# Stages of Concern:
## A Facilitator's Reaction to Implementing the RSD in a Community of Practice

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**Abstract**

*This case study examines one faculty-leader's change in concerns as Willison and O'Regan's (2007) RSD framework was introduced, via a community of practice, across four colleges at a university in the Midwestern United States. George, Hall and Stiegelbauer's (2006) Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) was used to measure the faculty-leader's awareness of the RSD framework; concerns about themselves relative to the RSD framework; concerns about managing tasks related to adoption of the RSD framework; and concerns about the impacts of the RSD framework at the university. George et al.'s (2006) "Stages of Concern Questionnaire" (SoCQ) was used to capture changes in the facilitator's concern levels over time but, as Kwok (2014) asserts, the measures needed to be contextualized within the facilitator's experience to make sense of the results. A more holistic model, like that described by McKinney, Sexton and Meyerson (1999), may be needed to provide a more accurate picture of faculty's willingness to embrace new initiatives such as integrating the RSD and undergraduate research into classrooms.*

**Introduction**

In 2013, a Midwestern University in the United States began a shift from being a predominantly teaching institution to becoming an emerging research institution under the direction of its Chancellor. A committee promoting undergraduate research, sponsored by the Provost's office, had been active for several years. The university joined other universities within the state system in a collaborative effort to promote undergraduate research using system-level collaborations. Administrative support and grant funding from state and national entities were used to support efforts to promote undergraduate research at the campus and state-wide levels.

The student senate at the university had passed a resolution supporting undergraduate research experiences for all students. The university's Chancellor charged the committee promoting undergraduate research to provide professional development to faculty members interested in integrating undergraduate research into their classrooms.

Spurred into action by this supportive climate, the committee promoting undergraduate research sought out a framework for undergraduate research that could be scaled from individual use to the university and system levels. Within this context, Willison and O'Regan's (2007) Research Skill Development (RSD) framework was introduced to twelve faculty members participating in a RSD Community of Practice (CoP). Participants in the CoP were committed to integrating undergraduate research experiences into their classrooms. This RSD CoP answered the Chancellor's charge to provide professional development and support the faculty's attempts to institutionalize undergraduate research. This case study examines one faculty-leader's changes in concerns over the course of two years as the RSD framework was introduced across four colleges at the university.

**Theoretical Framework**

Much of the research regarding the implementation and use of the Research Skill Development (RSD) framework (Willison & O'Regan, 2007) focuses on students as researchers. Yet, successful integration of the RSD framework into a university context depends upon faculty members' willingness to adopt the framework (Mc Kinney, Sexton and Meyerson, 1999). It therefore becomes important to measure faculty's willingness to embrace change as classroom practices and university culture change over time.

Hall and his colleagues have been researching institutional change for several decades and assume that organizational change is a process, that organisational change does not occur until individuals implement change, and that individuals react differently as the change process unfolds (2013). Hall et al., working with the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM), describe an individual's movement through stages of little concern about an innovation to concerns about themselves relative to an innovation, to concerns about managing tasks of innovation adoption and finally to being concerned about the impacts of the innovation (George, Hall and Stiegelbauer, 2006). Cheung, Hattie and Ng (2001) question the reliability and validity of George et al.'s model. Kwok (2014) found discrepancies between Hall's CBAM and observed data finding that contextual information is critical to personal feelings and perceptions. It may be that the CBAM is better described through a more holistic model like that described by McKinney, Sexton and Meyerson. McKinney et al. (1999) describe their Efficacy-Based Change Model (EBCM) as integrating Hall et al.'s CBAM, elements of self-efficacy (as defined by

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Bandura), Weiner's attribution theory and others into a holistic change model. This holistic model accounts for personal factors, individual persistence as well as internal and external factors influencing organizational change. It is acknowledged that organizational change is complex and includes many variables.  This case study focuses on one element of an EBCM, the stages of concern, of one faculty member leading a CoP aimed at institutionalizing research using the RSD framework to facilitate the change.

**Methodology**

A community of practice, focusing on the RSD, was established in the fall of 2014. The community of practice was led by three faculty members who had attended an RSD workshop during the summer. Faculty members interested in integrating the RSD into their classroom were recruited from the summer workshop with the help of the university's teaching and learning centre. Seven participants met bi-weekly throughout the school year. They familiarized themselves with the RSD during the first semester and integrated the RSD into a lesson during the second semester. George et al.'s (2006) Stages of Concern Questionnaire (SoCQ) was distributed three times, at the beginning, middle, and end of the first year of the CoP. The second CoP was led by one of the original facilitators and a completer of the first year's RSD CoP. Seven faculty members, four of them new to the RSD, participated in the second year of the RSD CoP. The Stages of Concern Questionnaire was administered at the beginning and end of the year as the new members repeated the process of integrating the RSD into their classroom. It was assumed that facilitator concerns may be different from participants' concerns during RSD implementation. It was also assumed that faculty with more RSD experience would have different concerns to those of faculty who had little or no experience with the RSD. These factors led to focusing the case study on one individual, a faculty-facilitator, who participated in responding to all the SoCQs over the course of the two-year implementation period. The responses of the individual were converted to percentiles and changes in scores were graphed and analysed by individual item. In addition, external influencers, such as a restructuring of the colleges, and significant changes in leadership (new chancellor, provost, dean, and department chairs) were noted.

**Results**

Figure 1, shown on the next page, indicates the facilitator's change in perception over a two-year period. The first three measures (awareness, information and personal categories) indicate how the RSD related to the facilitator as a person. The measures need to be contextualized within the facilitator's experience to make sense of the results. Awareness (the extent to which the facilitator attended to the task) was lowest during the

first year, rose sharply by the end of the first year and dropped to a lower level by the end of the second year. This pattern may be explained by the fact that the facilitator shared their work load with co-facilitators during the first year, with support in structuring and scheduling activities from the university's teaching and learning centre. The stakes were lower during the first year because every participant was new to the RSD. All participants, including facilitators, had little to no experience with implementing the RSD. The beginning of year 2 was high in the awareness category because two of the experienced facilitators left the university and much of the responsibility for facilitating the RSD fell on the remaining faculty member who had gained some expertise. By the end of the second year, the facilitator was confident in using the RSD, but was looking for ways to integrate the RSD across educational and disciplinary contexts. The information stage remained relatively consistent during the two-year implementation cycle. The facilitator had access to RSD resources from Willison, the University of Adelaide, Australia and from Monash University, Australia. The slight rise in information score may be indicative of the facilitator's increased awareness of the finer points and nuances of the RSD and an interest in gaining RSD expertise.
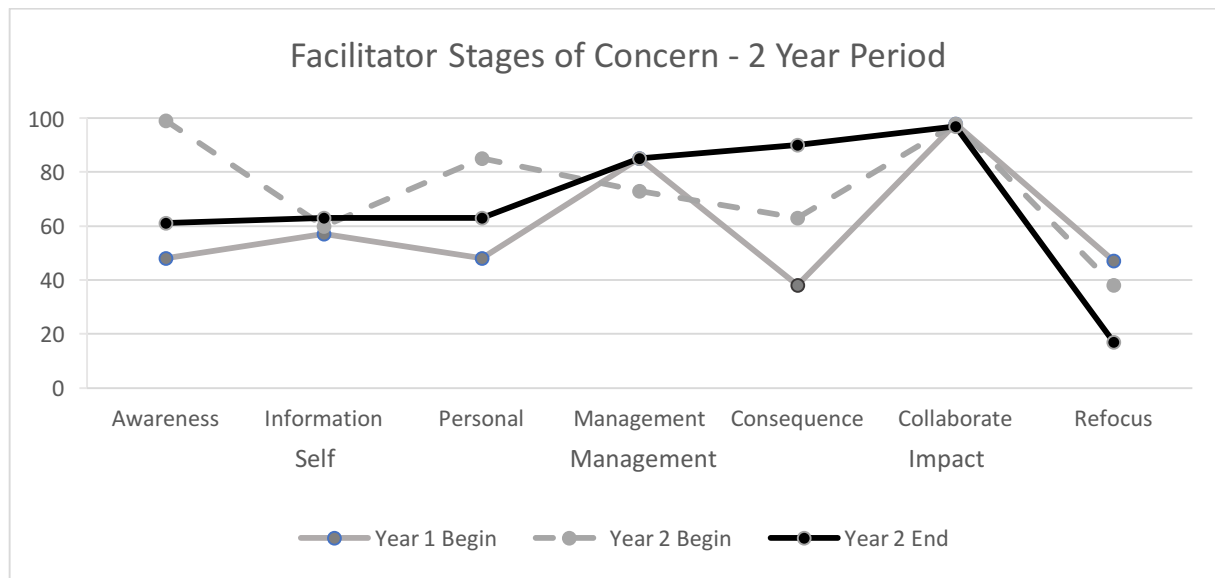


*Figure 1:* Facilitator's stages of concern over a two-year period

Personal concerns were relatively low during the first year, rose to a high level during the second year, and settled to a mid-level by the end of the second year. This reflects the changing dynamics at the university where the RSD was being implemented. Implementation of the RSD as a CoP occurred in response to the chancellor's charge during the first year. There was administrative support for the CoP as part of the initiative to have the university be known as an emerging research institution. Changes in administration during the second year included a new chancellor, university restructuring, new deans and new department chairs with a move away from becoming a research institution. These institutional changes are reflected in personal

concerns by the end of the first year. With less emphasis on undergraduate research and a dwindling need for expertise related to undergraduate research there is a large increase in ego-oriented concerns. The concerns begin to be alleviated by the end of the second year as organizational change and policy begins to settle into a known quantity and faculty roles relative to supporting undergraduate research and integration of the RSD across campus are clarified. Management of time and logistics remained consistent over the two-year span. This is to be expected as the facilitator's role relative to the timing and logistics of implementing a CoP remained constant.

Concerns regarding the impacts of the RSD were measured by consequence concerns, collaboration concerns and refocusing concerns. The consequences of utilizing the RSD and its impact on students and other began relatively low on the concern scale and continued to rise throughout the two-year implementation period. This is understandable as the facilitator became confident with the RSD framework and began to research its use within a classroom context. Additionally, the framework and sister frameworks were used by the facilitator in K-12 contexts and in various settings across the university and in a state-wide context. The relevance of the innovation for students, evaluating student performance and helping others gain confidence increased as the facilitator moved from being a novice to becoming an expert RSD framework user. The confidence and increased self-efficacy is reflected in the increased consequences concern. Collaboration and working with others was part of the CoP model from the beginning of the RSD initiative and remains consistently high throughout the two-year implementation period. This also reflects the collaborative nature of the facilitator's constructionist approach and constructivist teaching philosophy. Refocusing concerns began relatively low and continued to decrease over the two-year span. Utilising the RSD framework was a successful initiative at the university from the beginning. Concerns about finding alternatives to the RSD decreased as more faculty members and departments began to adopt and use the RSD. Additionally, the facilitator became comfortable finding innovative ways to introduce the RSD to diverse audiences. Concern about using the RSD continues to decline as RSD implementation continues to spread across campus and the facilitator gains more expertise using the RSD and sister frameworks.

**Conclusion**

George, et al.'s (2006) Stages of Concern Questionnaire (SoCQ) captures changes in the facilitator's concern levels over time. The data in this case study was drawn from a scenario where participants and facilitators were early adopters who were eager to integrate the RSD framework into their classroom. Participants' positive attitude and willingness to share information impacted facilitator responses to the SoCQ and changes in

concern level over time. However, the results need to be contextualized with follow-up interviews or other data to help explain why the changes occured. For example, responses to awareness concerns may be measuring confidence and comfort level with elements of change and not accurately reflect the need to attend to a new initiative. Additionally, changes in the larger campus climate, such as university reorganization, may impact individual stages of concern. More investigation needs to occur to determine how changes in concern vary from novice to expert user when new initiatives are introduced. Roles in institutional change, such as leaders, facilitators, or adopters, may impact perceptions and responses to the SoCQ. The success that CoP participants had in integrating the RSD into their classroom and potentially impacting teaching efficacy was not explored. Teaching experience, teaching efficacy and internal/external factors impacting faculty's self-efficacy provide areas for additional research. Looking at change through a more comprehensive lens like that proposed by McKinney et al. (1999) may provide a more accurate picture of faculty's willingness to embrace institutional change and initiatives such as integrating the RSD and undergraduate research into the classroom. A broader lens may also address the concerns raised by Kwok (2014) and Cheung Hattie and Ng (2001).

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