

Faculty Engagement In Professional Development

Thomas Qiao*, Brenda McDermott, & Jennifer E. Thannhauser

University of Calgary

Responses to the transition to online learning during the pandemic underscores the importance of faculty engagement in professional development (PD) to enhance their teaching practices. However, the creation and offering of PD opportunities does not always lead to faculty engagement. Using a change management perspective (the ADKAR framework), this paper examines the facilitators and barriers to instructor engagement in a self-paced, online PD program addressing instructional skills for managing students' experiences of test anxiety in the classroom. Seven university faculty members participated in focus groups to share their experiences of a pilot PD program in the program. The focus group data were deductively analyzed using the ADKAR framework. Key themes were identified, corresponding to the outcomes of ADKAR: awareness, desire, knowledge, ability, and reinforcements. Findings emphasized the value of considering PD as a change project, while also recognizing staff well-being as a significant factor that impacts engagement with the change process.

Reflection on Faculty Participation, or Lack of, in an Online Self-Paced Professional Development Program

The landscape of post-secondary teaching and learning is evolving. Considering the rapid move to hybrid and remote teaching, the emergence of generative artificial intelligence, and the importance of attending to student mental health in the classroom, there arises an urgent need for university faculty—encompassing all ranks and streams—to actively participate in ongoing professional development (PD) to advance their teaching practices (Leary et al., 2020; Pisapia et al., 2017). Subsequently, it becomes necessary to determine how to effectively engage and support faculty in such PD. A comprehensive understanding of the motivations that drive faculty participation, or lack of, in PD can be used to align programming with faculty needs but and inform strategies to enhance participation in teaching and learning PD programs (Hardré, 2012).

Recent research has argued that PD is essential to faculty adjustment to the evolving objectives of higher education and promotes faculty members' well-being by preparing them for these new teaching experiences (Muammar & Alkathiri, 2022). Professional development has

*Corresponding author – qingqi.qiao@ucalgary.ca

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been shown to improve teaching practices and support student-centered learning (Fassett et al., 2023; Gibbs & Coffey, 2004). A lack of relevant development opportunities has also been linked to faculty burnout (Sabagh et al., 2018). Despite knowing the positive impacts of teaching development, the literature is less clear about who is participating in these training opportunities. Fassett et al. (2023) identified several predictors of participation, including disciplinary area, academic rank, tenure status, and format in which they teach. Specifically, they found faculty in STEM fields participated in fewer teaching development initiatives than the average while Education faculty participated in more. Instructor rank participated in fewer development opportunities compared to the average. Faculty on tenure track but not yet tenured participated in more teaching development than the average while those who were tenured engaged in fewer than the average. Faculty who taught on-campus reported participating in fewer teaching development opportunities than those teaching in blended style courses. Notably, faculty at larger research-intensive institutions also participated in fewer teaching development activities than average, despite these types of institutions typically having greater access to resources that support innovative teaching practices. Fassett et al. (2023) called for more to be done to support faculty in their teaching development. What remains unclear is how to motivate faculty to engage in such PD opportunities given the already demanding workloads.

Understanding Professional Development from a Change Management Perspective

Planned organizational change, defined as deliberate activities that move an organization from its present state to a desired future state (Stouten et al., 2018), can help faculty adjust to an evolving post-secondary context. However, making meaningful and sustainable change can be a challenge. Change management frameworks can serve as a valuable tool for evaluating and addressing barriers to faculty engagement in teaching development opportunities. For example, Chen (2021) applied Kotter's model of change to guide the process of integrating scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) into faculty members' teaching practices across the institution. Pautz and Diede (2022) also used principles of change management to understand underlying motivations of faculty and identified five steps for engaging faculty in teaching development.

One popular change management framework is the ADKAR model (Hiatt, 2006). The ADKAR model emphasizes five sequential and cumulative outcomes that individuals must achieve to ensure successful organizational change, with a particular focus on fostering individual commitment and facilitating lasting changes, including behavioural and cultural transformations. The five outcomes defined by ADKAR are:

- a) *Awareness*: An individuals' understanding of why a change in practice is needed. Building awareness involves effective communication, observation, and guidance from leadership which addresses the rationale and process for change.
- b) *Desire*: Factors that motivate individuals to act toward a change (e.g., perceived likelihood of achieving change, level of risk involved, trust placed in the organization driving the change,

organization's track record in implementing and embracing change, consequences of not embracing change, individuals' personal experiences with past changes).

c) *Knowledge*: Skills and tools that are needed for the change (e.g., includes the capacity to learn, involving cognitive load, and sufficient time to engage).

d) *Ability*: Stage where changes actually occur and the processes that can enhance the individual's ability translate their knowledge about the changes into practice (e.g., performance monitoring, coaching).

e) *Reinforcements*: Strategies to sustain a change (e.g., incentives that encourage persistence through the change processes, feedback).

Current Study

The present study used the ADKAR model to explore factors that facilitate or hinder faculty participation in a pilot PD program aimed to enhance classroom instructional strategies as an upstream approach to reducing and managing test anxiety experienced by students. Student Wellness and Accessibility Services staff at the University of Calgary, in collaboration with instructor stakeholders, developed the PD program, which was made available on the institution's Teaching and Learning website (<https://taylorinstitute.ucalgary.ca/resources/module/test-anxiety>). The program included 6 modules: 1) introduction to test anxiety, 2) identifying and respond to students experiencing test anxiety, 3) talking about tests in the classroom, 4) design decisions for exams, 5) growth mindset, and 6) working with feedback. The program was intended to provide faculty with tangible strategies to support students in returning to the classroom from online instruction and to in-person exams. A self-paced, online format was used to provide flexibility in when and how faculty engaged with the material. Despite these considerations, participation in the PD program was limited, leading us to the current study exploring what motivated or impeded faculty engagement in PD for advancing teaching practices.

Methods

Recruitment and Participants

The target population for the pilot PD program included university-level faculty (i.e., all ranks and streams) and graduate teaching assistants at a major comprehensive western Canadian university who were currently teaching or had recently taught undergraduate-level courses that utilized tests as an assessment method. After obtaining ethics approval, three rounds of recruitment occurred between August 2022 and May 2023. A variety of recruitment strategies were employed to address the low rates of participation in the pilot PD program. Specifically, the PD program was marketed through a series of targeted emails to Faculty list-servs and all instructors of record for Registrar-scheduled final exams during the 2022-2023 Fall and Winter semesters. The second author also completed personal outreach to departments/faculties that use

tests as a form of assessment. While many faculty expressed interest in the PD program, participation remained low.

Sixteen people completed the 4-hour, self-paced, pilot PD program and were invited to participate in a follow-up focus group. We ran two separate focus groups with a total of seven participants. The first focus group included three faculty and one graduate teaching assistant, while the second focus group comprised three faculty. Among the participants, four were from the natural sciences disciplines, two were from the health sciences, and one was from the humanities.

Focus Group Material and Procedure

Focus groups were used to better understand faculty and teaching assistants' perceptions about the content of the PD program, along with their experiences participating in PD more generally. We adopted a strengths-based approach, focusing on participants who successfully completed the PD program. However, the aim of the focus groups was ultimately to acquire insights into the factors that either facilitated or impeded participants' and their colleagues' involvement in PD programs for teaching development.

Invitations to participate in an online focus group via Zoom were extended to consenting individuals. Focus group sessions were audio recorded and subsequently transcribed for data analysis purposes. The sessions were co-facilitated by two research team members, who posed questions to the participants using a semi-structured interview guide. Each focus group session lasted approximately 1.5 hours. As a token of appreciation for their time, each participant received a letter of acknowledgement and a \$20 gift card.

Qualitative Analysis

We completed a deductive thematic analysis of the focus group data, adhering to the guidelines proposed by Braun and Clark (2006) and guided by the ADKAR model (Hiatt, 2006). We chose the ADKAR model for our analysis because it places emphasis on the individuals affected by the change, rather than solely focusing on the change itself. Given the self-directed nature of our PD program, which emphasizes the intentional actions of individual faculty, we also sought to highlight the experiences of the program participants.

After familiarization with the data, the analysis began by utilizing the five key outcomes outlined in the ADKAR model as initial themes. Quotes were systematically extracted from the data and categorized under the relevant pre-existing themes, while subthemes emerged during this process. The findings were thoroughly reviewed to identify patterns and connections among the codes, and the themes were further refined in relation to the research's purpose. No software was employed for the process of data analysis. Data analysis led to new insights about facilitators of and barriers to faculty engagement with the pilot PD program.

Results

Our analysis produced five primary themes that aligned with the five ADKAR outcomes, shedding light on instructors' engagement in PD opportunities.

Awareness

Participants recognized the necessity for changes in teaching and assessment practices to be responsive to an evolving post-secondary context. As one participant stated, “just coming off COVID... there (are) so many factors and changes in learning, and we're not knowing how to respond in a lot of ways.” Another participant acknowledged a noticeable increase in student anxiety, which “is something (he) has been struggling to deal with.” These contextual changes served as a catalyst for their engagement in this PD program, hoping to acquire skills to better support their students. A participant also highlighted how departmental awareness prompted a curriculum review focused on addressing heightened student anxiety. The outcome of awareness was consistently described by participants, emphasizing its crucial role in initiating change.

Desire

Within this theme, participants discussed the challenges they faced in developing the desire to engage in PD and instructional changes, despite being aware of the need for change. High workloads emerged as a significant barrier. Most participants highlighted the significant impact of large class sizes, which consumed a substantial amount of their time and made it difficult to “know (their) students.” Additionally, accumulated fatigue reduced individuals' desire for change. One participant highlighted how “some old professors are [burnt out] and biding [their] time until they retire,” resulting in a lack of interest in change. These personal and institutional barriers collectively contributed to a diminished desire for change among the participants, underscoring the importance of addressing such barriers, and promoting faculty well-being and positive work experiences.

Knowledge

Participants emphasized the significance of their own knowledge in driving changes in teaching and assessment. They recognized the value of the content included in the PD program, particularly in areas such as test setup and effective communication with students. They also appreciated the research referenced in the program. Additionally, participants indicated that learning new knowledge facilitated their interests in change. For example, a participant noted that “anything related to mental health [discussed in the PD] . . . was useful” and has informed their teaching and interactions with students. However, some participants recommended opportunities for collaboration with colleagues to be integrated into the PD program (e.g., a community of practice). They highlighted that change occurs at a system-wide level and affects all stakeholders, emphasizing the need for collaborative efforts to facilitate knowledge sharing.

Ability

Participants expressed their concerns about the lack of systemic support, which hindered their ability to implement changes. Large class sizes were highlighted as a catalyst for changes in teaching practices, but also as a barrier. However, participants felt unsupported by the institution in addressing these challenges. One participant stated that with the increasing number of students per class, “the amount of commitment and hours and the emails... [are] a lot to ask for” with little support from the institution in addressing these changes. Similarly, another participant shared that they “typically teach 7 [courses] a year, so trying to find time [for PD that supports change] is tricky... until I was on sabbatical.” Despite the need for systemic support, our data suggested a common pattern of limited institutional involvement in addressing the barriers to faculty participation in teaching development programs, which further limits individual faculty member’s ability to make instructional changes.

Reinforcements

Reinforcements play a critical role in sustaining and supporting the change process in PD participation. One participant said, “I think a lot of us like certificates. They look good on merit and (is) a good way to motivate some of us to take [PD].” The role of institutions in recognizing and promoting PD was also discussed, including the suggestion of incorporating new programs, like the pilot program, as “badges” for the teaching portfolio and integrating them into existing workshops and programs to generate more interest. The topic of mandatory training was raised, suggesting that it could reinforce faculty engagement in PD. While others argued that “as soon as you mandate something, nobody wants to do it.” Overall, system-based reinforcements were seen as vital for sustaining individual participation in PD and facilitating the change process.

Discussion

In this qualitative study, we explored what factors motivated or impeded faculty engagement in a pilot PD program addressing instructional strategies for managing and responding to test anxiety in the university classroom. Through focus group discussions, participants identified facilitators and barriers related to the five key outcomes of change outlined in the ADKAR change management framework. Notably, our findings underscored the importance of the university administration in enhancing faculty participation in PD, recognizing its role in supporting instructors to respond and adapt to the ever-changing landscape of post-secondary education. Moreover, our analysis highlighted staff well-being as a central component of individual-level change, emphasizing the need for systemic support in this regard.

Responsive leadership and university administration can effectively support meaningful engagement in teaching practice PD for faculty, while responding to the evolving landscape in the postsecondary environment (e.g., changes in in-person and online learning). This entails more than expecting faculty to make surface-level changes on their own; it involves providing necessary resources (Rodriguez et al., 2022) and fostering a departmental culture that motivates faculty engagement through shared governance processes (Burleigh et al., 2021). Addressing

workload and recognition models is essential, allowing faculty to view PD as complementary to their work rather than as competing interests (Pisapia et al., 2017; Halladay et al., 2022). McMaster University's mental health-focused PD initiatives serves as a successful example, where leadership explicitly supported these opportunities, prioritizing PD integration into strategic plans (Halladay et al., 2022). Additionally, rethinking recognition structures, such as tenure and promotion, and considering the use of training certifications for career progression can further incentivize participation in PD (Hoffman, 2016; Yilmaz et al., 2022). By implementing these strategies, the system can create an environment that actively supports and recognizes the value of ongoing PD in responding to changes in post-secondary environments.

High workloads, fatigue, and burnout are significant barriers that hinder faculty participation in PD programs and adversely affect their overall well-being (Sabagh et al., 2018). Despite faculty expressing interest in teaching development opportunities, the present study experienced low participation rates, reinforcing the challenges faced by faculty to participate in such learning activities. Time constraints emerged as the primary barrier to engagement in PD, aligning with existing research highlighting the increasing demands on faculty for research and teaching (Lee et al., 2022). Furthermore, the ongoing changes in teaching practices, exacerbated by the pandemic, have contributed to emotional exhaustion and higher levels of burnout among faculty (Paulz & Diede, 2022; Sabagh et al., 2018). Decreased well-being of faculty ultimately diminishes their desire to participate in PD. Therefore, it is crucial for the post-secondary system to prioritize and address the overall well-being of faculty to foster their active engagement in PD and promote meaningful change that is responsive to the ever-evolving learning needs of the student population.

Conclusion

In a dynamic post-secondary environment, faculty and institutions are expected to respond to students' changing needs in learning by adopting novel practices in teaching and assessment. By analyzing faculty feedback about engaging in the current PD program, this paper demonstrated the value of viewing teaching and learning PD as a change management project rather than following traditional processes for learning design. To ensure successful engagement in professional development, the post-secondary system must revamp its strategies, foster a positive culture that embraces growth and learning, and prioritize the overall well-being of faculty. Moreover, a change management framework can be used to situate teaching and learning PD into the strategic plans of departments, faculties, and universities, more broadly. By taking these measures, institutions can effectively support instructors in enhancing their pedagogical approaches and provide a more enriching educational experience for students.

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