



Change strategies utilized in rural Alaskan schools when implementing an innovation
by Terry Dale Bentley

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education
Montana State University

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Abstract:

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Results of the study revealed that after five years only about half of the districts had successfully implemented the mandated Initiative. In the larger districts, which for the most part reflected a secular culture, adoption of a modified version of the Initiative proved to be a successful strategy. There seemed to be no visible pattern for successful implementation in the smaller districts.

Attitudes of the superintendents toward the changes mandated by the Initiative varied in relation to the success of their district's implementation. However, it was felt by all that a lack of funding, little or no support from the Alaska Department of Education, and short timelines for implementation all constituted real and significant barriers to the success of their district's implementation efforts.

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Terry Dale Bentley

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ABSTRACT

In 1994 the Commissioner of Education in the state of Alaska mandated the implementation of the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative for all school districts. Using a telephone survey, superintendents in thirty-two Alaskan rural school districts were interviewed about the progress of the Initiative's implementation in their districts. Specifically, the research focused on the relationship of the success of implementation to the school districts' culture, size, and the method of implementation.

Results of the study revealed that after five years only about half of the districts had successfully implemented the mandated Initiative. In the larger districts, which for the most part reflected a secular culture, adoption of a modified version of the Initiative proved to be a successful strategy. There seemed to be no visible pattern for successful implementation in the smaller districts.

Attitudes of the superintendents toward the changes mandated by the Initiative varied in relation to the success of their district's implementation. However, it was felt by all that a lack of funding, little or no support from the Alaska Department of Education, and short timelines for implementation all constituted real and significant barriers to the success of their district's implementation efforts.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Since the first village schools were established in the New England colonies in the seventeenth century, American education has been inherently a political institution. The school is a visible emblem of the community and of participatory democracy. It is no accident that when Americans vote, they usually do so at our neighborhood elementary school. As a political entity, the American school is therefore subject to and frequently buffeted by the winds of political change. In no other country of the western world do citizens routinely go to the polls to vote on initiatives about the school. State legislatures annually vote, not merely on educational spending, but on whether to include, among other things, specific components of history, reading methodology, or mathematics in the school program (Lutz & Merz, 1992).

As political entities, schools are subject to constant change,

and Alaskan schools are no more protected from the winds of political change than those of any other state. In 1994 the Governor's State Commissioner of Education mandated change for Alaskan School Districts through the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative (Referred to as the Initiative). This was a politically powered reform directed primarily at rural Alaskan schools. Legislators perceived rural schools to be more expensive and less effective than their urban counterparts (Holloway, 1996).

Change is a topic of enormous importance to educational leaders in Alaska as well as the rest of the United States. A consensus has emerged in the educational research base that since change is inevitable, the educational leaders of a school district must systematically manage that change rather than let it occur incidentally. Through research and practice, educators have identified and explored many types and philosophies of change and the best ways to successfully implement it (Cuban, 1992; Deal, 1990; DiNatale, 1994; Foley, 1994 & McKenzie, 1985). One of the most popular methods of change, or reform, is for a district to

identify a particular practice or program which has been validated in another district and to implement that innovation (Hall & Hord, 1987).

The primary question for a school district's leadership seeking to achieve reform or change through the implementation of an existing practice is whether to adopt faithfully and exactly all the key elements of the innovation or to thoughtfully adapt only some elements of the innovation. Fullan and Pomfret (1977) call faithful adoption "fidelity adoption" and adaptation adoption "mutual adaptation". The choice whether to use the fidelity adoption or the mutual adaptation approach faces each school leader.

Educational researchers have also noted that one of the key variables in predicting the success of a school reform effort is not only the selection of the external program to be introduced into the school, but the prevailing internal school culture or climate.

Researchers studying this variable have identified two facets of school culture - secular, which embraces change, and sacred, which resists change (Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970).

It has been suggested by Iannaccone and Lutz (1970), that these variables, the school culture (secular/sacred) and the type of change process selected (fidelity/mutual adaptation), will impact both the degree to which reforms are implemented and actually improving education (Hansen, 1985). Since most rural schools in Alaska have responded to the political demand for reform by adopting or adapting existing programs, practices, and standards, the Initiative provides a virtual laboratory to analyze the dynamics of change.

It was the intent of this study to identify and describe patterns of relationships among the types of change processes and the prevailing school cultures in the context of recent educational reform in rural Alaskan Schools. This study, which focused on the relationship of the two variables (fidelity/mutual adaptation change and secular/sacred culture) to successful implementation of the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative, focused on the 37 rural school districts of Alaska. Information was gathered from each district's superintendent. It was anticipated that the analysis of the survey

results would reveal for each district what was generated by the Initiative, how the reform was managed, which type of culture existed, and the success of the reform. Of primary interest was the question of which change management approach was related to a particular type of school culture.

The basis for this study was the implementation of the ten core content standards of the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative (see Appendix B). The Alaska Quality Schools Initiative was to have been fully implemented by the start of the 1999-2000 school year.

Theoretical Basis

It is crucial that educators understand the process of change. Whenever new educational standards are developed, a solid understanding of the change process is necessary in order for meaningful and lasting change to occur (Osborne, 1993).

Dynamic organizations, such as schools, are constantly under public scrutiny and therefore subject to pressures for change from sources

outside of the school (Champlin, 1991). Although change is inevitable, desirable change is not always the result. While, desirable change may occur by chance, the likelihood of it occurring is increased if the change is planned (Griffith, 1979).

Change can be incorporated into the culture of an organization. However, for full incorporation to occur, the appropriate approach to implementing an innovation must be utilized. In this study, two approaches to the change process were examined. These approaches are categorized by Fullan and Pomfret as: 1) fidelity adoption, and 2) mutual adaptation (1977).

The fidelity adoption model is often associated with a linear approach to change that is directed at a defined organizational goal. Usually these goals are imposed from the top down. The fidelity approach requires that the innovation be adhered to as closely as possible. Implementation must follow the original plan, and any variation is discouraged (Fullan, 1991; Hall & Hord, 1987; Snyder, Bolin & Zumwalt, 1992).

In contrast, the mutual adaptation approach allows for

modification of the innovation by individuals in the organization to adapt changes at a lower level during implementation (Fullan, 1991; Hall & Hord, 1987; Snyder, Bolin, & Zumwalt, 1992). Mutual adaptation provides the flexibility to adapt to organizational needs, supporting personal and growth within an organization or school.

When attempting to bring about organizational level planned change, some basic cornerstones must be built into the foundation of the change for success. According to Fullan (1991) these strategies for change should include: "an active initiation and participation, pressure and support, changes in behavior and beliefs, and the overriding problem of ownership" (p. 91).

By applying a systems view to organizational change, interrelationships should be noted which will assist in planning for the change. Leaders within the organization should remember that:

1. Change is a process, not an event;
2. Change is accomplished by individuals;
3. Change is a highly personal experience;
4. Change involves developmental growth;
5. Change is best understood in operational terms; and,
6. The focus of facilitation should be on individuals, innovations, and the context (Hall & Hord, 1984).

According to Hersey and Blanchard (1988) there are three elements to changing an organization: 1) use of personal or organizational power, 2) behavior modification, and 3) planning for and implementing a planned change. These authors examined change from more than just a behavioral perspective. Changes in behavior often result from applying new knowledge, which often leads to a change in attitude.

Organizational structure and culture can have a direct impact on the nature of change. There is a growing awareness that the success of any organization is directly dependent upon its effective use of available human resources. Change and growth involve changing people at four different areas: 1) knowledge, 2) attitudes, 3) behavior, and 4) group or organizational behavior (Osborne, 1993). The relative difficulty involved in making each of the above areas of change from a voluntary perspective is illustrated in Figure 1.

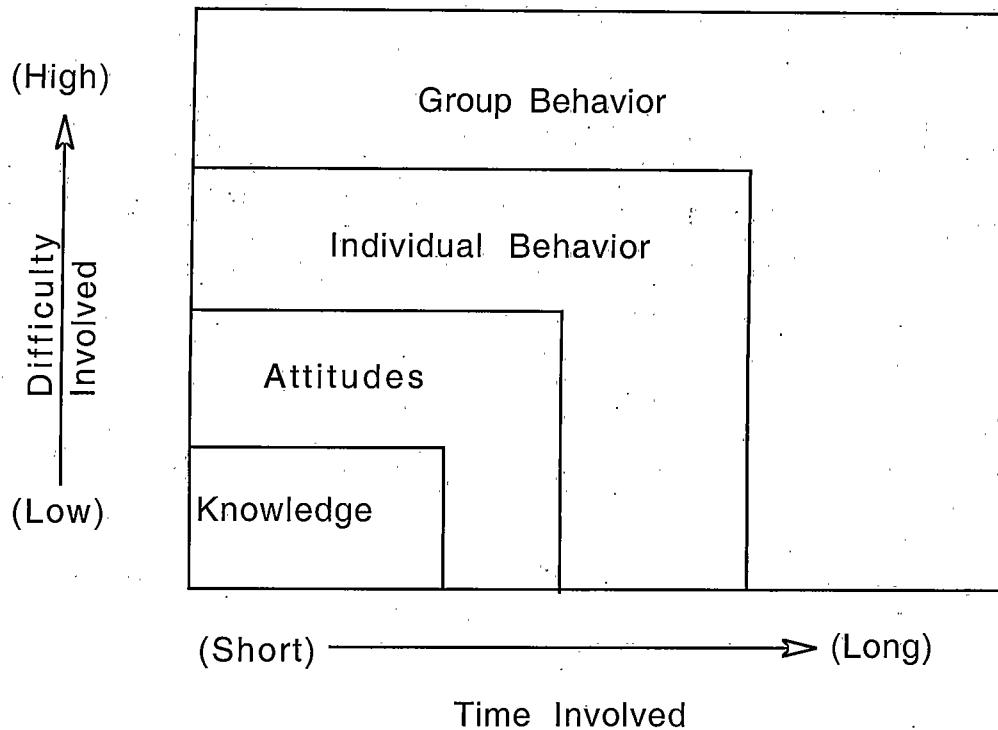


Figure 1. Time and difficulty involved in making various changes. Hersey and Blanchard. (1988) Management of Organizational Behavior. (5th ed.). Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall p.4.

Change in individual knowledge tends to be the easiest to make. This may be accomplished in a variety of ways such as giving a person a book or an article to read, or having someone learn something new through a workshop. When a change in attitude involves highly emotional issues, the change requires a longer time period and is more difficult to accomplish (Owens, 1991).

Affective attitudes differ from cognitive knowledge in that

people's emotions reflect either a positive or negative view of the proposed change. Changes in individual behavior seem to be significantly more difficult and time consuming than either knowledge or attitude. A person may change their knowledge base or attitudes by reading and watching others over a period of time. To actually learn a new behavior, a person must practice that which is to be learned and make the new course of action relevant to his/her own behavior (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988).

Change in teaching practices is brought about by individual teachers, not by institutions. Research by Joyce and Showers (1983) on teacher motivation indicates it is the teacher who makes the difference. Without committed, educated teachers any instructional reform effort will be muted and short-lived. Although many worry about teachers' motivation and willingness to learn, teachers have been found to be able to withstand the discomfort involved in new learning and change (Joyce & Showers, 1983).

Even more difficult than a change in individual behavior is a change in group or organizational behavior, because it is at the

organizational level that customs, mores and traditions are changed. Customs, mores, and traditions are steeped in attitudes of the individual, and those individual attitudes make up group norms. Groups tend to be self-reinforcing units and therefore, a person's behavior as a member of a group is more difficult to alter without first modifying the group norms (Owens, 1991).

The question is not whether schools will change, but how and who will manage the change. In an attempt to keep a school viable and current, the issue is how to cope with the inevitable barrage of change that confronts the school daily. Effective leaders can no longer be content to let change occur at random; they must be able to control change through a systematic process. Change is constant, nothing remains the same from one moment to another, especially in schools which are steeped in societal politics. This is especially true in rural schools where the districts tend to be, as Iannaccone and Lutz (1970) have described, sacred societies, or those that tend to avoid change.

Sacred societies are those which are highly resistant to

change. The sacred community may display sentiments which are consistent with a central characteristic of avoiding or resisting change (Lipham & Hoeh, 1974). The secular community has the tendency to welcome or seek change and expresses sentiments consistent with its major characteristic of pursuing new innovations (Lipham & Hoeh, 1974).

Statement of the Problem

That schools are in need of fundamental change is no longer debated by much of society (McNeil, 1988; Shanker, 1988 & Timar and Kirp, 1989). The Alaska Quality Schools Initiative was mandated as a result of the changing demographics in Alaskan communities and of societal demands for educational improvement.

Appropriate strategic implementation of a change process may mean the difference between a successful and unsuccessful innovation implementation. The problem is that it is unknown what the relationship is between successful implementation strategies

and demographic characteristics in the school district.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to analyze the implementation strategies of the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative in Alaska's rural school districts. To accomplish this, the study focused on four areas of change. Which change process was being used when implementing the innovation? What was the district's culture (secular or sacred) in regard to change? Was the innovation being successfully implemented? Was there a discernible relationship between the change process, culture of the district, size of the district, and success of the implementation?

The first task was to determine what change processes were being utilized in Alaska's rural schools when implementing the Initiative. Twenty years of research about change processes in schools have provided a wealth of information about these processes. However, it was unclear from the literature if rural

schools respond best to the fidelity approach or to the mutual adaptation approach in order to accomplish the desired change (Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970).

Second, the researcher needed to determine if the success of Alaska's Quality Schools Initiative related to a specific change process. Most school change studies focus on how administrators (at the top) manage the change process implemented by teachers (at the bottom).

Third, did the characteristics of each district relate to a sacred or secular culture? The successful implementation of an innovation in a sacred rural environment remained somewhat of a dilemma. Was it better to utilize a fidelity approach in a sacred society or was it better to use mutual adaptation? The school leaders needed to know which process to select as they attempted to positively impact student outcomes (Steigelbauer, 1994).

The final point involved school district size. Did the size of the student population relate to the district's successful implementation of the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative? Was it

better to utilize a fidelity or mutual adaptation approach to change with a large, small, or very small school district?

Importance of the Study

Studies related to change in rural Alaska were few in number and therefore were hard to relate to this study. Most rural studies have been conducted in the lower forty-eight states. The literature on rural schools focused on the choice between the fidelity approach and the mutual adaptation approach (Iannacoccone & Lutz, 1970). Little relevant research was available concerning either the fidelity-mutual adaptation and the sacred-secular societies issues which were derived from rural, or specifically Alaskan schools.

If administrators want change to be successful, they have to manage change. Successful implementation of any innovation requires not only that organizational problems be clearly identified and appropriate solutions selected, but that they be correctly introduced depending upon the school culture. Successful

innovations may be either fully adopted (fidelity) or adapted (mutual adaptation) to meet the needs of the school. A successful innovation is one that has achieved the desired outcomes and becomes enculturated or imbedded into the practice of the school. It is important that rural school administrators know which process to use to achieve the best results (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988).

It is unclear which change process, the fidelity approach or mutual adaptation approach, actually works best in Alaska's rural school environment. The prevailing role of an educational administrative leader in rural Alaska has been one of an external benefactor providing services to an indigenous, largely Native, population. This is all the more compelling because much of the early education in rural Alaska was sacred and was done by missionaries, priests, or nuns. Inherent within this traditional model is the highly centralized process of command and control of educational programs. Administrators are perceived as authority figures responsible for making changes and seeing that subordinates follow through on the implementation of these changes (Barnhardt,

1979).

In Alaska, the hierarchical structure has had the effect of stifling new innovations, except those that are introduced or blessed by officially sanctioned administrators. It is possible that subordinates are accustomed to implementing innovations through a fidelity approach instead of allowing for mutual adaptation. As a result, program innovations which have introduced new variables or have posed a threat to established procedures have been successfully resisted (Barnhardt, 1979). The continued use of a fidelity approach may reinforce the resistance to change that the administrator seeks to avoid in the first place. It is questionable if it is possible to implement adaptive change in a sacred society at all. Yet, adaptive implementation is more likely to be successful. Therefore, it is important to know if a fidelity approach or a mutual adaptation approach seems to be most related to success.

This study has focused on the results of using different approaches (mutual adaptation or fidelity) in Alaska's rural schools or societies (secular or sacred). An administrator needs to

understand the local educational setting in which the innovation is to be implemented. Without this understanding of the educational setting and the understanding of the innovation process, change will not be easily implemented or institutionalized (Eastwood & Louis, 1992).

Research Questions

This study focused on: analyzing the implementation of the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative; identifying relationships between change process, school culture, district size, and innovation success; and describing the personal response of superintendents to the demand for change posed by the Initiative. To explore these areas, several questions were posed.

1. Which change process was used when implementing the innovation?
2. What was the district's culture (secular or sacred) in regard to change?

3. Was the innovation successfully implemented?
4. Was there a discernible relationship between the change process, culture of the district, size of the district and success of the implementation?

Definitions

Rural district. A rural district is a district that is not on the highway or road systems of Alaska (Air or marine travel is necessary to reach the school.), or does not have a student population over 3,500 (Digest of Educational Statistics, 1997).

Change process. A change process is the strategy by which schools accomplish their goals more effectively by replacing some structures, programs and/or practices with better ones (Fullan, 1991).

Innovation. An innovation is any thought, behavior, or idea that is new because it is qualitatively different from the existing educational approach which is being used (Owens, 1991).

Successful change. A successful change is one that has achieved the desired effects, and the results of which may be placed on a continuum ranging from very desirable outcomes to very undesirable outcomes (Hanson, 1985; Hersey & Blanchard, 1988).

Successful innovation. A successful innovation is an innovation that has achieved its desired outcomes or implementation and the results may be placed on a continuum ranging from very desirable outcomes to very undesirable outcomes (Hanson, 1985; Hersey & Blanchard, 1988).

Sacred society. A sacred society is a school, school district, institution, or community whose culture tends to be more highly resistant to or tends to avoid change (Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970).

Secular society. A secular society is a school, school district, institution, or community whose culture tends to be more open to or seeks change (Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970).

Fidelity approach to change. The fidelity approach is characterized by a high degree of adherence to the developer's model that is expected from the school or teacher (Fullan, 1991).

Mutual adaptation approach. The mutual adaptation approach is the process by which schools can make adaptations or improvements to the developer's innovation (Hall & Hord, 1987).

Limitations

1. The study was limited to the districts from rural Alaska that had a district student population under three-thousand-five-hundred (3,500).
2. This study used only rural public K-12 districts and no private school districts were included.
3. Districts that were K-6, K-8, K-10, or any configuration other than K-12 were not included.

Delimitations

1. The data collection covered a period of time from February, 1999 to March, 1999.

2. The results of the study reflect the bias of the persons who completed the survey.

3. The results of the study reflect the bias of the researcher's interpretation of the answers of the survey.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Education is constantly coping with change that originates from many sources. This investigation was concerned with change which is planned versus change which occurs as a result of political forces or through the natural process of organizational evolution.

Any change is difficult and resistance to change is natural, occurring at both the personal and organizational level. This reality often impacts school administrators attempting to make changes within rural schools. It is well-known that teachers often resist well thought out reasonable changes (Hall & Hord, 1987). Most administrators have been surprised when innovations that are near and dear to their core beliefs fail due to a lack of teacher support. Therefore, in order to understand the change process, administrators need an understanding of the historical perspective of change. Knowledge of past change processes will help today's

administrators manage change innovations.

This chapter is divided into the following major areas of literature review: a) educational history of Alaska, b) history of change, c) mutual adaptation, d) the fidelity perspective, and e) barriers to change.

Educational History of Alaska

Formal education in Alaska began with Gregory Shelikov when he began teaching for the Russian colony in 1784 on Kodiak Island. The first recorded school was a Russian Orthodox school at Sitka in 1805. The American religious and educational missionaries made a great educational effort to educate the Alaskan population (Carpenter, 1978).

Congress passed the Organic Act in 1884, which directed the Secretary of the Interior to provide education for all children in Alaska without regard to race. Although Congress appropriated monies for education, the funds were inadequate to accomplish the

task of educating the children of Alaska. It was therefore necessary for the Director of Education, Sheldon Jackson, to appeal to various religious organizations to help in the educational process (Naske & Slotnick, 1987).

The state was divided into areas by the church organizations for missionary education - southeast Alaska was for the Presbyterians, upper Bristol Bay and Kuskokwim area for the Moravians, Lower Yukon or Holy Cross area for the Roman Catholics, the Alaskan Peninsula and Aleutians for the Methodists, Cook Inlet and Prince William Sound for the Baptists, the Interior and North Slope for the Episcopalians, the Bering Sea and Bering Strait for the Congregationalists, the Norton Sound and Port Clarence for the Swedish and Norwegian missions (Carpenter, 1978).

In 1912, towns supported education for non-Natives and the Bureau of Education operated schools for non-Natives. When Alaska became a territory, the territorial legislature passed a law that all children would be educated (Naske & Slotnick, 1987).

In 1931, the Bureau of Indian Affairs took over the operation

of rural schools in Alaska. The State of Alaska opened several regional high schools for educating the high school students. The villages missed having high school students in their communities and in 1972, the State of Alaska was sued by Molly Hootch, a student from Emmonak, because she had to attend high school in Anchorage rather than in her hometown. In 1976, the State agreed with the plaintiff and with the consent decree and constructed high schools in villages that had an elementary school. In 1984, the Bureau of Indian Affairs turned over the education of Alaska Natives to the State of Alaska. Senate Bill 36, passed in the spring of 1999, has funded those K-12 schools with student populations of ten or more (Antonson & Hanable, 1985).

History of Educational Change

In American schools, change has traditionally been implemented through a process of natural diffusion. Natural diffusion is the process by which new ideas and practices are spread

in an unplanned way from school district to school district (Owens, 1991). The result is that schools adopt changes haphazardly or adopt innovations very slowly. Innovations that are implemented through natural diffusion often fail to produce the results that are desired (Mort, 1958). Change takes about fifty years to be diffused and accepted in school districts throughout the country.

Consequently, the average district lags twenty-five years behind the accepted best practice of the times (Mort, 1958).

Educational change proceeds very slowly. After an invention which is destined to spread throughout the school appears, fifteen years typically elapse before it is found in three percent of the school systems....After practices reach the three percent point of diffusion, their rate of spread accelerates. An additional 20 years usually suffices for an almost complete diffusion in an area the size of an average state. There are indications that the rate of spread throughout the nation is not much slower today.

The launch of Sputnik I in 1957 accelerated the development of innovations during the 1960s. The sixties brought about new math and science curriculums, ungraded schools, open classrooms, audio-lingual language laboratories, and programmed instruction (Fullan, 1991; Gibboney, 1991). According to Fullan (1991), the sixties were

known as the adoption period because districts were preoccupied with how many innovations could be implemented. The more innovations, the better the district and this was how districts were judged as being successful.

During the sixties, new ideas were adopted without question and with little or no thought to follow-through activities. The consequences of wholesale adoptions of innovations resulted in dissatisfaction with any improvement project and many implementation efforts failed (Fullan, 1991).

Innovations in the late seventies and early eighties were starting to emerge with successful ideas including behavioral objectives, mastery learning, accountability, and competency based curriculum and testing (Gibboney, 1991). The eighties also culminated the research based on effective schools and effective teaching that began in the seventies. Within the same time frame the Department of Education released A Nation at Risk, (1983).

A Nation at Risk (1983) proposed changes that were assumed essential for education in today's competitive world. These

recommendations called for tougher course work requirements, higher admissions standards to universities, a longer school day, merit pay for teachers, and more participation by parents in schools (Keedy, 1990).

During the eighties all states made changes in their schools as a result of A Nation at Risk (1983). Chief among these changes were higher standards for high school graduation, competency testing for teachers, open enrollment, and magnet schools (Doyle, Cooper & Trachtman, 1991).

During the early nineties, many states and districts turned to mandatory solutions, and with a crisis mentality, schools quickly adopted solutions that were believed to address a specific issue. Primary changes implemented during the nineties were site-based management, teacher empowerment, collaborative work cultures, and strategic planning (Fullan, 1991). These changes came at a time when there was less funding for schools and a greater demand made for quality in education (Cuban, 1992).

In past decades, efforts to improve schools came about partly

due to a wave of prosperity, implementing successful change will become harder in the future. The 1990s and beyond will be different; schools will have limited resources to deal with more mandates from state level authorities. Excellence in schools can be attained in the future by using the positive focused approaches to change that occurred in the eighties and nineties (Doyle, Cooper & Trachtman, 1991).

The purpose of planned change is to help school districts accomplish their stated mission more effectively by replacing some structures, programs, and/or practices with something better. Current approaches to change are dominated by developing strategies and tactics to control the change process (Owens, 1991).

There are numerous definition and methodological problems involved with assessment of the success of the innovation being implemented. One direction for research about implementation processes tends to study the degree of implementation of the innovation according to the intended or planned use; this is called fidelity of implementation. The second primary direction for

implementation is to examine how the innovation is modified during the adaptation process; this is called mutual adaptation (Fullan & Pomfret, 1977).

Fidelity Perspective

The study of the fidelity perspective in implementation has focused on the degree of adherence to the original tenets of the innovation. By closely following the innovation, the desired outcome of the change occurs. Innovations consist of a number of relatively well-designed components called key elements, and should closely follow rigorously developed and evaluated programs. Innovations are supposed to be implemented as closely as possible to the original models. Doing otherwise will lead to innovations that are less than effective (Boruch & Gomez, 1977; Calsyn, Tornatzky & Dittmar, 1977).

A more moderate approach to fidelity was taken by Hall and Loucks (1978) who stated that adaptation is acceptable up to a

point, beyond which the innovation loses its integrity. Therefore, the parameters of fidelity are of crucial importance to the innovation being implemented.

There are five situational parameters of change to be considered when planning to implement an innovation: (1) incremental or major change, (2) theoretical or technological certainty, (3) conflict over goals and means, (4) institutional structure, and (5) stability of environment. A relatively structured environment supports the fidelity approach (Berman, 1980).

Administrators within the central office level or at the building level often fail to acknowledge the needs of those who are being asked to implement the change in the classroom. Educators are taught to respond to the needs of students, but somehow administrators forget to respond to the needs of those required to implement instructional change, the teachers (White, 1990).

Some of the benefits of the fidelity approach are that it works, saves money, and saves time with little exploration (Berman, 1980). The problems that can arise from the fidelity

approach are the lack of ownership by those who are implementing the change and the use of canned programs (McLaughlin, 1989).

Mutual Adaptation

In the mid-seventies researchers began to document that educators, when implementing innovations, changed those innovations to fit their own situations. This is known as mutual adaptation, a process that allows components of the innovation to adapt to the individual culture within an organization (Loucks, 1983 & Meara, 1979).

The Rand study group found that federal policies had a major role in encouraging local school districts to undertake projects that were generally congruent with federal guidelines, but that adoption of a project consistent with federal goals did not ensure successful implementation. The Rand study further found that although successful implementation did not predict long-run continuation of the project, effective innovation did promote mutual adaptation in

each institutional setting. Effective implementation of an innovation supported the process of adaptation through feedback, identification and correction of mistakes, and building support for the project. The Rand study group concluded that local choices about how to put an innovation into practice have more significance for change than the innovation itself (McLaughlin, 1989).

Research has cast considerable doubt on the validity of the fidelity approach to implementation (Fullan & Pomfret, 1977).

Fullan's and Pomfret's study concluded that any description of the use of the innovation should take into account not only the characteristics of the organization, but the process by which the innovation is adapted and implemented. Researchers have cast doubt on the assumption that the degree of effectiveness is often influenced by the degree of implementation (Fullan & Pomfret, 1977; Hall & Loucks, 1977).

As the new program is implemented, the participants begin to identify different needs and therefore make modifications to fit the needs identified within the organization. Successful

implementation of an innovation will not occur unless it is perceived as meeting a specific need in the organization, identified during the adaptation of the innovation (White, 1990).

Proponents of the mutual adaptation process have stated that adopters of the innovation (teachers) have a greater understanding of the organizational climate and structure which relate to the use of the innovation than those who developed the change or those who require the change (Hall & Hord, 1987). The differing organizational context results in a need to incorporate the level and degree of teacher involvement in the change process:

1. Frequent staff development opportunities designed to meet the developmental needs of the teachers are seen as a supporting factor (Guskey, 1986).
2. The length of teaching career is negatively correlated with successful implementation and is generally seen as an obstacle to the process (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978).
3. When teachers view the principal as supportive of an innovation, the level of implementation tends to increase (Hall & Hord, 1987).
4. The availability and variety of incentives encouraging participation in an innovation are important factors in determining the level of teacher involvement in the change process (Hall & Hord, 1987).

Fidelity or mutual adaptation differ to the degree to which the implemented innovation is similar to the innovation in its original form and to the degree that participants effect the formation of the adoption. It is possible that adoption would become routinized and survive because it was used with a high degree of fidelity. On the other hand, a program that is adapted would become routinized and survive because the teachers or change agents changed the innovation to fit the school culture (Blakely, 1983). The implementation of the innovation, whether it be large or small, adapted partially or adopted as a whole, is as important to the success of its outcome as the organizational structure of the school (White, 1990).

Other research suggests that organizational structure, culture, and political factors can have a direct impact on the nature and extent of change occurring within the school. The importance of teacher participation is a critical element in the successful implementation of change. Administrators should view change as an ongoing process, not as a single event (White, 1990).

Barriers to Change

Sacred-secular concepts help us understand barriers to change. It is predictable that conflict will occur in public education because schools which are sacred societies impress upon their members certain organizational behaviors, and this culture of tradition makes for a higher degree of resistance to change. A secular school is not likely to be as isolated or as resistant to change and tends to be more open without the rigid barriers to change (Lutz & Merz, 1992).

Small rural Alaskan schools provide a natural environment for sacred behaviors. Education literally was synonymous with sacred societies in rural areas due to the early presence of missionaries, priests, and nuns who started rural schools. Also, in rural Alaskan communities everyone knows nearly everyone else, of what they are capable, and not only what they are doing, but also their faults, needs, potential, and background (Barnhardt, 1979). This is not to say that all small schools are sacred or that large urban schools are secular (Lutz & Merz, 1992). The schools that tend to search for

consensus, avoid conflict, or resist change are considered sacred (Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970).

A secular society is likely to be less isolated than a sacred society because a secular society is one in which resistance to change is at a minimum. Secular societies are normally open to change, whereas sacred societies are communities that resist change and value tradition (Lutz & Merz, 1992).

Communities exist along the sacred-secular continuum; they tend to be more one or the other, and more than likely the community will exhibit some elements at both ends of the continuum (Lutz & Merz, 1992). Successful introduction of innovations may require different and sometimes opposite methods of implementation depending on whether the community is sacred or secular.

Most school reformers are frustrated as a result of organizational structure, culture, and the political nature of communities. Most Americans still regard schools as successful according to Haberman (1994). The public wants to improve the educational system that it believes in, while most experts or

reformers want to change it in part or in totality (Haberman, 1994).

Despite the widespread call for educational reform, the literature on change states that change is difficult and resistance is natural (Margolis, 1991). There is a natural conflict between traditional views and reform in American education. Parents want schools to be like they were in the past but know their children must be prepared for a different future (Margolis, 1991).

At the building level, successful change requires that the administrators understand why teachers are resistant to change. Resistance is less likely to occur when teachers view the change or innovation as meaningful to their lives. Margolis (1991) has urged that those desiring change should:

- *Not impose solutions upon people.
- *Concentrate on beliefs and perceptions.
- *Emphasize processes and open systems thinking.
- *Focus on what people think is immediately important and troublesome.
- *Encourage innovation and change with the potential to achieve mutually desired goals.
- *Eliminate barriers to reform.

Keys to overcoming barriers to change are understanding and responding to both the structural and personal factors causing

resistance. Open communication is invaluable in breaking the barriers to change. When implementing innovations the change agent must remember that changing a teacher's belief system is a task that is far more complicated, difficult, and time consuming than leaders expect (Hanson, 1985). Therefore, being knowledgeable about change process may be both the best offense and the best defense that administrators have in managing educational change.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The review of the literature has suggested a difference in levels of resistance to change in sacred and secular societies. The purpose of this study was to discover and analyze the implementation of the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative, to identify relationships between change processes, school culture, district size, innovation success, and to describe the personal responses of superintendents to the demand for change posed by the Initiative.

The purpose was defined by four research questions. 1. Which change process was being used when implementing the innovation? 2. What is the district's culture (secular or sacred) in regard to change? 3. Was the innovation being successfully implemented? 4. Was there a discernible relationship between the change processes, culture of the district, size of the district, and success of the implementation?

The qualitative nature of the study allowed the researcher to

analyze how superintendents have responded to the demand for systemic change posed by the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative, and to assess the success of the implementation, in relation to the local district's culture and the change process employed.

Description of Population

The definition of a rural school district in Alaska is based on its size and location. A rural district is one that is located off of the State road system and has a population of less than 3,500 students (Digest of Education Statistics, 1997). With only a total of 54 school districts in the state of Alaska, all rural districts that met the above criteria were examined in this study. This involved a total of 37 districts which were divided into three categories (very small, small, or large) as described in Table 1 on the next page.

Table 1. Public school districts and enrollment by size of district.
Digest of Education Statistics (1997).

Number of Alaska School Districts by Organizational Category

| <u>District size</u> | <u>Number of districts</u> | <u>Percent of total</u> |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. very small 1 to 300 pupils | 12 | 32% |
| 2. small 301 to 700 pupils | 14 | 38% |
| 3. large 701 to 3,500 pupils | 11 | 30% |
| Total | 37 | 100% |

The twelve very small districts averaged 1.8 in central office personnel. The very small districts' personnel usually included the superintendent and a business manager. The fourteen small districts averaged 4.2 central office personnel which included a superintendent, business manager, special education director and a director of maintenance. The eleven large districts had an average of 8.1 personnel in their central offices with personnel titles ranging from superintendent, assistant superintendent, director of curriculum, business manager and other assorted positions. Secretaries and accounts payable personnel were not included in these personnel counts as these information numbers were not

available for all districts (Office of Data Management, 1997).

Data Collection

Data about the implementation of the Initiative was collected from each of the superintendents through a telephone survey. Each question in the survey focused on only one concept and no item was included that did not relate to the objectives of this study. Success of the research depended entirely on verbal communication; i.e., the clarity of the questions and the rapport that was established between the interviewer and the superintendents. To inform the superintendents about the telephone survey and the questions to be asked, each superintendent was contacted through an e-mail several weeks before the calls were made. This communication provided each superintendent an opportunity to prepare for the interview.

