

STAGES OF CONCERN

The progress of new programs is often measured by how well they are being executed. This approach tends to ignore a critical actor—the person charged with implementing the innovation. The Stages of Concern process helps keep the people doing the work at the center of the change process. Using the Stages of Concern, education leaders can assess and respond to the worries, attitudes, and perceptions of staff as they deal with the challenges of changing the way they work.

In a Nutshell

The Stages of Concern is one of three components that make up the diagnostic dimensions of the Concerns-Based Adoption Model. The component is based on a key understanding—for a new program to succeed, it is critical to address the concerns of the people charged with implementing it. Staff may respond to change in many ways, from stress and anxiety to cynicism and burnout. Through the Stages of Concern process, leaders can identify staff concerns and provide targeted support to help individuals cope and focus on the task at hand.

Seven Stages of Concern

The Stages of Concern consists of and describes seven categories of possible concerns related to an innovation. People who are in the earlier stages of a change process will likely have more self-focused concerns, such as worries about whether they can learn a new program or how it will affect their job performance. As individuals become more comfortable with and skilled in using an innovation, their concerns shift to focus on broader impacts, such as how the initiative will affect their students or their working relationships with colleagues.

Stage of Concern	Typical Statement
Unconcerned	"I think I heard something about it, but I'm too busy right now with other priorities to be concerned about it."
Informational	"This seems interesting, and I would like to know more about it."
Personal	"I'm concerned about the changes I'll need to make in my routines."
Management	"I'm concerned about how much time it takes to get ready to teach with this new approach."
Consequence	"How will this new approach affect my students?"
Collaboration	"I'm looking forward to sharing some ideas about it with other teachers."
Refocusing	"I have some ideas about something that would work even better."

Use and Application

What does the process involve?

The Stages of Concern process involves using one or more of the following methods to ask staff who are implementing a program about their concerns:

- **Stages of Concern Questionnaire:** This 35-item questionnaire asks staff members to rate the extent to which they agree with various statements related to an innovation, such as how they will be able to manage all that a new math program requires. This method of assessment enables leaders to examine the concerns of a large number of staff across multiple sites. The questionnaire is available in print and online.
- **Brief interview:** Leaders hold brief one-on-one conversations with staff about their feelings, thoughts, and reactions to an innovation. This method enables leaders to hear from individual staff members in person.
- **Open-ended written statement:** Typically administered at a staff meeting, these open-ended statements prompt staff to respond in writing about their concerns regarding an innovation. This method enables leaders to gather more in-depth information about staff concerns.

The results of the data collection indicate where staff members fall within the seven stages and provide a snapshot of their concerns so that leaders can address them. Follow-up actions may include providing additional information about the research behind a new program or offering how-to supports and coaching.

How are the data used?

Leaders can analyze the data to inform the actions they take to support individual staff members. More typically, however, the data are examined at the organizational level to determine the types of concerns identified by the group—an approach that allows for confidentiality and for the actions of leaders to have a larger impact.

When and how often should the Stages of Concern tools be administered?

The Stages of Concern Questionnaire is usually administered at the start of a new program and no more than 2 times per year. Interviews and open-ended statements can be used more frequently, in a formative fashion, to gather more specific feedback on individual concerns.

Research Base

The Stages of Concern was developed as part of the Concerns-Based Adoption Model in the 1970s and 1980s by a team of researchers at the Research and Development Center for Teacher Education, the University of Texas at Austin. Since its development, researchers have tested CBAM for reliability and validity; in 2006, it was updated to ensure its reliability. Today, CBAM continues to be applied in a range of school, organizational, and research settings. The tools are commonly used to help leaders, evaluators, and researchers understand, monitor, and guide the complex process of implementing new and innovative practices. The following resources provide additional information about the Stages of Concern and other elements of CBAM:

Hall, G. E., Wallace, R. C., & Dossett, W. A. (1973). *A developmental conceptualization of the adoption process within educational institutions*. Austin, TX: Research and Development Center for Teacher Education, The University of Texas at Austin.

Hord, S. M., Stiegelbauer, A. M., Hall, G. E., & George, A. A. (2006). *Measuring implementation in schools: Innovation configurations*. Austin, TX: SEDL.

Hall, G.E., & Hord, S.M. (2011). *Implementing change: Patterns, principles and potholes (3rd edition)*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

Contact Information

SEDL provides a range of resources and services to support the Concerns-Based Adoption Model. Contact us at services@sedl.org to discuss how we can best serve your needs.

About SEDL

SEDL is a private, nonprofit education research, development, and dissemination corporation based in Austin, Texas. Our mission is to strengthen the connections among research, policy, and practice in order to improve outcomes for all learners.

