



## How principals implement change effectively

**K**ay Psencik, Frederick Brown, and Stephanie Hirsh explore how school leaders can apply a learning lens to achieve their ambitious goals for educators and students in *The Learning Principal*, their new book for Learning Forward. The authors show how learning and leading go hand in hand, especially when it comes to innovation and improvement.

Chapter 3, “Managing Change,” details how leaders can create the conditions and learning opportunities that help staff navigate change — a vital but often challenging part of increasing equity. This leadership must happen throughout the change process, from establishing readiness for change to leveraging strategies to support staff through challenging steps.

One of those strategies is articulating and following a theory of change. As the authors write, “Developing a clear theory of change proposes the best understanding of the relationships among our assumptions, strategies, outcomes, and results based on the data we collected to frame our problem. Developing this theory is helpful in

### ABOUT *THE LEARNING PRINCIPAL*

*The Learning Principal: Becoming a Learning Leader* supports school leaders in developing a learning orientation to each challenge they face, ensuring they are ready to identify solutions that put students’ equitable outcomes at the fore.

Chapters cover principals’ roles and responsibilities related to designing professional learning, implementing curriculum, managing change, leveraging feedback and coaching, maximizing resources, and more. Online tools complement each chapter.

Purchase the book through Learning Forward’s bookstore at [learningforward.org/store](https://www.learningforward.org/store).

informing a change management plan that will successfully support desired

outcomes. Combined with the logic model, an action-planning tool, the theory of change guides the principal and leadership team as they seek to respond to these questions:

- What is the outcome sought? What will it look like when the desired results are achieved?
- What will staff and stakeholders need to learn and be able to do differently to achieve the desired results?
- How will people acquire the new knowledge and skills?”

You can learn more and read an example of theory of change in chapter 3. In addition, each chapter of the book includes online tools to help readers implement the strategies.

Developing a Theory of Change, the tool on the following pages, supports teams in drafting and implementing a plan of action based on theory and research. Using this tool, you and your team members will answer foundational questions independently and then together so you can work toward your goals and address your challenges in an aligned way.

## DEVELOPING A THEORY OF CHANGE

<b>Purpose</b>	Theory of change protocols support the development of thoughtful plans to address challenges or opportunities. This tool can be used by a principal learning community or with other leadership, grade-level, and subject matter teams.
<b>Recommended time</b>	1 hour minimum. Time allocation will vary throughout implementation.
<b>Materials</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Questions to Guide Development of a Theory of Change</li> <li>• Media for capturing notes and recording artifacts for virtual and face-to-face small-group discussions (e.g. tablets, laptops and applications, white boards, chart paper, note cards)</li> </ul>
<b>Process</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. State the team's expectations: Team members will establish a theory of change to achieve the goals they have set as an organization. Team members will develop a clear theory of change before making decisions about the actions they will take to achieve their goals.</li> <li>2. Explain that a theory of change helps to clarify all building blocks required to achieve a long-term goal. This set of connected building blocks establishes a path to success.</li> <li>3. Ask participants to work individually or in small teams to answer each of the seven questions on the following page. Note: If team members require additional research before the questions can be answered effectively, ask them to conduct their research and come prepared to share.</li> <li>4. Consider the questions one at a time. Once each participant has answered the first question, ask each small team to come to agreement.</li> <li>5. Ask each team to share results with the whole group.</li> <li>6. Find common ideas and come to consensus as a whole group.</li> <li>7. Then answer the second question in the same way and proceed until all questions are answered.</li> <li>8. Ask each team member to reflect on his or her work, share it with the larger community, and make revisions in the answers based on the best thinking of everyone.</li> <li>9. Use the theory of change to establish a clearly articulated plan of action.</li> <li>10. Implement the plan and reflect on the progress regularly.</li> </ol>

# TOOLS

## QUESTIONS TO GUIDE DEVELOPMENT OF A THEORY OF CHANGE

**Answer each question individually, then work as a team to come to consensus about the answers.**

1. What is the current situation that we intend to impact?

2. What will it look like when we achieve the desired results we set for ourselves earlier today?

3. What do we need to do to achieve that?

4. What behaviors need to change for that outcome to be achieved?

5. What knowledge or skills do people need before the behavior will change?

6. What resources will be needed to achieve our results?

7. How will we know we are achieving the goals that we have set for ourselves?