

Introduction

What is the Technical Assistance Report Series (TARS)?

The TARS consists of a compendium of short reports structured around key process improvement topics. Each of four reports in this first series will provide introductory tools and guidance, posing key questions, and highlighting provider and payer experiences that demonstrate effective application of methods to improve access to and retention in addiction treatment.

Who should read the Technical Assistance Report Series?

The TARS is designed for any individual or team wishing to maximize the likelihood of success in organizational change efforts. The examples presented herein pertain to addiction treatment processes, although many of the concepts illustrated can be adapted and applied in various industry settings.

Setting the Scene for Spread

This Technical Assistance Report shares useful information and practical tips associated with the spread of successful process change ideas within an organization. It provides an easy-to-read overview of spread; a series of self-assessment tools designed to help identify the most suitable change ideas to spread; a guide to effectively communicating those change ideas; and a compendium of ideas tried, tested, and successfully spread within member agencies of the NIATx collaborative.

The spread of successful change ideas is an essential and integral part of an overall diffusion strategy. Spread should follow the successful implementation and sustainability of change within the organization. A Change Team that uses key tools and seeks to spread successful change ideas will make significant, long-term contributions to the organization.

What is spread?

In this report, spread refers to the diffusion, through adaptation, of innovative ideas throughout the organization. A group of addiction treatment professionals from NIATx defined an innovative idea as *“a simple, tangible change that has been successfully implemented and sustained and, as a result, creates staff excitement for the change.”* Furthermore, based on their experiences implementing change, they identified five components of successful change:

- Positive effect on financial sustainability
- Data that shows a positive impact
- Simple, tangible change that has been sustained in the organization
- Positive consumer feedback
- Strong staff interest

In her book, *Accelerating the Spread of Good Practice*¹, Sarah Fraser outlines four different approaches to spreading innovative ideas within an organization.

Scatter: *One idea or practice, many adopters.* Although this approach to spread is simple to communicate, it assumes that the innovative idea is the best and messages about the innovative idea are not often received or implemented

Share: *Replication of innovations within the organization.* With this approach to spread, it is important to communicate the concepts not solutions and allow other parts of the organization to adapt the innovative idea to their situation. The potential exists for staff to perceive that the innovative idea received special support at the initial implementation site that may not be present at the new location.

Switch: *One idea or practice from outside the field.* This approach to spread requires that the new innovative idea is tested within the setting in which it will be adopted but the language and examples related to the idea may turn off potential adopters.

Stretch: *involves copying an idea and implementation across many organizational boundaries.* With this type of spread, the process of reaching decisions across organizational boundaries may be complex and time consuming and it may be difficult to maintain ownership and the direction of the change effort.

What does the evidence suggest?

Most literature on effective approaches to spreading change to other parts of the organization is anchored in Roger's Diffusion of innovation theory². Roger's theory suggests that successful spread hinges on eleven key attributes, which include leadership, customer focus, relative advantage of the change, communication, and evaluation of spread. In her book, Sarah Fraser suggests that organizations can effectively evaluate the viability of spreading an innovative idea by rating an idea using a five-point scale across five attributes, as below:

1=very weak, 3=okay and 5=very strong, relative to this attribute

	Change Idea:	1	2	3	4	5
Relative Advantage	The degree to which an innovation is perceived as better than the idea it supersedes					
Simplicity	The degree to which an innovation is perceived as simple to understand and use					
Compatibility	The degree to which an innovation is perceived as being consistent with the existing values, experiences, beliefs, and needs of potential adopters					
Trialability	The degree to which an innovation can be tested on a small scale					
Observability	The degree to which the use of an innovation and the results it produces are visible to those who should consider it					

¹ *Accelerating the Spread of Good Practice Fraser (2002)*

² Rogers, E. M. *Diffusion of Innovations*. New York: Free Press, 2003

In some organizations, the large, complex nature of operational systems serves as a barrier to the spread of successful innovations or changes within the organization. As a result, innovative changes spread more slowly and patients and staff alike do not benefit from innovations such as new medications (Nolan, Schall, Erb, and Nolan, 2005). Current spread research has evolved from Roger's theoretical basis to a more concrete Framework for Spreading Change developed by Nolan et al., (suggested reading 2), which builds on literature and organizational experience in spreading change ideas from one location within to throughout the organization. The Framework identified six components associated with the successful planning for the spread of new innovative ideas within the organization:

- The responsibilities of leadership which include:
 - Ensuring that goals are aligned with a key strategic initiative
 - Selecting an executive sponsor and a day-to-day leader
 - Setting up the process for spread:
 - Choosing the target population
 - Identifying successful change sites, key partners and potential adopters
 - Developing a spread plan
- Identification of better ideas
- Communication
- Strengthening the social system
- Measurement and feedback
- Knowledge management

Why is spread important?

Change is essential for any organization wishing to achieve its strategic goals. One primary objective shared by all agencies collaborating within NIATx is to exert a positive and lasting impact on access to and retention in addiction treatment. An innovative idea implemented in one part of the organization may significantly improve the desired outcome. The resulting success may encourage treatment agencies to spread the innovative idea to other parts of the organization to realize similar success elsewhere. A primary benefit to the organization is the ability to replicate a successful idea or change without continually searching for new and innovative ideas. In addition, the proven success of this idea in a different part of the organization encourages buy-in from staff and helps them believe that the change is worthwhile.

Why is some spread successful?

Due to the high level of uncertainty that naturally exists with any kind of change, even organizations previously successful at implementing an innovation in one location are not always successful when they attempt to spread the change. Often times, it is a failure to adequately understand the customer at the new location or to allow for testing of the innovation before encouraging full-scale adoption.

Tip: Avoid the assumption that what works at location A will also work, if implemented identically, at location B. The new location has unique attributes that should be considered in the planning phase, prior to implementation of spread project.

Ultimately, the successful spread of an innovative change idea may hinge on the successful communication of the change idea. This should include a description of the change and its relative advantage over existing systems. In addition, the opportunity for staff at the new location to *observe* how others are implementing the idea and to *test and adapt* the idea through rapid-cycle change is important. Based on their experience, addiction treatment professionals from NIATx identified attributes that distinguish successful versus unsuccessful spread:

Successful spread:

- Implements a change that is important to your customers and creates a win-win situation for clients and staff—for example, reduction in paperwork
- Identifies weaknesses and processes to correct a key problem
- Is simple to implement
- Gives quick results
- Reduces workload
- Can be quantified
- Is a team effort
- Is a small simple change idea

Unsuccessful spread:

- Attempts to implement a change not important to your customer
- Lacks investigation into the root cause of the problem before implementation
- Is hard to implement
- Gives results months rather than days or weeks after implementation
- Does not improve staff workload
- Is driven by research protocols
- Lacks staff buy-in
- Is too large in scope, with not enough resources

How does an organization set the stage for spreading innovative ideas?

Selection of innovative ideas to spread within the organization should be based on the same five NIATx key principles that support successful organizational change.

Pick a key problem: the Executive Sponsor should identify a key problem in the organization.

Seek Ideas from Outside the Organization: once the key problem has been identified, the Executive Sponsor should guide, often in conjunction with the current Change Leader, the identification and selection of innovative ideas that have been successfully adopted and sustained in other parts of the organization.

Understand and involve the customer: for any successful spread project it's important to understand the needs of customers at the new location. Conduct a walk-through to help staff at the new location fully understand the process as experienced by the consumer. Involve one to three consumers from the new location on the Change Team for this spread project.

From the staff perspective, the new idea must be superior to the process it will replace. If you are attempting to spread an innovation to a new location, give staff there the chance to experience the innovation in the location where it is currently successfully.

Pick a Powerful Change Leader: select an individual at the new location who has some influence within the department to make sure that change can be implemented with success.

Note: What is less clear is the approach to select new Change Leaders to implement the innovative idea. Some organizations opt for the *grassroots* approach and select new Change Leaders from existing Change Team members. But other organizations take a more *formal* approach and only select new Change Leaders after identifying a set of desirable characteristics of a successful Change Leader.

Use rapid-cycle testing: test the spread change using rapid-cycle Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) prior to full implementation at the new location. You may need to try and test several cycles before the change is right for the new context. After each cycle, make modifications based on the results, and test again. The process allows staff at the new location to adapt it to their particular client population or circumstances.

Discussion Questions for Senior Leaders

When thinking about spreading change, either for your organization in general or for a specific project, you may wish to consider the following questions:

- How do you recognize a good innovation in your organization?
- What roles are required in your organization to spread change?
- How do you select an innovative idea to spread within the organization?
- Once selected, what type of spread will you use to diffuse the innovative idea?
 - Scatter: one idea or practice, many adopters
 - Switch: one idea or practice from outside the field (Key Principle)
 - Share: replication of innovations within the organization
 - Stretch: copy an idea to implement across many organizational boundaries
- How will you set the stage for spread in your organization?
 - Conduct a walk-through
 - Observe the process
 - Pilot-test the innovation
 - Adopt, adapt, or abandon the innovation
- How do you communicate the benefits of the innovative idea?
- Adaptability Questions:
 - What could you change?
 - How could the practice be simplified?
 - What could be changed to improve compatibility?
 - Does the innovation have other uses?

Self-Assessment Diagnostic Tools

You can find additional tools designed to aid teams in their efforts to plan and effectively spread change ideas in their organization on the NIATx Web site at www.NIATx.net. These tools include:

1. Spreading Change: The Identification of an Innovation
2. Spreading Change: A Framework for Spreading Change
3. Spreading Change: Deciding on the Best Communication Strategy
4. Spread Innovation Checklist
5. Comparison of Communication Strategies for Types of Change

Examples of Innovative Ideas

The following is a partial list of innovative ideas that NIATx members have successfully sustained and then spread to other parts of their organizations:

- Reminder phone calls
- Recruiting clients or staff to help transition clients from one level of care to another
- Use Motivational Interviewing (MI) Engagement Strategies during the client's first contact with the agency
- Offer walk-in appointments
- Process changes that shorten the assessment procedure

More information on these and other change ideas can be found on the NIATx Web site at www.NIATx.net.

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Suggested Readings

Greenhalgh, T., Robert, G., Macfarlane, F., Bate, P., & Kyriakidou, O. (2004). Diffusion of innovations in service organizations: Systematic review and recommendations. *The Milbank Quarterly* 82(4), 581–629.

Nolan, K., Schall, M., Erb, F., & Nolan, T. (2005). Using a framework for spread: The case of patient access in the Veterans Health Administration. *Joint Commission Journal on Quality and Safety* 31(6), 339–47.