018, people from Evaluation Support Scotland, the Coalition of Care and Support Providers Scotland, the Improvement Hub and Scottish Government came together to share experiences and challenges of facilitating change programmes in the public service “system”. We wanted to support each other to identify common barriers we’ve faced when facilitating improvement and share solutions. This paper pulls out some lessons we identified. The paper might be of interest to others who are **supporting change and improvement**.

1. **Expose the false consensus:** I (as a facilitator) may believe the person/people I am working with share my vision of the change process and they seem to be saying the right things. But I need to scratch the surface and actively probe any differences. Ask specifically what they think will be different and when. Ask them what will be the measures of success.
2. **Spend time at the start** patiently teasing out expectations from all parties.
3. **Check out how important this change is:** We might agree about the change task but not about its relative importance or the timescales. Ask the people I am working with: “how important is this to you in comparison to other things?” [this might expose risks of nothing happening despite good intentions]
4. **Estimate the risks** / factors that might work against change at the beginning and decide whether I or others should be involved in the first place.
5. **Be (nicely) assertive about their failure to take action:** Say “here is the consequence for me of your inaction”; “this is what we agreed to do”. And “how would you describe our achievements?” If there is a difference of opinion (they think good progress has been made, I think it's not very much for the time and resources invested) then try to surface that difference.
6. Nevertheless, understand that a change might be useful for the group/person even if I think it was trivial. It’s not that the facilitator’s view isn’t worth anything but **I might not understand the significance of the change** for the group.
7. **Probe real versus perceived barriers:** actively probe when there is a real barrier to change – such as regulation, lack of money – and when the barrier is perceived, that they don’t want to change or they have other priorities.
8. **Use allies:** Try to stop wrestling with supporting change on my own if I can. Find other people who care about this change AND other people who might be supporting it. Use them as moral support, or advice or connections. Or better still enlist them to help with the change.



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