THE PRACTICE OF INNOVATION AND PROBLEMS OF IMPROVEMENT

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Growing enthusiasm for continuous improvement as integral to the practice of educational innovation...

Yet integrating continuous improvement at scale, among a large population of innovating organizations, is contingent on developing system-level infrastructure to support the work.
OVERVIEW

- The practice of educational innovation.
- Centrality (and categories) of continuous improvement.
- Problems of improvement.
- Aligning politics, policies, and practice to build and leverage complementary “impact” and “improvement” infrastructures.
THE PRACTICE OF EDUCATIONAL INNOVATION

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- Specific focus: Organizations managing large-scale networks that engage schools in developing and fielding systemic, multi-component improvement programs.
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- Specific focus: Organizations managing large-scale networks that engage schools in developing and fielding systemic, multi-component improvement programs.

- Distinguishing characteristics:
  - Functionally complex, including development, training, evaluation, logistics, business systems, executive management, and more.
  - Problem-fraught, owing to interdependencies among clients, programs, innovating organizations, external evaluators, funders, and environments.
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Domains of continuous improvement:

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- Program improvement: Researcher/practitioner collaboration to address practical problems, needs, and opportunities.
- Network improvement: Building enterprise-wide infrastructure supporting production, use, and refinement of knowledge and capabilities at scale.
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Domains of continuous improvement:

- Program improvement: Researcher/practitioner collaboration to address practical problems, needs, and opportunities.
- Network improvement: Building enterprise-wide infrastructure supporting production, use, and refinement of knowledge and capabilities at scale.
- Executive improvement: Developing the knowledge and capabilities to structure and manage distributed, inter-organizational learning.
Overarching observation: Innovating organizations have been more successful in developing capabilities to attend to program impact than in developing capabilities for the continuous improvement on which positive impact depends.
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Root cause: Variability in system-level infrastructure supporting impact and improvement as key dimensions of the practice of educational innovation.
ESSENTIAL CHALLENGE: VARIABILITY IN INFRASTRUCTURE

- Overarching observation: Innovation organizations have been more successful in developing capabilities to attend to program impact than in developing the capabilities for continuous improvement on which impact depends.

- Root cause: Variability in system-level infrastructure supporting impact and improvement as key dimensions of the practice of educational innovation.
  - Political supports.
  - Policy supports.
  - Philanthropic, private, and professional supports.
Strong impact infrastructure and rapid effects on practice.
IMPLICATIONS OF INFRASTRUCTURE FOR PRACTICE

- Strong impact infrastructure and rapid effects on practice.
- Weak improvement infrastructure and problems of practice.
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- Non-embrace: Continuous improvement not recognized as essential to the practice of educational innovation.
Strong impact infrastructure and rapid effects on practice.

Weak improvement infrastructure and problems of practice.

- Non-embrace: Continuous improvement not recognized as essential to the practice of educational innovation.
- Struggles developing and leveraging capabilities for continuous improvement in all three domains:
  - Program improvement.
  - Network improvement.
  - Executive improvement.
The response to impact: Positive effects of politics and policies on practice.
INNOVATION: ALIGNING POLITICS, POLICIES, AND PRACTICE

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- The challenge of improvement: Adapting politics and policies *in response to practice.*
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- The response to impact: Positive effects of politics and policies on practice.
- The challenge of improvement: Adapting politics and policies in response to practice.
- Beginning points in addressing the challenge:
  - Philanthropists, private firms, and professional associations as potential sources of influence on politics and policies.
  - Organized as a coalition or coalitions.
  - Coordinated efforts to incorporate improvement into the language and discourse of education politics and policy.
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