

RESEARCH-BASED TOOL GAUGES ACTUAL USE OF A NEW APPROACH

“To what extent are staff development program participants actually using what they are learning in the (fill in the blank) initiative in their daily work?” The question about actual use in the workplace is key to tracking impact and designing help during change. Whether the staff learning initiative is differentiating instruction, assessing student performance, teaching critical thinking, mapping curricula, integrating technology into instruction, learning a particular teaming approach, or some other complex bundle, getting participants to use what they learn is a major milestone.

Finding credible yet efficient techniques to gauge the extent of implementation can be frustrating. The Levels of Use framework (known as the LoU) is a powerful research-based approach for gathering diagnostic data on individuals involved in incorporating a new approach into their daily work. The change construct of differing levels of use and the framework were developed 35 years ago as part of research on change at the University of Texas at Austin Center for Research in Teacher Education. The center’s work became the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM).

The CBAM theory of change is now well-known: Change does not happen automatically or instantly when someone learns a new approach. The rate of change varies widely with individuals, usually in developmental steps.

THE LEVELS OF USE FRAMEWORK

Gene E. Hall, former director of the CBAM work, along with Shirley M. Hord, another major researcher at the center, have synthesized their work on change and moved the conversation forward in the newest edition of their book, *Implementing Change: Patterns, Principles, and Potholes* (Allyn & Bacon, 2006). They explain the evolution of the LoU: “The implicit assumption was that initial training plus materials equaled use. Instead, our observations and studies document a number of different behavioral patterns for nonusers and users. To understand this

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phenomenon of the change process, the diagnostic dimension of Levels of Use (LoU) was born” (p. 158).

The LoU (simplified in the chart on p. 61) is organized around eight stages. The LoU’s three earliest stages describe nonuse, before the individual actually attempts to use the newly learned approach. The nonuser may be at Level 0 nonuse (not yet thinking about the new approach), Level I orientation (looking for information about the new approach), or Level II preparation (actually preparing to use the new approach at a certain point in time).

The next five LoU stages describe what happens once the person has moved forward as a user: Level III mechanical (using the new approach, albeit awkwardly, while also making changes to get it right), Level IV-A routine (has a routine established with the new approach), Level IV-B refinement (shifting into tweaking behaviors regarding the new approach for the purpose of getting better results), Level V integration (reaching out to others to collaborate on the new approach), and Level VI renewal (actively seeking better alternatives to the approach).

ONE-LEGGED INTERVIEWS

An important view of the CBAM work on change is that schools and districts are very busy workplaces; data must be gathered unobtrusively and efficiently. To gauge an individual’s actual use of a new approach, the LoU uses a focused, one-on-one interview process. The interview process uses prescribed questions and probes that require the interviewer to make quick judgments about which question to use as responses lead the interview into one direction or another. The interview has been dubbed the One-Legged Interview. The interviewer should be able to stand on one leg and get the necessary information before getting so tired that he has to shift back to standing on two legs.

Because the interview is intentionally brief and highly structured, it can usually be done in a few minutes. If being done for research purposes, the interview takes longer than if it is being done to ascertain what kind of help the individual might need right now. In a recent interview, I asked Gene Hall about the value of observing to determine use. He pointed out that ethnographic observation of the individual throughout the entire workday could also be useful in gauging the person’s level of use, but such intense observation is usually impractical. He pointed out that individuals like to be interviewed by a nonjudgmental interviewer and are usually eager to share their personal experiences dealing with the new approach.



In each issue of *JSD*, Robby Champion writes about how to collect and evaluate data effectively. Her columns can be found at www.nsd.org/library/authors/champion.cfm

Levels of Use framework

LEVEL	DESCRIPTION	TYPICAL BEHAVIOR
VI	Renewal	The user is seeking more effective alternatives to the established use of the innovation.
V	Integration	The user is making deliberate efforts to coordinate with others in using the innovation.
IV-B	Refinement	The user is making changes to increase outcomes.
IV-A	Routine	The user is making few or no changes and has an established pattern of use.
III	Mechanical use	The user is using the innovation in a poorly coordinated manner and is making user-oriented changes.
II	Preparation	The person is preparing to use the innovation for the first time.
I	Orientation	The person is seeking out information about the innovation.
0	Nonuse	No action is being taken with respect to the innovation.

Source: “Levels of use of the innovation: A framework for analyzing innovation adoption,” by Gene E. Hall, Susan F. Loucks, William L. Rutherford, and Beulah N. Newlove. (1975, Spring). *The Journal of Teacher Education*, 242(1), 52-56.

The most difficult hurdle is getting newly trained LoU interviewers to ask the prescribed questions, use the precise probes, and follow the branched questions appropriately. Novice interviewers tend to get involved in the conversation and veer off. They digress to ask spontaneous questions that often fail to elicit the right kind of information needed to accurately gauge the level of use.

The LoU interviewer must amply prepare before the interview so he or she has a clear definition of the specific elements that define the particular initiative. Part of the initial LoU questioning process is the “configuration hunt” to probe sufficiently to learn how the interviewee defines the particular initiative operationally. Since educators are bombarded with overlapping change initiatives, it is important to be clear what the initiative is — or isn’t.

TWO CAVEATS

Caveat #1: The LoU doesn’t purport to determine how or where an individual learned to do what he is currently doing. The teacher who, for example, is actively using an interactive word wall on a regular basis may have learned, or been motivated to use, the word wall approach in a number of different places, including through a conversation with a teacher friend. Just as a thermometer measures one’s temperature and gives us valuable current information about an individual, it doesn’t tell how the individual got to that point. It is important to avoid making assumptions and to listen carefully.

Caveat #2: The LoU cannot predict whether students will benefit from the teacher’s or principal’s use of a particular new approach. Even if every individual in a depart-

ment, grade level, school, or district is fully implementing the new approach, perhaps operating at Level IV-A (routine), Level IV-B (refinement), or even V (integration), there is no guarantee that students’ learning will improve. The “new approach” itself may be way off target and not be aligned with the very specific learning needs of the students.

POTENTIAL FOR MULTIPLE USES

The LoU has potential multiple uses at different points in the life cycle of an initiative. First, knowledge of the LoU research can help take the guesswork out of long-range budgeting. The research indicates that districts may spend three to four years to get everyone to routine (Level IV-A) use. Then, before launching an initiative, the LoU could be used on a sample of teachers or principals to gauge their learning needs more accurately than a pencil-paper survey.

In the midst of implementation, LoU data can guide staff developers and other change facilitators in more accurately designing the right kinds and amount of follow-up activities. Solid diagnostic data on who is doing what can ensure that follow-up isn’t simply more busy work for overloaded educators. Finally, the LoU can provide some of the information for summative evaluations aimed at documenting the impact of an initiative.

REFERENCE

Hall, G.E. & Hord, S.M. (2006). *Implementing change: Patterns, principles, and potholes (2nd ed.)*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon. ■