



Tools Training Strategy Facilitation

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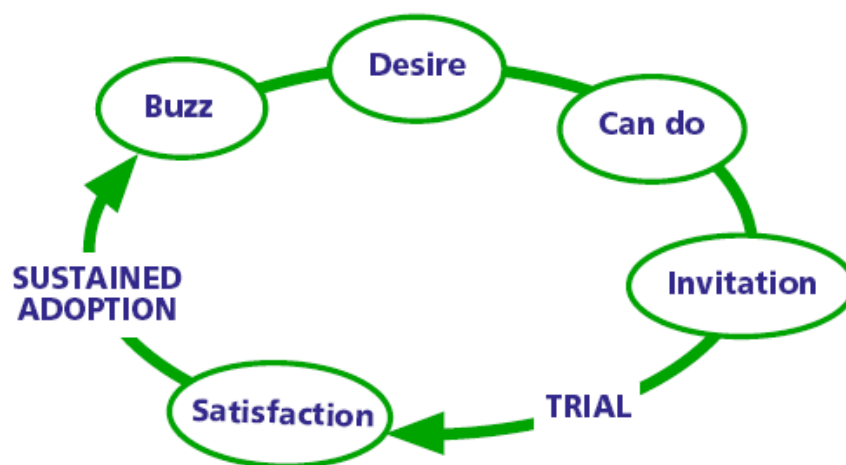
Five steps to create motivation

“What is motivation?” is a question you rarely hear, but it should be on the lips of change agents everywhere. After all, motivation is the essential condition for any successful change effort. So what is motivation and how do you create it?

I wrote this as part of a guide to starting parents’ self-help groups, but it’s universally applicable, so I thought I’d publish it as a short article. Although it focuses on parent’s groups you can easily extrapolate the ideas to almost any activity, behaviour or project.

Those of you who are into cognitive psychology and diffusion will recognise the provenance of these ideas: Diffusion of Innovations; discrepancy; self-efficacy; and a bunch of ideas from motivational psychology and social psychology.

Five factors are necessary to motivate participation in a new group, activity or behaviour.



Illo: This sketch shows how the five factors form a virtuous circle. When a new activity or behaviour generates satisfaction, people talk about it, creating more buzz, increasing desire, and so on.

The principle is: for sustained participation or behaviour, all five of these factors need to be present in the situation, even if you, the change agent, are not personally responsible for creating all of them.

1) Connect-to-the-buzz. The meeting, activity or behaviour should be about an issue that parents are already talking to each other about. As you listen to parents, or question other community workers, you'll start to hear the kinds of child learning, health or development issues they are already buzzing about. Frame your communications as if they are part of that conversation. Connecting-to-the-buzz naturally creates interest and attention for your invitation.

2) Connect-to-hopes. Listen for parent's fears, worries, and frustrations. Frame your activity as a solution to those dissatisfactions. For instance, if you hear that some young parents are fearful and worried about loneliness and being out of their depth with young babies, then frame the activity as being a solution to exactly those fears. Beware of negative talk however, always frame your solution in positive terms. So, instead of "isolation" you'd talk about "making friends". Instead of "poor growth" you'd mention "healthy thriving, happy babies".

3) Respect comfy zones. When people's comfy zones are challenged, denial and resistance follow, so gently expand those comfy zones by hands-on learning and modelling ("modelling" = seeing how others do it and get rewarded for success). The barrier to motivation is often a fear of failure, embarrassment, humiliation, or losing certainty or control. So choose familiar, comfortable "soft-entry" activities, goals and venues. Perhaps start a cooking class or a social chat. Once trusting relationships are built, many parents will be comfortable with more challenging activities - storytelling skills, parenting skills or a TAFE course. Giving parents as much control over the activity as possible (ie. when, where, how, for how long) is especially essential for excluded, risk-risk or vulnerable individuals.

4) The right inviter. *Who* issues an invitation is as important as the invitation itself. Known, respected faces, from the same cultural background, should always issue or endorse the invitation. Familiar, similar, respected faces lower fears and reduce the natural distrust all of us have for government or welfare programs. So, aim to find trusted, similar faces to issue your invitations. Another method is the 'popular opinion leader' approach where you approach charismatic individuals and ask them to spread the word for you.

5) Satisfaction. At each stage of involvement, parents should experience satisfactions. It's important that each activity is enjoyable and new behaviours generate satisfactions as advertised. It's equally vital to publicly acknowledge parents' successes, celebrate their achievements and reward their efforts, no matter how small. Most people are self-doubting, so unless attention is drawn to their successes, then often discount them. Never let a chance to celebrate a success go by! Name the person, make sure their peers are listening, and tell them exactly what they did well. If possible make it more real with a round of applause or a simple gift. Remember that small, frequent satisfactions are better than big infrequent satisfactions.

These five factors are a useful check list for program development and also for evaluation. I use them as the basis of much of my work. Together they form a good all-purpose theory of change that provides a fantastic window into any change challenge. I hope you find them useful.

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