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Improving Online Student Engagement in the Online Classroom

Emily Chen-Bendle

Western University, echenben@uwo.ca

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Abstract

This Organizational Improvement Plan seeks to address inadequate online student engagement within online classrooms at University X. Inadequate student engagement risks students' learning, persistence, performance, and academic achievement (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzi, & Gonyea, 2008; Meyer, 2014; Pardo, Han, & Ellis, 2016; Phan, McNeil, & Robin, 2016), demonstrating the pressing need to improve online student engagement. This work is undertaken in the context of substantial growth in online education, accelerated in the short term by a movement to online delivery of face-to-face post-secondary education necessitated by the coronavirus pandemic of 2020. The author considers this problem from a non-traditional leadership role of an adjunct online instructor, and so employs distributed leadership, as enacted through teacher leadership, from the vantage point of constructivism. The assumptions of emergent and continuous change which underpin this result in the selection of Weick and Quinn's (1999) freeze, rebalance, unfreeze framework for leading change and sensemaking as a tool to conduct a critical organizational analysis, in alignment with the author's constructivist perspective. The author recommends engaging in a period of individual modifications to her instructional practice, followed by the development of a Community of Practice. This Community of Practice will collaboratively build a definition of online student engagement and develop relevant changes to practice designed to improve online student engagement in the online classrooms of the Community of Practice. Communication is a critical element of this plan as the author must engage colleagues and build momentum with limited resources.

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Keywords: online student engagement, teacher leadership, distributed leadership, constructivism, social constructionism, community of practice

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Executive Summary

This Organizational Improvement Plan focuses on improving online student engagement in online classrooms at University X. Research indicates that inadequate student engagement risks students' learning, persistence, performance, and academic achievement (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzi, & Gonyea, 2008; Meyer, 2014; Pardo, Han, & Ellis, 2016; Phan, McNeil, & Robin, 2016), demonstrating the value and importance of improving online student engagement.

Chapter 1 includes a discussion of the author's leadership position and lens. The author is an adjunct online instructor at University X, a small university located in Ontario, Canada. Distributed leadership (Gronn, 2000) and teacher leadership (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; Silva, Gimbert, & Nolan, 2000) are employed to align with the author's role in the organization. The author approaches this work from the perspective of constructivism.

The author addresses the Problem of Practice (PoP), which focuses on inadequate online student engagement in the online classroom at University X. Relevant factors which frame this PoP are discussed, including the growth of online education, the prevalence of a survey which measures institutional student engagement, called the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), and controversy and lack of consistency surrounding the use of the term student engagement in academic literature. A vision for change in the author's online classroom and those of her fellow online instructors is articulated. This effort will close two gaps: a conceptual gap and a practice gap. The chapter concludes with a discussion of some of the challenges and potential impediments to change, including mixed organizational readiness for change.

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Chapter 2 discusses how the PoP will be addressed including how the conceptual and practice gaps will be closed. This will leverage distributed and teacher leadership (Gronn, 2000; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; Silva et al., 2000) as discussed in Chapter 1. Weick and Quinn's (1999) freeze, rebalance, unfreeze model is selected as a framework for leading change, as it is designed to address situations in which change is emergent and continuous. These stages will translate to observing and analyzing existing policy and practice, identifying opportunities for improvement, acting on those observations, and then sharing findings with the broader organization, therefore relinquishing some control of the process and outcomes. A critical organizational analysis is then undertaken, using sensemaking (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005), selected for the analysis because of its alignment with constructivism, emergent change, and with the author's position in the organization. Three solutions are proposed. The chosen solution begins with individual modifications to the instructor's practice, followed by leveraging a Community of Practice (CoP) (Wenger, 2011) to craft a definition of online student engagement and refine practice related to online student engagement in online classrooms. Finally, ethical implications of the OIP are discussed, and the author's alignment with Stefkovich and O'Brien's (2004) best interests of the student model are made clear.

Chapter 3 details the implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and communication plans required to bring the recommended solution into existence. The goal of the implementation plan is broken into three SMART objectives, which connect to the three main initiatives in the implementation plan: modifications to individual practice, the development of the Community of Practice, and Community of Practice discussions and practice changes. Stakeholder reactions to change and empowerment are discussed,

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as are potential issues and mitigation plans, how momentum will be built, and limitations of the plan. Monitoring and evaluation are then considered. The focus of this discussion is on monitoring and evaluation of two central and complex aspects of the plan: collaborative efforts essential to the OIP, and online student engagement in online classrooms. The Adoption Continuum (Cawsey, Deszca, & Ingols, 2016) is proposed as a tool to monitor collaboration. Several potential tools to evaluate online student engagement are explored. The author acknowledges that refinements to the plan may need to be made based on this monitoring and evaluation and highlights the important role of the communication plan in those refinements. The communication plan is then presented, including messages and strategies for communicating those messages to the Community of Practice. The OIP concludes with a consideration of next steps and future considerations.

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Acronyms

CoP (Community of Practice)

LMS (Learning Management System)

NSSE (National Survey of Student Engagement)

OIP (Organizational Improvement Plan)

PoP (Problem of Practice)

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Glossary of Terms

Adjunct Instructor: An instructor employed on a contract basis, often course by course.

This could be in a face-to-face or an online capacity.

Community of Practice: Informal groups, often of colleagues in an organization, who typically have common professional interests and backgrounds (Wenger & Snyder, 2000).

Constructivism: A worldview founded on the belief that reality is constructed or created by individuals or groups (Schwandt, 1994).

Distributed Leadership: A form of leadership in which leadership is spread across multiple individuals, who work together collaboratively and synergistically (Gronn, 2000; Gronn, 2002).

Learning Management System: Software commonly used in educational environments to facilitate such functions as communication, assessment, and reporting.

National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE): A commonly used survey which assesses institutional level student engagement.

Post-secondary Education: Education which occurs after the completion of secondary school, or high school.

Sensemaking: An activity that is concerned with crystallizing an understanding of the past through communication and employing that communication as a mechanism to decide how to move forward (Weick et al., 2005).

Social Constructionism: A form of constructivism in which verbal and non-verbal communication and social interaction are central to the creation of meaning (Schwandt, 1994).

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Teacher Leadership: Leadership by teachers (Harris, 2003) which often employs influence (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; York-Barr & Duke, 2004) and collaboration (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; Silva, Gimbert, & Nolan, 2000).

Chapter 1: Introduction and Problem

The environment surrounding this Organizational Improvement Plan (OIP) is one in which the opportunity presented by the growth in online education is paired with increased interest in external monitoring of post-secondary performance. Within this context, administrative and instructional staff at University X believe that online student engagement is not adequate in online classrooms. Research demonstrates the significance of such a concern, indicating that inadequate student engagement risks students' learning, persistence, performance, and academic achievement (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzi, & Gonyea, 2008; Meyer, 2014; Pardo, Han, & Ellis, 2016; Phan, McNeil, & Robin, 2016). This OIP seeks to address online student engagement in online classrooms within University X, to ensure online students are able to successfully achieve outcomes such as those listed above. University X's heritage and orientation to prioritize excellence in teaching may support a significant consideration of online student engagement. Chapter 1 outlines the Problem of Practice and its context, the author's leadership position, and her vision for change.

Organizational Context

The focal organization of this OIP is University X, a small university located in Ontario, Canada, which serves mostly undergraduate students. University X became a chartered university in the last few decades (University X, n.d.a), and is therefore amongst the youngest of Canada's universities. However, it was founded nearly a century before this time as a normal school, one of many schools set up to train teachers (Bohan & Null, 2007). This heritage may in part account for the organization's focus on teaching practice and student experience.

An analysis of political, economic, social, and technological factors acting on University X highlights several factors of particular relevance to this OIP. The recent emergence of the global coronavirus pandemic has a significant impact on many elements of this analysis and is therefore incorporated into this discussion. However due to its recency and its unprecedented nature, the exact magnitude and shape that impact will take is still unknown.

As a result of political pressures, there has been increased interest in external monitoring of post-secondary education. In his discussion of the impact of neoliberalism on higher education, Busch (2017) laments, “the administration of universities and research institutes has been restructured so as to . . . promote managerial control and hierarchy” (p. 48). This has resulted in the development and deployment of tools such as the National Survey of Student Engagement. This tool is used by University X on a periodic basis as a mechanism to measure student engagement on campus (University X, n.d.c). The tool and critiques of it are elaborated on later in this OIP. Additionally, political changes at both the provincial and federal levels have a significant impact on University X, particularly with respect to funding for both students and the institution. For example, the Ontario provincial government transition in 2018 has resulted in tuition and student aid cuts (Friesen, 2019).

The global coronavirus pandemic has already begun to have a devastating impact on the economy. IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva projects it will result in, “a recession at least as bad as during the global financial crisis or worse” (International Monetary Fund, 2020). Such an economic contraction will put a significant strain on Canadian universities, impacting governmental funding sources and tuition revenues.

These losses will be exacerbated if the actions to suppress the coronavirus take the form of continued travel bans which will affect international student tuition revenue (Usher, 2020). While the travel bans are a result more of political than economic factors, they will have a significant effect on the finances of Canadian universities. And such an impact on finances may exacerbate issues like universities' dependence on precarious labor, most notably adjunct instructors such as the author of this OIP. While difficult to specifically quantify, adjunct instructors are growing in numbers at Canadian universities (Usher, 2014). Financial constraints may lead to continued dependence on this labor force.

Relevant social factors include rising enrollments in higher education and changing demographics of undergraduate students in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2017). Notable examples of those changing demographics include recent growth in the attainment of bachelor's and higher degrees by lone-parent family mothers and Aboriginal people in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2017). Stone (2017) highlights the increased access opportunities presented by online education for students such as these.

The growth in online education is a significant technological factor impacting University X. Its rapid recent growth in Canada, "up by 52% since 2011, at the rate of roughly 10% per annum over the years 2011 to 2015" (Bates, Desbiens, Donovan, Martel, Mayer, Paul, Poulin, & Seaman, 2017, p. 15) and continued growth (Johnson, Donovan, Seaman, & Bates, 2019) have created opportunities to pursue higher education for those previously unable to do so. The speed of its adoption has led to a sizable base of students and instructors using platforms for which best practices and expectations are still developing and emerging.

The most current technological development is the recent temporary shift to online delivery of teaching by many post-secondary institutions, including University X, in response to social distancing measures undertaken to combat the coronavirus pandemic during the spring of 2020. Future anticipated waves of coronavirus outbreaks (Jackson, 2020) might necessitate additional or longer term returns to online delivery of post-secondary education. While Carey (2020) notes that this is not so much a true shift to online education as “conducting traditional education at a distance,” this shift will certainly expose many post-secondary students, instructors, and administrators to the opportunity that online education presents, perhaps whetting appetite for further growth in online education. Govindarajan and Srivastava (2020) question whether this “experimentation” will result in a significant shift to online teaching.

Combined, these factors contribute to an environment characterized by uncertainty and change, paired with an increased interest in external monitoring. This has particular relevance for University X, but also for this OIP.

Vision, Mission, Values, Purpose, and Goals

Several sections of University X’s mission and vision statements are particularly relevant to this OIP, and indicate a focus on delivering excellence in teaching, and serving remote populations.

Among a small handful of statements in University X’s mission statement, the University writes that it “recognize[s] our particular role in supporting northern communities” (University X, n.d.b). This is clearly important to the university, and relevant to this OIP as online education can be an essential tool in reaching populations with inequitable access, such as geographically remote populations. Efforts to improve

online student engagement in online classrooms may as a result be well received and supported.

University X's mission statement, vision statement, and goals, derived from its discussion of priorities, all emphasize its commitment to teaching (University X, n.d.b). This suggests that University X will be receptive to initiatives designed to improve student engagement, as it has been connected to related outcomes, including learning, persistence, performance, and academic achievement (Kuh et al., 2008; Meyer, 2014; Pardo et al., 2016; Phan et al., 2016).

These statements indicate that University X's purpose is largely to serve undergraduate students, including those in remote populations. The university aspires to be one that delivers excellence in education and through that supports the community, including geographically remote communities. This aspiration aligns with the purpose of this OIP.

Organizational Structure

University X has a bicameral structure, comprised of a Board of Governors and an Academic Senate. The University President is part of both the Board and the Senate. The Senate is responsible for "educational policies . . . and any matter of academic concern" (University X., n.d.a); while the Board responsibilities are "to govern the university, its property and revenues, its business and affairs, with the exception of those matters assigned to Senate" (University X, n.d.a.). Occasionally, there is overlap between the Senate and Board's responsibilities, and in such cases the final decision rests with the Board. For example, the Senate may "consider and recommend policies to the Board policies concerning the allocation or use of University resources for academic purposes"

(University X., n.d.a). Curriculum and academic planning are direct responsibilities of the Senate (University X., n.d.a), which has a number of committees relevant to this OIP.

The program in which this Problem of Practice (PoP) is situated is a degree completion and distance program within the business school. These programs are delivered both in blended as well as purely online formats. Within this program, the author has direct contact with an administrative representative, but otherwise has experienced an environment which largely allows for significant autonomy. However, certain structural elements have been put in place which enable the university to create a consistent experience for students. For example, the course taught by this instructor is pre-packaged, meaning that many elements of the course are not at the discretion of individual instructors. Additionally, the course is often team-taught in a blended delivery.

Leadership Position and Lens Statement

I am an adjunct online instructor hired by University X on a semester-by-semester basis. I do not have staff that report directly to me. I connect with university administrators, staff, and fellow instructors for specific, functional reasons (e.g., when there is a task to be accomplished or an issue to be addressed). The most substantial interactions I have with those in my organization are with the students in my online courses. As a result, my current direct sphere of influence is relatively small. However, the organization has been receptive to change initiated by me in the past, which indicates potential opportunity for me to influence the organization through collaboration with others at University X.

The nature of my role impacts the leadership theories used in this OIP. I draw on distributed leadership theory (Gronn, 2000). Additionally, I consider how this intersects

with literature on teacher leadership (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; Silva, Gimbert, & Nolan, 2000), as Harris (2003) argues that the literature on teacher leadership describes an enactment of distributed leadership theory. Finally, this OIP is informed by constructivism (Schwandt, 1994) and social constructionism (Gergen, 1985).

My objective is to improve the organization by modifying and enhancing my online teaching practice, and by collaborating with other online instructors in the organization to collectively improve practice within online classrooms at University X.

Constructivism

This OIP is undertaken from the vantage point of constructivism, and draws on both constructivism and social constructionism (Gergen, 1985), the latter of which is a constructivist school of thought. Central to constructivism is a belief that reality is constructed or created by individuals or groups (Schwandt, 1994). Schwandt (1994) describes this noting, “Constructivists are deeply committed to the . . . view that what we take to be objective knowledge and truth is the result of perspective. Knowledge and truth are created, not discovered by mind” (p. 236). Inherent in constructivism is an elevation of perspective, perhaps best contrasted to positivism. For example, Guba and Lincoln (1994) observe that positivists believe the nature of reality to be “verified hypotheses established as facts or laws,” while constructivists believe it to be “individual reconstructions coalescing around consensus” (p. 112).

Several similar sounding terms are used in different ways in discussions related to constructivism and constructivist learning theory. A brief discussion of these terms follows.

Constructivism and constructivist learning theory. The term constructivism is also used to refer to a learning theory (Hein, 1991). Bada and Olusegun (2015) define the learning theory, noting its roots in the work of Dewey and Piaget, as an “approach to teaching and learning based on the premise that cognition (learning) is the result of ‘mental construction’” (p. 66). There is alignment and overlap between this and Schwandt’s (1994) definition of constructivism, particularly with respect to the creation of knowledge. For the sake of clarity, the use of the word constructivism, in this OIP, does not refer to the learning theory unless otherwise noted.

Social constructionism: Distinct from Papert’s constructionism. Social constructionism (Gergen, 1985) is a form of constructivism (Schwandt, 1995). While the word “constructionism” is present in this term, it is a distinct concept from Papert’s constructionism, which Rob and Rob (2018) describe as a “theory...based on the principle that meaningful learning occurs when individuals actively construct a meaningful product in the real world” (p. 276). Papert’s constructionism is focused explicitly on learning; social constructionism (Gergen, 1985) has a much broader focus.

Social constructionism: A school of constructivist thought. Schwandt (1994) divides constructivism into several schools of thought. One of these constructivist schools of thought is social constructionism (Gergen, 1985). As depicted in Figure 1, Schwandt (1994) categorizes social constructionism as a type of constructivism. Schwandt (1994) describes it, explicitly referencing the work of Gergen, noting, “the focus here is . . . on the collective generation of meaning as shaped by conventions of language and other social processes” (p. 240). In social constructionism, verbal and non-verbal communication and social interaction are central to the creation of meaning.

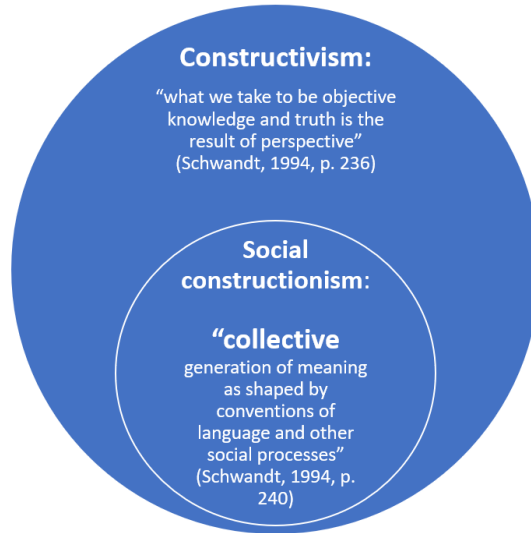


Figure 1. Relationship between constructivism and social constructionism.

Social constructionism impacts the understanding of the past and present (Gergen, 1985), and also shapes the future (Gergen & Gergen, 2004). Understanding the past and the present results from social activity, as Gergen (1985) writes, “From the constructionist position the process of understanding is not automatically driven by the forces of nature, but is the result of an active, cooperative enterprise of persons in relationship” (p. 267). Further, social constructionism shapes the future, as social endeavors provide opportunities to mould reality. As Gergen and Gergen (2004) more colloquially suggest, “In a broader sense, we may say that as we communicate with each other we construct the world in which we live” (p. 11). Gergen and Gergen (2004) acknowledge the creative nature of social construction, and hint at its inherent potential.

Practical application. Two important factors drove the selection of constructivism for this PoP: 1) the focal topic of the PoP; and 2) the role of the author. The first is the focal topic of the PoP, online student engagement. While *online* student engagement as an academic topic of study is in its relative infancy, student engagement

has been considered and debated at length. This debate, discussed below, illustrates the socially constructed nature of “student engagement.” It does not exist independently of what those who study it and use it agree that it means. Further, practitioners, in agreeing upon its meaning are shaping the way that practice is designed, in effect, shaping the reality for instructors and their students. The author’s constructivist perspective allows her to acknowledge that the concept student engagement is constructed by those who use it. Therefore, the author, as a constructivist, does not need to accept the standing definition of student engagement as a given. Further, viewing the concept as a constructivist, the author acknowledges the impact that the definition has on practice and on the students and instructors learning and teaching in an environment framed by its definition.

The second factor is the role of the author. The social constructionist perspective acknowledges that leadership, like all reality, is socially constructed (Gergen, 1985). As an adjunct online instructor approaching a problem such as this from a leadership perspective, the social construction of leadership becomes even more apparent. The author needs to construct herself as a leader first independently, and then collaboratively construct leadership with her peers through language, dialogue, and social conventions (Tourish & Barge, 2010) in order to effect change.

Further, crafting an OIP from a constructivist perspective has three implications: 1) it impacts the understanding of the past and present; 2) it impacts the potential for the future; and 3) it impacts the way in which leadership is conceived. First, it impacts the understanding of the past and present. In the context of this OIP, this means that the perspective of the author is validated and legitimized in analyses. Sensemaking (Weick,

Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005), with its theoretical alignment with constructivism (Craig-Lees, 2001; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015), takes on additional relevance and importance, and is employed in the Critical Organization Analysis of this OIP.

The second is that language and other social behaviors, as seen through the eyes of a social constructionist, can be used as tools to construct the future. Gergen and Gergen (2004) further elaborate on this, inspirationally suggesting, “As we speak together, listen to new voices, raise questions, ponder alternative metaphors, and play at the edges of reason, we cross the threshold into new worlds of meaning. The future is ours — together — to create” (p. 12). Words, language, and definitions matter, and their selection and use can have a decisive impact on how reality is shaped. In the context of this OIP, this emphasizes the importance of the definition of online student engagement as a pivotal and shaping decision in the execution of this plan. Finally, constructivism, and particularly social constructionism, impact the way in which leadership is imagined and employed.

Social constructionism and leadership. Fairhurst and Grant (2010) explore the implications of social constructionism on leadership, noting that “Social constructionist leadership approaches commonly exhibit two interrelated characteristics. First, they eschew a leader-centric approach Second, emphasis is given to leadership as a co-constructed reality” (p. 175). Tourish and Barge (2010) elaborate on this, emphasizing the importance of “discourse” (p. 325) and the focus on “the communicative practice of individuals and the construction of social arrangements” (p. 327). They note an advantage of social constructionist leadership is “its focus on articulating the multiple voices that comprise a situation” (p. 335). Fairhurst and Grant (2010) and Tourish and Barge (2010) together present a vision of social constructionist leadership which departs from heroic

leadership, in which leadership is participatively created, in which perspectives of multiple stakeholders in a situation are incorporated, and in which language and social interactions take on particular importance as tools through which leadership is constructed. This vision shared many points of alignment with Gronn's (2000) definition of distributed leadership, as is discussed in the following section. Further, it provides insights into how leadership could be socially constructed to drive a collaborative effort to improve online student engagement in the online classroom, in which social conventions, language, and receptiveness to multiple perspectives are drawn on to build a collective vision of leadership.

Distributed Leadership

The author turns to distributed leadership in developing this OIP. In particular, her use of distributed leadership aligns with writings of Gronn (2000) and Robinson (2008). In Gronn's (2000) description, distributed leadership is defined by its use of "conjoint agency" (p. 318), in which leadership is spread across multiple individuals, who work collaboratively and synergistically in "concertive action" (Gronn, 2002, p. 429). Distributed leadership (Gronn, 2000) is most readily contrasted with more prevalent leadership theories, which focus on the leader as a single individual. Further, "concertive action" is contrasted with "aggregated, individual acts" (Gronn, 2002, p. 429). In other words, distributed leadership relies on multiple individuals leading, not by merely splitting up and recombining efforts, but by collaborating and coordinating.

Connections to social constructionism. In Gronn's (2000) description of distributed leadership, the key points that Fairhurst and Grant (2010) and Tourish and Barge (2010) made to describe leadership shaped by social constructionism are evident.

Gronn's (2000) conjoint agency does not center on a single leader (Tourish & Barge, 2010). Further, the "co-constructed reality" (Tourish & Barge, 2010, p. 175) central to social constructionist leadership is suggested by Gronn's (2002) concertive action—particularly in certain manifestations of it such as "the intuitive understanding that develops as part of close working relations among colleagues" (p. 429). Finally, the focus on communication found in the literature on social constructionism (Fairhurst and Grant, 2010) is essential to the collaborative nature of distributed leadership (Gronn, 2000).

Related concepts and definitions. Gronn's (2000) definition of distributed leadership shares commonalities with those of other significant distributed leadership theorists. For example, Harris' (2014b) definition also focuses on multiple individuals contributing to leadership, which she describes as, "shared influence that can contribute to positive organizational improvement and change" (p. 12). Spillane (2005) defines distributed leadership, noting it "is first and foremost about leadership practice" (p. 144) which "takes shape in the interactions of leaders, followers, and their situation" (p. 149). For Spillane (2005), there is again a concept of multiple leaders, but his conception of distributed leadership elevates the importance of the situation. There are additional points of difference between descriptions and definitions of distributed leadership, including the amount of emphasis and importance of formal leaders in distributed leadership (Harris, 2014b; Robinson, 2009). Robinson (2008) describes an egalitarian conception of distributed leadership that is less reliant on those with formal authority as, "leadership as distributed influence," noting that "the concept embraces the social dimension of leadership This source of influence is important in schools where the professional culture typically constrains reliance on positional authority" (p. 249). She argues that it,

“can make more expertise available to staff if those with relevant expertise are willing and able to exercise leadership” (Robinson, 2008, p. 254). Robinson’s (2008) description provides a glimpse of what distributed leadership might look like for this author, an adjunct online instructor, working to address a PoP.

Appropriateness given the position of the author. While there are varying opinions about the importance of formal leaders in distributed leadership (Harris, 2014b; Robinson, 2009), distributed leadership can be employed by both those with positional authority and those with limited positional authority in an organization (Robinson, 2009). Robinson (2009) elaborates on this idea, writing “there are three broad indicators of distributed leadership; those based on the distribution of formal leadership positions or role, on the distribution of so-called leadership tasks and those based, directly or indirectly, on the distribution of interpersonal influence” (p. 225). Robinson (2009) describes leadership conceived of in the latter way as “extend[ing] beyond positional authority” (p. 225), noting “[w]hile positional authority may be available to a limited number of organisational members, the other two sources of leadership influence – personal qualities and relevant expertise – are open to any member of the organisation” (p. 225). Robinson’s (2009) argument that those with limited positional authority can employ distributed leadership is in alignment with this author’s role, which has limited positional authority, as an adjunct online instructor in University X, indicating its relevance and appropriateness to the author .

Gronn (2000) also points to aspects of distributed leadership which make it an appropriate theory to draw on given the position of this author, noting it is “fluid and emergent” (p. 324) and not necessarily initiated by formal leaders in the organization. For

example, Gronn (2002) proposes one manifestation of distributed leadership as “intuitive understandings . . . known to emerge over time when two or more organization members rely on each other and develop a close working relationship.” (p. 430). As it is “emergent” (Gronn, 2000, p. 324), as illustrated in this example, and does not need to be driven by formal leaders in an organization (Gronn, 2000; Robinson, 2009), distributed leadership is an appropriate theory for this author to use in this OIP.

Practical application through teacher leadership. In online research oriented towards practitioners, Harris (2014a) offers advice about how distributed leadership could be utilized, suggesting, “One practical way forward is to create strong collaborative teams . . . where leadership is naturally and authentically distributed.” Harris (2003) further proposes that distributed leadership is practically enacted through teacher leadership, noting “the literature and associated empirical work on teacher leadership provides an important starting point in understanding and illuminating how distributed leadership actually works in schools” (Harris, 2003, p. 318). Harris (2003) presents a persuasive case for drawing on distributed leadership theory and pairing it with the practical guidance provided by literature on teacher leadership.

Teacher Leadership

There is a stream of literature which connects teacher leadership in the classroom to student outcomes, including student engagement. While this work is frequently situated in face-to-face classrooms, much is readily transferrable to the online environment. Umbach and Wawrzynski (2005) note: “the educational context created by faculty behaviors and attitudes has a dramatic effect on student learning and engagement” (p. 18). The impact of teacher leadership on student engagement is significant.

Harris (2003) provides a definition of teacher leadership, noting that it “essentially refers to the exercise of leadership by teachers, regardless of position or designation” (p. 316). Other authors have provided expanded definitions and descriptions. Present in these definitions are recurring themes of collaboration, influence, and focus on improved teaching practice. These themes are relevant and appropriate for this author to use in her efforts to improve online student engagement in online classrooms, given her informal leadership role and the teaching practice-oriented nature of the PoP. Katzenmeyer and Moller’s (2009) definition incorporates all three themes of collaboration, influence, and practice: “teacher leaders lead within and beyond the classroom; identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders, influence others toward improved educational practice” (p. 6). York-Barr and Duke’s (2004) summary of their literature review also shares common themes of collaboration, influence, and practice, “teacher leadership is the process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues . . . to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement” (pp. 287-288). Silva, Gimbert, and Nolan (2000) subtly allude to influence and collaboration, as they observe that the current generation of teacher leaders “navigate the structures of schools . . . nurture relationships . . . encourage professional growth. . . help others with change . . . challenge the status quo by raising children’s voices” (p. 793). Silva et al.’s (2000) description of teacher leadership, in alignment with the definition crafted by Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009), is founded on teaching practice, and has a strong emphasis on interaction with the larger organization.

While the literature on teacher leadership is not as developed as the literature on some leadership theories, Harris (2003) suggests it is closely linked to distributed leadership, and in fact is a practical manifestation of distributed leadership. Harris (2003) observes that there are multiple uses and definitions of the term teacher leadership and, “Whatever specific definition of teacher leadership one chooses to adopt, it is clear that its emphasis upon collective action, empowerment and shared agency is reflected in distributed leadership theory” (p. 317). Harris (2003) draws a clear connection between distributed leadership theory and teacher leadership.

This connection to distributed leadership is particularly apparent in discussions of collaboration, as referenced in teacher leadership literature. The collaboration inherent in Silva et al.’s (2000) description of teacher leadership is referred to by Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) as “contribut[ing] to a community of teacher learners and leaders” (p. 6) and “build[ing] communities and collaboratively find[ing] ways to make a difference for students” (p. 9). York-Barr and Duke (2004) offer “Teacher leaders lead by maintaining a focus on teaching and learning and by establishing trusting and constructive relationships” (p. 290). These observations are reflective of foundational qualities of distributed leadership, especially in Gronn’s (2002) discussion of concertive action. Gronn (2002) describes a form of concertive action in which, “intuitive understandings are known to emerge over time when two or more organization members rely on each other and develop a close working relationship. In this instance, leadership is manifest in the shared role space encompassed by their partnership” (p. 430).

Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) note that teacher leaders frequently do not have positional authority in their organizations. In fact, they describe teacher leadership as

often incorporating influence, “a key word in our notion of teacher leadership is influence Leadership is influencing Formal positions are not necessary to influence others” (p. 9-10). York-Barr and Duke’s (2004) definition of teacher leadership also focuses on the use of influence. As an adjunct online instructor, this author also has limited positional authority in her organization. Teacher leadership literature suggests influence is therefore an appropriate strategy to use.

Drawing on teacher leadership literature in this OIP includes continuing to focus on students in the online classroom and building expertise with respect to online student engagement that will help establish credibility with peers. It will also involve collaborating with other teacher leaders, using influence, and focusing on improved teaching practice. There is alignment with this description of teacher leadership and the author’s current role, but also potential in this description to effect change with respect to the PoP—particularly because of its emphasis on improved teaching practice. Making use of distributed leadership as a teacher leader, viewed from a constructivist and social constructionist perspective, provides a robust path to explore this PoP. The implications of this are discussed throughout this OIP.

Leadership Problem of Practice

Within the context of this growth and change in post-secondary online education, delivering programs that enable online student engagement has become essential. Yet this author currently teaches in a program in which online student engagement in online classrooms is deemed inadequate by instructional and administrative staff. Academic literature addresses the importance of student engagement. Kuh et al. (2008) conclude that, “student engagement in educationally purposeful activities had a small but

statistically significant effect on first-year grades” (p. 547) and, “[s]tudent engagement in educationally purposeful activities during the first year of college had a positive, statistically significant effect on persistence” (p. 551). More broadly, Meyer (2014) notes, “participation matters, involvement matters, and participation and involvement affect engagement, which in turn affects student learning” (p. 70). Connections have also been made between engagement and performance (Phan et al., 2016) and engagement and academic achievement (Pardo et al., 2016). This raises considerable concerns about the effects of low student engagement.

Symptoms of this problem have become apparent to both administrative and instructional staff. Administration’s personal assessments of post-semester student phone calls and responses to open ended questions in surveys suggest low student engagement. Similarly, this author’s observations as an online instructor in the program regarding quantity of survey responses, frequency of interactions with students, frequency of inter-student interactions and instructor beliefs about comprehension of material taught also indicate that online student engagement in online classrooms is not adequate. These symptoms demonstrate a pressing need to improve online student engagement in the online classroom at University X.

The author’s sphere of influence most directly includes students in her online classes. Additionally, conversations with colleagues in the organization have revealed an interest in improving online student engagement in online classrooms which would allow this author to partner with colleagues in the organization, in particular other online instructors. The Problem of Practice is inadequate online student engagement in online classrooms at University X.

Framing the Problem of Practice

The Problem of Practice (PoP) sits at the meeting place of a revolutionary trend in educational practice, online education, and a controversial topic in educational literature, student engagement. In order to build a plan to address the PoP, an analysis of relevant scholarly and grey literature was undertaken. This work situates the PoP in the appropriate context, both with respect to practice as well as research. Importantly, it also ensures that the OIP leverages existing relevant scholarly work.

Growth of Online Education

Student engagement is connected to students' learning, persistence, performance, and academic achievement (Kuh et al., 2008; Meyer, 2014; Pardo et al., 2016; Phan et al., 2016), and therefore valuable to students on an individual level. Additionally, as more post-secondary students study online (Bates, et al., 2017; Johnson, et al., 2019), particularly as the coronavirus of 2020 has sparked sizable short-term growth and potential acceleration of long-term growth, the magnitude of the value grows even further. As there are more and more online students, there is a growing opportunity to reap the benefits of improved online student engagement. This occurs in the context of the relatively new field of online education, suggesting that the systems, organizations, and the faculty operating within them may still be learning how best to engage an ever-growing population of students.

The National Survey of Student Engagement

One of the most pervasive conceptions of student engagement is present in the work of George Kuh and is measured by the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). The NSSE, which assesses institutional level engagement, considers, "level of

academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student interactions with faculty members, enriching educational experiences, and supportive campus environment” (Kuh, 2001, p. 13). Student engagement is explained by the administrators of the NSSE as

representing two critical features of collegiate quality. The first is the amount of time and effort students put into their studies and other educationally purposeful activities. The second is how the institution deploys its resources and organizes the curriculum and other learning opportunities to get students to participate in activities that decades of research studies show are linked to student learning. (NSSE, n.d.)

This particular conception of student engagement has a strong, dominant behavioral component. Zepke (2015) is one of the most passionate critics of this conception of student engagement, and offers, “that what is to be learnt is practical and economically useful in the market place; that learning is about performing in certain ways in order to achieve specified outcomes; and that quality is assured by measurable accountability processes” (p. 695). Berry and Edmond (2014) suggest this is “a process of ‘commodification of the self’” (p. 10).

The NSSE is used widely, including at University X (University X, n.d.c). For example, the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario’s report titled *Canadian Postsecondary Performance: IMPACT 2015* and authored by Weingarten, Hicks, Jonker, Smith, and Arnold (2015) includes NSSE data. Even recent research on online student engagement occasionally appears to default to use of the NSSE, in spite of its questionable applicability to online education (Bryan, Lutte, Lee, O’Neil, Maher, & Hoflunch, 2018; Ma, Han, Yang, & Cheng, 2015; Stott, 2016). Its widespread use positions it as a natural default definition—a reasonable starting place on which to build a plan to improve online student engagement. Yet its critics, its narrow definition of student

engagement, and its institutional focus raise serious concerns about the appropriateness of its application to the context of online student engagement in the online classroom.

Controversy Surrounding the Concept of Student Engagement

The debate surrounding the meaning of the term student engagement is important background to this PoP. Discussions of this debate bring to light some of the significant implications such definitions might have on policy and those impacted. Vibert and Shields (2003) write “student engagement . . . is a catch-phrase that begs a number of qualifying questions, questions such as engagement in what and for what purposes?” (p. 238). The conception of the term—seemingly inoffensive and inarguable—reflects the ideology of the person using it. If that person is in a position of authority, the conception might consequently shape the interaction between the student, teacher, and institution, impacting student educational outcomes. The decision about which conception of student engagement on which to base policy, practice, and assessment is by no means neutral. All students may not benefit equally from all conceptions.

While the prevalence of the conception of student engagement underpinning the NSSE is clear, competing conceptions of student engagement should be considered and potentially utilized, particularly as the NSSE has an institutional and face-to-face focus. Dixon (2015) explains, “engagement is composed of individual attitudes, thoughts, and behaviors as well as communication with others. Student engagement is about students putting time, energy, thought, effort, and, to some extent, feelings into their learning” (p. 4). Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) define engagement as, “a multidimensional construct that encompasses behavior, emotion, and cognition” (p. 83). Both definitions elevate emotion and to some degree cognition in their understanding of student

engagement. Finally, Vibert and Sheilds (2003) write, “a critical pedagogy envisions engagement (and, implicitly, education) as in the service of a re-thinking of experience in the interests of a more just and democratic community” (p. 237). McMahon and Portelli (2004) reaffirm this, noting that the reason for engagement is “democratic reconstruction” (p. 70). Vibert and Sheilds present an inspirational conception of student engagement that addresses the potential inherent in the concept, demonstrating the importance of thoughtfully crafting or selecting a definition of the term.

The Potential for Varying Conceptions by Stakeholders

Not only is there a theoretical debate about the conception of student engagement, but in practice it is unlikely that various stakeholders within University X are using the term in the same way. Administrators, instructors, and students may not have the same conceptions of student engagement. In fact, there may be differences of conceptions even within these groups. Many of these stakeholders may not have given more than a passing thought to the concept of student engagement, much less have attempted to craft a definition of it. Undergraduate business students, for example, may not have a fully formed definition of the term. Yet in the context of a university environment there will be many who will have crafted much more robust definitions of the term; a research academic in the field of education may for example have a carefully constructed, theoretically and philosophically driven, research-based conception of the term.

Tourish and Barge (2010) suggest social constructionism is an appropriate lens to approach such a situation as it allows these different perspectives to be expressed and considered. Pragmatically for this OIP, this might be particularly relevant if different instructors have different conceptions of student engagement. It points to the practical

value of a truly collaborative leadership approach which allows those perspectives to be voiced and incorporated in a meaningful way.

The PoP centers on the controversial concept of student engagement, in the context of the rapidly growing but still nascent world of online education. Within this context, the problem itself is complex, shaped by individual and institutional conceptions of student engagement. In the midst of all of this complexity, online student engagement is believed to be inadequate in online classrooms at University X. Implications of these factors will be considered later in this OIP.

Guiding Questions Emerging from the Problem of Practice

Several fundamental questions highlight the complexity in the literature, in the academic and practitioner fields of online education, and in the problem itself. These questions include fundamental concerns about what strategies should be used and how they should be used. A social constructionist (Gergen, 1985) perspective additionally informs a focus on the construction of the term online student engagement and the construction of collaborative leadership.

How should online student engagement be defined? The PoP centers on improving online student engagement, yet there is disagreement in academic literature about the meaning of the term student engagement. Discussions of this disagreement unearth some of the implications such a definition might have on policy and those impacted. It is an important decision with significant ramifications for practice, and significant potential impact on both students and instructors. Further, a social constructionist perspective reveals the importance of these definitions by highlighting the shaping force that language has on the future (Camargo-Borges & Rasera, 2013; Gergen

& Gergen, 2004) Yet it is not readily apparent which definition should be selected, or how that definition should be chosen.

How can the author collaborate with other instructors at University X to effectively learn from and build on their experiences and perspectives? While the author has taught online for a number of years, she recognizes the professional and personal value of drawing on the expertise and perspectives of other online instructors, particularly in efforts to improve practice, related to online student engagement. Yet teaching online from home does not readily allow for the development of a professional network that working in a physical office or school might. Further, the author's social constructionist (Gergen, 1985) orientation elevates the importance of ensuring that in such a network, multiple voices are truly allowed to express themselves.

What existing face-to-face student engagement strategies would align to an online classroom environment? A challenge of this PoP is its context within the rapidly growing field of online education (Bates, et al., 2017; Johnson, et al., 2019). While there is a substantial stream of literature related to student engagement, there is limited work on the topic of *online* student engagement. In fact, both the academic and practitioner fields of online education are in their relative infancy, when compared to the respective fields of face-to-face education. Questions emerge about the transferability of research on offline student engagement to the online environment.

Leadership-Focused Vision for Change

The present state of the organization is characterized by a concern amongst administration and instructional staff that there is inadequate online student engagement in the online classroom. This phenomenon is paired with a lack of clarity and consensus

around the meaning of the term online student engagement, and author concerns that certain definitions may result in the systematic disadvantaging of certain groups of students.

The envisioned future state is the improvement of online student engagement within the online classrooms of this author and that of a group of her fellow online instructors. This vision begins with improved online student engagement in the online classroom of this author. Online student engagement cannot logically be improved, either in the context of the author's online classroom, or in the wider organization, until it is clearly defined. Therefore, this vision for change must necessarily involve two phases: 1) the construction of a definition of online student engagement; and 2) the improvement of online student engagement as it is articulated in that definition through practice. In the envisioned future state, within the author's online classroom, a clear definition of online student engagement will be used to inform the instructional practices that this author uses. This definition will be carefully constructed, leveraging academic literature, to balance the priorities of inclusiveness and student success. Related practices will be modified to improve online student engagement in the online classroom as conceived of in this definition. The work completed in the online classroom of the author will be used as a starting place to collaborate with online instructor colleagues to improve online student engagement in other online instructors' online classrooms.

To arrive at the envisioned future state, two gaps must be closed. The first is the conceptual gap between the current use of the term online student engagement, and a fully considered and formed definition of the term. The second gap is the practice gap between current teaching practice and a modified teaching practice designed to improve

online student engagement in online classrooms. Closing the conceptual gap is a constructivist activity, as the author will work, first on her own, to construct a definition of online student engagement, and will later, as a social constructionist, co-construct a refined definition of online student engagement with her peers (Gergen, 1985). Teacher leadership will enable closing these gaps, both in the author's online classrooms as well as within the online classrooms of her network of peers, as the author will first work to establish herself as a credible leader through her work in her own online classroom (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009), and then collaborate with peers to develop solutions while modelling receptivity to change (Silva et al., 2000). Drawing on Robinson's (2008) description of distributed leadership as "distributed influence" (p. 249), the author will work to achieve the envisioned future state by enlisting, encouraging, and inspiring the participation of fellow instructors in the organization.

Priorities for Change

An analysis of the anticipated benefits of closing these gaps to key stakeholder groups is presented in Table 1. A discussion of the implications of this table follows.

Table 1

Analysis of Anticipated Benefits of Closing Gaps to Stakeholder Groups

	Potential benefit to students	Potential benefit to instructors	Potential benefit to administrators/staff
Closing Conceptual Gap	Eliminates potential for excluding some students through particular conception of student engagement (McMahon & Portelli, 2004) ; Clarity about expectations of student behavioral engagement online	Clarity about expectations of instructor role in increasing online student engagement; Motivating and inspirational; Professional satisfaction; Professional growth	Clarity about expectations of online student engagement; Motivating and inspirational; Professional growth; Professional satisfaction
Closing Practice Gap	Improved outcomes, including achievement and persistence (Kuh et al., 2008), learning (Meyer, 2014)	Professional satisfaction; Professional growth	Professional satisfaction; Professional growth; Improved student outcomes, including achievement and persistence (Kuh et al., 2008), learning (Meyer, 2014)

This analysis presents compelling reasons to prioritize both closing the conceptual gap and closing the practice gap. Relevant literature suggests closing the practice gap may improve important educational outcomes for students (Kuh et al., 2008; Meyer, 2014). The analysis also uncovers that students would benefit from closing the conceptual gap in that it would eliminate the potential for excluding some students through a particular conception of student engagement (McMahon & Portelli, 2004). While closing the practice gap might provide better educational outcomes, closing the practice gap without closing the conceptual gap may not provide better educational outcomes to all students. For example, many students in the program have full time jobs and families while pursuing their educational studies. A worrisome situation might be reasonably envisioned in which online student engagement is conceived of as having a measurable

behavioral component reflected in online activity (number of posts, frequency of log ins). What might be the impact on these students of closing the practice gap without closing the conceptual gap? Might a busy student be penalized for not demonstrating this engagement? What might be the impact of such a penalty on retention of students such as these? One might imagine the choice between prioritizing the conceptual gap over the practice gap as a choice between prioritizing all students slowly (closing the conceptual gap), or a smaller number of students quickly (closing the practice gap without closing the conceptual gap).

A discussion of prioritization must incorporate ethical considerations. While the ethics of leadership are addressed later in this OIP, it is important to make explicit the author's underlying alignment with the work of Stefkovich and O'Brien (2004). Stefkovich and O'Brien's (2004) ethical model is founded on the belief that the, "best interests of the student [are] central" (p. 200). Stefkovich and O'Brien (2004) importantly note, "in many instances school officials do not agree on what is the best course of action to take or what is truly in the best interests of the student" (p. 201). There is already some evidence that this is the case for this particular PoP, as University X uses the NSSE, suggesting organizational alignment with a particular, controversial conception of student engagement. Underlying this observation is a reasonable assumption that the organization is acting in accordance with what it believes to be the best interests of the student.

Stefkovich and O'Brien (2004) provide additional guidance in their model which aids in the prioritization effort. They note their model is based on, "rights, responsibilities, and respect [and] . . . the individual rather than on the group" (Stefkovich & O'Brien, 2004, p. 202). These rights include, "freedom from unlawful discrimination . . .

. right to dignity, [and] . . . right to an education” (Stefkovich & O’Brien, 2004, p. 202). In this model, there is clear guidance that the conceptual gap must be closed before the practice gap can be in order to ensure each individual student has access to an education.

Closing the conceptual gap is the priority when examined in this way. It is however important to note that ideal prioritization does not equate to temporal ordering. For example, it may be necessary to address the practice gap using a working definition of online student engagement that crystalizes its use within the organization, rather than applying an ideal definition. From a leadership perspective, improving online student engagement using such a working definition in the author’s online classroom may be necessary to establish the credibility that will allow this author to effect more substantial change within the organization (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009).

Change Drivers

In this OIP, change drivers are defined as “facilitate[ing] the implementation of change throughout the organization and, specifically facilitate[ing] individual adoption of change initiatives” (Whelan-Berry & Somerville, 2010, p. 177). This analysis will focus on one of the change driver categories identified by Whelan-Berry and Somerville (2010), described as: “leadership support from leaders throughout the organization including teams, departments, and locations” (p. 180).

Arriving at the envisioned future state will require collaboration within the organization. Other instructors, leaders within their online classrooms or teacher leaders, will be important organizational partners, as their insight and expertise will be essential to the change. Truly effecting organizational change will involve changing the practice of other instructors in the organization through grassroots efforts. The remote nature of the

author's work environment will necessitate concerted efforts at developing a network of fellow online instructors.

Organizational Change Readiness

Weiner (2009) describes organizational readiness for change as, "a shared psychological state in which organizational members feel committed to implementing an organizational change and confident in their collective abilities to do so" (p. 6), focusing exclusively on internal factors and stakeholders within the organization. Much of the following analysis will also focus on internal stakeholders and will harken back to Weiner's description of organizational change readiness. However, it is the position of this author that in order to assess organizational readiness for change, both internal and external factors must be accounted for, as must their interaction. Therefore, a discussion of external factors will also be included.

Internal Factors

Cawsey, Deszca, and Ingols (2016) explore both commitment to change and confidence in ability to change (Weiner, 2009) in their model. They propose that change occurs in the condition in which the cost of change is less than the product of the perceived discontent with the current situation, the advantages of change and the likelihood of success (Cawsey et al., 2016). Table 2 contains this author's assessment of these factors as they relate to this PoP. Approaching the analysis as a constructivist, the assessment is based on this author's personal observations and indicates that while the cost of change is high for all three stakeholder groups, administration and staff are more consistently dissatisfied with the status quo and are more consistently convinced about the benefits of change than are students and instructors. The observations captured in this

table indicate that students and instructors have mixed levels of dissatisfaction with the status quo and mixed views about the benefits of change. This assessment acknowledges the varieties of motives and commitment levels of those that both teach and learn in online programs. Many are sincerely interested in improved teaching and learning, but some may be comfortable with the status quo.

Table 2

Assessment of Likelihood of Change

Stakeholder	Perceived Dissatisfaction With Status Quo	Perceived Benefits Of Change	Perceived Probability of Success	Cost of Change
Students	Mixed	Mixed	Medium	High
Instructors	Mixed	Mixed	Medium	High
Administration and Staff	High	High	Medium	High

Adapted from Cawsey, T.F., Deszca, G., & Ingols, C. (2016). *Organizational change: An action-oriented toolkit* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

This analysis demonstrates that the product of dissatisfaction, benefits, and probability of success do not clearly exceed the cost of change for any of the aggregated stakeholder groups. Cawsey et al. (2016) suggest that change is not likely to occur in this situation. The conditions of Weiner’s (2009) description of commitment to change and confidence that the change can be made, are also not present, suggesting the organization as a whole is not ready for change. Two logical actions follow from this analysis. The first would be for the author to not focus on organization-wide change, as the organization as a whole does not appear to be ready, but instead focus on smaller-scale change, centered on those individuals ready for it. The second would be to disaggregate the stakeholder groups. This is particularly relevant for instructors. An action the author

might take resulting from this information would be to identify those instructors who are more receptive to change and focus her efforts on changing online student engagement in the online classrooms of those instructors. Focusing change efforts on those instructors likely to change presents a realistic way to initiate change in the organization.

Cawsey et al. (2016) also posit: “the impact on individuals [and] the impact on the organization [can] predict the resulting support for a change initiative” (p. 194). This analysis then provides an assessment of commitment—one of the two factors in Weiner’s (2009) description of organizational change readiness. Stakeholders most directly impacted by this OIP were analyzed, with the results detailed below in Table 3. This analysis also captures that author’s assessment that there are both students and instructors who believe the change will have a positive impact on them individually, and those who will simply worry that such a change will produce more work. While an extended consideration of the reasons why this occurs are beyond the scope of this OIP, it is important to note that there are students who will be concerned with workload, and that this is not an irrelevant factor when considering issues of online student engagement in online classrooms.

Table 3

Stakeholder Support for Change

Stakeholder	Perceived Impact of the Change on the Organization	Perceived Impact of the Change on the Individual	Direction of Support of the Change
Students	Neutral	Positive and Negative	Positive and Resistance
Instructors	Positive	Positive and Negative	Strong and Indeterminate
Administration and Staff	Positive	Positive	Strong

Adapted from Cawsey, T.F., Deszca, G., & Ingols, C. (2016). *Organizational change: An action-oriented toolkit* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Portions of this analysis suggest “indeterminate support” or “resistance to change” (Cawsey et al., 2016, p. 195) by two of the three stakeholder groups. These groups, students and instructors, are believed to have a mixed assessment of the benefits of change. Timing of changes will be important to help students who might otherwise be resistant to change. Changes to practice should be timed to occur at the beginning of each semester so students accept the change as part of the course. Additionally, the author will work to recruit those instructors who are not resistant to change as allies in the building of a network in order to address the PoP.

External Factors

Four pertinent factors of the PEST analysis identified earlier in this Chapter were considered with respect to their effect on change within the organization.

First, the political analysis acknowledged the increased appetite for external monitoring of higher education. This is particularly relevant for this OIP because of the use of the National Survey of Student Engagement at University X. There are several

potential impacts of this factor on change related processes. The first is that because the organization is interested in monitoring performance, there may be pressure to solve any problems identified in that assessment quickly. As a result, there may be additional resources and support available to do so. However, a negative impact could be pressure to use an existing external assessment of student engagement—and limited interest in investigating the implications of the use of that tool and the conception of student engagement behind it.

The second factor anticipates the destructive impact that the coronavirus pandemic is projected to have on the global economy in the short term (International Monetary Fund, 2020) and likely beyond. Such a situation may strain budgets at institutions such as University X, making advocating for resources for change initiatives more difficult. The third factor explored social dynamics, specifically the changing demographics of post-secondary students. More working students may be resistant to changes to course structure and curriculum if they believe those changes may impact the amount of work and time needed to dedicate to their studies. This observation dovetails into the analysis presented earlier in this section. The final factor considers technological trends—specifically the simultaneous increase in and novelty of online education. This change and novelty may drive uncertainty about what optimal online student engagement in online classrooms looks like, making it difficult for some stakeholders to assess the dissatisfaction with the existing conception and practice of online student engagement and any benefits of change.

The analysis highlights some roadblocks to change, including potential resource constraints springing from significant economic changes that result from the coronavirus

pandemic, and lack of stakeholder buy-in from students worried about workload, and administrators who may not be interested in a new conception of online student engagement, or may be concerned about the practical implications of such a conception. It is also important to note that there are also windows of opportunity including support that may result from political pressures for measurement-based performance.

Convergence of Internal and External Factors

Analyses of internal and external factors both suggest that there are portions of the organization ready for change, even if the organization as a whole is not ready for change. Specifically, this analysis uncovers the value in identifying fellow instructors interested in and ready for change.

This chapter introduces the PoP of inadequate online student engagement in the online classroom at University X, in a context characterized by uncertainty and growth, and mixed organizational readiness for change. Additionally, this PoP focuses on a controversial topic in education. The author employs distributed leadership, and literature on teacher leadership viewed through the perspective of constructivism and social constructionism. Two gaps are identified: a conceptual gap and a practice gap. Chapter 2 explores how these gaps can be closed given the author's leadership approach by constructing an appropriate framework for leading change.

Chapter 2: Planning and Development

Chapter 2 considers how to address the conceptual and practice gaps that need to be closed to improve online student engagement in online classrooms in light of the author's orientation towards constructivism and social constructionism, and use of distributed and teacher leadership. The appropriate way to drive change in an environment characterized by emergent and continuous change is explored, resulting in the selection of Weick and Quinn's (1999) "freeze, rebalance, unfreeze" (p. 379) model as a framework for leading change, and sensemaking to undertake a critical organizational analysis. Three solutions are proposed, and the author advocates for one.

Leadership Approaches to Change

This author approaches organizational change by drawing on distributed leadership, as enacted through teacher leadership. This is informed by a constructivist and social constructionist perspective. Relevant academic literature provides guidance about the implications of this leadership approach to leading organizational change.

Implications of Distributed Leadership for Approaching Change

Three aspects of distributed leadership are of particular importance when approaching change in the context of this OIP: its emergent nature (Gronn, 2000), its focus on collaboration (Gronn, 2000), and its use of interpersonal influence (Robinson, 2009). Together, these three aspects present a potential for change from those without positional authority, who lead collaboratively and use influence to do so. The collaborative and social dynamics of leading change emerge as dominant in this description. These elements are largely present in the discussion of change as a teacher

leader, which follows, echoing Harris' (2003) observation about the connections between distributed and teacher leadership.

Change as a Teacher Leader: Collaborating and Modelling

Teacher leaders are driven by an orientation towards change (Silva et al., 2000) and improvement to teaching within their organizations (Lai & Cheung, 2015). Teacher leaders, concerned with driving change beyond individual teaching practice, do so partially through collaboration with colleagues (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; Lai & Cheung, 2015; Silva et al., 2000). Both Lai and Cheung (2015) and Silva et al. (2000) highlight the importance of modelling a motivating vision to leading change as a teacher leader, with Silva et al. (2000) elaborating, "teacher leaders must demonstrate publicly. . . their ultimate willingness to frame change as a growth opportunity" (p. 798). Further, Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) observe that teacher leaders drive change by "modeling of their own effective practice" (p. 102).

Fundamentally teacher leaders approach change by collaborating with colleagues and modelling receptivity to and enthusiasm for change. In the context of this PoP, work such as this has already been identified as a mechanism by which to close the gaps between the present and envisioned future state. A deliberate plan will enable collaboration and modelling given the remote nature of online adjunct teaching. Practically, this will result in the development of a network of fellow online instructors who share a similar orientation to change, and with whom the author can model and build enthusiasm for the opportunities presented by change with respect to online student engagement in online classrooms.

Distributed leadership and teacher leadership present a compelling approach to change that addresses some of the dynamics unearthed in Chapter 1. Together they provide a mechanism for the author to drive change given her position in the organization, by collaborating with colleagues, and therefore gradually building momentum for change with others in University X.

Implications of Social Constructionism on Change. Multiple voices need to be heard, and multiple perspectives need to be explored when approaching change from a social constructionist perspective (Tourish & Barge, 2010). This has important implications for this OIP, as it suggests that making a unilateral decision about the conception of student engagement to be used is problematic. Language and social processes are important ways to co-construct reality and change in a social constructionist worldview (Schwandt, 1994). Further, collaboration is an essential component of driving change from a social constructionist perspective to ensure multiple voices are heard. Distributed and teacher leadership (Gronn, 2000; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; Silva et al., 2000) therefore play the final vital role in approaching change for this OIP. The collaboration integral to distributed and teacher leadership takes on particular importance in this context. Collaboration is not just a means of disseminating ideas, sharing work or drawing on collective expertise. Collaboration facilitates the co-production of reality envisioned in social constructionism (Gergen, 1985). It therefore takes on renewed importance as one of the mechanisms by which diverse voices are heard and diverse perspectives are truly integrated into the solution.

Framework for Leading the Change Process

To address how this author will lead change, this OIP uses Weick and Quinn's (1999) change model which has its roots in emergent change (Higgs & Rowland, 2005; Kickert, 2010). Weick and Quinn's (1999) work proposes three phases to change: "freeze, rebalance, unfreeze" (p. 379). The following section discusses the appropriateness of this model to the situation, explains the model, and details how it will be utilized to address the PoP.

Emergent Change

The concept of emergent change (Higgs & Rowland, 2005; Kickert, 2010) is based on the assumption that change arises from multiple viewpoints or agents, rather than being directed by a single individual (Higgs & Rowland, 2005), and is therefore consistent with distributed leadership, as described by Gronn (2000) and Robinson (2008). In fact, Gronn (2000) describes distributed leadership as "fluid and emergent" (p. 324). The complicated origin of emergent change results in the complicated nature of emergent change, which is neither orderly, nor distinct. Specifically, this complicated beginning gives rise to three of the defining characteristics of emergent change: that emergent change is "complex" (Higgs & Rowland, 2005, p. 127), not "linear" (Kickert, 2010, p. 495), and not discrete (Kickert, 2010). Kickert (2010) builds on this, describing emergent change "as a continuous, open-ended, cumulative and unpredictable process" (p. 495). Emergent change is fitting for this PoP as the author, acting as a change agent, is not a formal leader and will rely on a network of colleagues. Emergent change is not only fitting, but Higgs and Rowland (2005) also note its frequent effectiveness and success.

Higgs and Rowland (2005) share additional insights about their observations of instances of emergent change that further demonstrate its appropriateness to this OIP. Importantly, they note, emergent change involves “interventions involving individuals or small groups outside of the mainstream of the organization” (p. 145). There is an uncanny connection between this observation and the nature of this author’s role as an adjunct online instructor at University X. In fact, to further strengthen this point, Higgs and Rowland (2005) also observe, “change [is] initiated anywhere in the organisation but usually where there is high contact with client/customers” (p. 127). While the term clients/customers is not directly applicable in this particular online classroom setting, the author does have high contact with the end users—the students. Higgs and Rowland (2005) present a vision of change which justifies the author as a change agent particularly because of the nature of her role.

While Higgs and Rowland’s (2005) work describes emergent change, it does not offer a model for approaching this type of change. Weick and Quinn’s (1999) freeze, rebalance, unfreeze model, discussed in the following section, provides more specific guidance. Underlying Weick and Quinn’s (1999) model is an assumption that the organization is continuously changing, and in such circumstances, Weick and Quinn (1999) observe, “a common presumption is that change is emergent” (p. 375). Weick and Quinn’s model is therefore an appropriate model to turn to for this OIP which conceptualizes change as emergent.

Continuous Change and Freeze, Rebalance, Unfreeze

Weick and Quinn (1999) describe continuous change as a series of relatively small, purposeful modifications. An examination of University X demonstrates that it is

in fact an organization engaged in such continuous change. For example, the PoP was identified through a conversation with the manager for the programs in which the author teaches. It was already recognized as a problem in the organization. Further, the organization's use of the NSSE indicates that student engagement, even at the offline and institutional level, has already been accepted as important enough to assess on a regular basis. The implication of this measurement is that there is already interest in, if not efforts towards, improving student engagement.

This continuous change has specific implications for the change model used in this OIP. Weick and Quinn (1999) found their model upon, and then contrast it with Lewin's seminal model. In fact, Weick and Quinn's (1999) model contains the same three steps present in Lewin's, reordered as "freeze, rebalance, unfreeze" (p. 379). They note that it is an appropriate adaptation of Lewin's model when there is an underlying condition of continuous change (Weick & Quinn, 1999). Weick and Quinn (1999) describe this work as "redirecting", contrasting it with initiating change. In the context of this OIP, this might manifest in redirecting the work already underway to improve student engagement, as evidenced by organizational use of the NSSE (University X, n.d.c), so that it is applicable to the online classroom.

The three stages of this model are conceived of in particular ways. The focus of the first stage, freezing, is on observing, analyzing, and communicating or documenting the current situation (Weick & Quinn, 1999). This phase describes what is currently happening and makes sense of it. For this PoP, this would involve documenting how current policy and practice is designed to drive online student engagement in online classrooms, and then, on the basis of those observations, determining what existing

conception of online student engagement is implicit in those policies and practices. The focus of the second stage, rebalancing, is on identifying opportunities for improvement and re-designing with the goal of delivering a better outcome (Weick & Quinn, 1999); one such better outcome might be fewer students who are sub-optimally engaged online. Drawing on the social constructionist perspective on the construction of reality through language (Camargo-Borges & Rasera, 2013; Gergen & Gergen, 2004), this would involve crafting a working definition of online student engagement designed to optimize the educational outcomes of online students, and then refining teaching practices to reflect that definition. Unfreezing, the final stage of the process, is an exercise in relinquishing control but relinquishing it into an environment framed by improved communication (Weick & Quinn, 1999). For the current PoP, this may involve executing re-imagined practices in this author's online classroom, communicating the tactic to peers in the organization, and then accepting the diversity of tactics that those colleagues will take.

Higgs and Rowland (2005) describe emergent leaders as “working through informal networks and alliances” (p. 145). Teacher leadership, with its collaborative orientation (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; Silva et al., 2000), naturally connects to emergent change, as teacher leadership inherently represents the decentralized initiatives that emerge at the grassroots level central to emergent change. The teacher leader may, for example, drive change through the organization through collaboration and communication with networks of fellow teachers. This example connects to Robinson's (2008) description of a distributed leader who leads through influence.

Critical Organization Analysis

Many frameworks designed to analyze organizations are founded on an assumption of organizational stability. However, the assumption underlying Weick and Quinn's (1999) change model, and the author's understanding of the nature of University X, is one of continuous, emergent change. This is a fundamental difference which requires identifying an analytical framework with the same underlying assumption. Weick and Quinn (1999) argue that in the context of continuous change: "change agents become important for their ability to make sense (Weick, 1995) of change dynamics already under way" (p. 381), explicitly referencing the concept of sensemaking, elaborated on by Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld (2005). Weick et al. (2005) expound on sensemaking, writing: "if the first question of sensemaking is 'what's going on here?,' the second, equally important question is 'what do I do next?'" (p. 412). Sensemaking is an appropriate tool to conduct an organizational analysis in the context of this OIP, because it explicitly addresses the question of what needs to change. Additionally, sensemaking, which elevates and validates individual perspective, is well aligned with constructivism, and is in fact understood in related literature to have constructivist roots (Craig-Lees, 2001; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015).

Sensemaking

Sensemaking is concerned with crystallizing an understanding of the past through communication and employing that communication as a mechanism to decide how to move forward (Weick et al., 2005). Sensemaking clearly aligns with the first stage of Weick and Quinn's (1999) freeze, rebalance, unfreeze change model; in fact, it serves as a robust envisioning of this stage, where verbalization is the means of freezing, described

by Weick and Quinn (1999) as “mak[ing] a sequence visible” (p. 380). In fact, the importance of communication to sensemaking is one of the key aspects of the theory. Weick et al. (2005) describe it as “activity that talks events and organizations into existence” (p. 413). This description is evocative of Gergen and Gergen’s (2004) description of social constructionism: “as we communicate with each other we construct the world in which we live” (p. 11). Additionally, its focus on communication aligns with the collaborative aspects of teacher leadership (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; Silva et al., 2000), and distributed leadership (Gronn, 2002; Robinson, 2009). This might manifest, for example, in discussions amongst teacher leaders collaborating with each other, in which they are able to form a clear understanding of various online classroom phenomena through conversation. Sensemaking provides an approach to critical organizational analysis which is aligned with the author’s position in the organization and leverages the strengths of that perspective. It does not assume or require perfect or complete information (Weick et al., 2005) and privileges the perspective of the sense-maker, in alignment with constructivism (Schwandt, 1994). Weick et al. (2005) defend this position, noting, “people do not need to perceive the current situation or problems accurately to solve them; they can act effectively simply by making sense of circumstances in ways that appear to move toward general long-term goals” (p. 415). Their position highlights the weakness inherent in many, but not all, organizational analyses—they are founded on an assumption of accurate information which may be faulty, and by presenting the ensuing analysis as founded on such accuracy, misrepresent the nature of the analysis, giving it more weight than it is due. Further, their position effectively democratizes analysis, allowing it to be conducted by those in non-traditional

leadership roles in an organization. Weick et al. (2005) address this, noting this assumption, “conflicts with academic theories and managerial practices that assume that the accuracy of managers' perceptions determine the effectiveness of outcomes” (p. 415). Given the author’s role, on the periphery of University X as an adjunct online instructor, resource constraints may make securing institutional reporting difficult. Sensemaking offers a way to move forward with a critical organizational analysis in light of this circumstance.

Application of Sensemaking

Sensemaking provides a mechanism to explore the gaps that will need to be closed to allow the envisioned future state to occur. Weick et al. (2005) describe sensemaking as a process in which the sense-maker “organizes flux” through “communication” (pp. 411-413)—the sense-maker makes sense of change. That organization of flux is informed by three categories of factors: what the sense-maker recalls about what has happened in the past, referred to as “retrospect”; the sense-maker’s “presumptions” or conjecture; and broader organizational and macro factors, referred to as “social and systemic factors” (Weick et al., 2005, pp. 412-413). The function of sensemaking is to determine what action to take (Weick et al., 2005).

While retrospect and social and systemic factors (Weick et al., 2005) are relatively easy to comprehend, Weick et al.’s (2005) use of presumptions requires some additional explanation. Weick et al. (2005) describe their use of presumptions, here in the context of a nurse treating an ill infant, by noting “to test a hunch is to presume the character of the illness and to update that presumptive understanding through progressive approximations” (p. 412), which are described as “immediate actions” (Weick et al.,

2005, p. 412). As an example in an education context, an instructor might use presumptions about why students seem disengaged in a face-to-face class, and modify delivery, the timing of breaks, or other factors. The instructor will then informally recalibrate their understanding of the reason for that disengagement based on the reaction to the modifications. The cycle will continue as the instructor continues to make modifications and adjustments based on their presumptions. This process is one that might otherwise be described as acting based on conjecture, speculation, or the colloquial use of the term hypothesis.

The role of the critical organizational analysis is to explicitly consider what this author recalls of the past, this author's conjecture, and the broader organizational and macro factors (Weick et al., 2005). The analysis is a constructivist activity (Schwandt, 1994) firmly centered on the perspective of analyzer—in this case the author. Her understanding of what has happened, what the situation is, and the broader factors are validated and legitimized through sensemaking. This analysis is conducted as it applies to the gaps between the current state and the envisioned future state identified in the Leadership Focused Vision for Change: the conceptual gap and practice gap.

Analysis of the past. As a sense-maker, this author employs retrospect (Weick et al., 2005) to consider the conceptual gap, and in so doing identifies several interconnected phenomena from the past that shape the sensemaking activity. Several have been addressed at length earlier in this paper, including a lengthy and ongoing debate that has resulted in multiple conceptions of student engagement that exist in the academic literature (Dixon, 2015; Fredricks et al., 2004; NSSE, n.d.; Vibert & Sheilds, 2003); the author's concern that stakeholders have varied conceptions of student engagement; and

relatively limited research that distinguishes online classroom student engagement as a unique concept from that of face-to-face student engagement. A retrospective analysis also identifies that this gap has not widened over time. There was not a clearly articulated defensible conception of online student engagement in the online classroom that was previously articulated by the organization but over time and use has degraded.

Additionally, the practice gap has largely been identified through retrospect. Author conversations with colleagues and personal reflection have revealed that administration and instructional staff believe online student engagement in online classrooms is inadequate, based on their past observations of related factors, including student feedback, comprehension of materials, and presence online. This author's retrospective analysis accounts for these observations, as well as her own individual belief that online student engagement in online classrooms is inadequate. Again, the practice gap has not widened over time, but the author also acknowledges that it has not materially lessened.

This retrospective analysis shows little change with respect to the conceptual and practice gaps. While neither of the gaps appear to have widened, they have not lessened over time either. This analysis indicates that without intervention the conceptual and practice gaps will not diminish. Action is required to ameliorate the situation. Specifically, a clear definition of online student engagement needs to be crafted and changes to instructional practice need to be made to improve online student engagement in online classrooms.

The role of conjecture. There are fundamental conjectures underlying this OIP, particularly with respect to the conceptual and practice gaps. The conceptual gap is rooted

in conjecture, an educated guess that there is a conception of online student engagement which either currently exists, or can be created, which will better serve the needs of online students. It is in fact impossible to confirm such a guess without substantial, and as yet unavailable, research about the impact of various conceptions of online student engagement on students. Additionally, there are conjectures underlying the practice gap. This includes that administration and instructor beliefs that online student engagement is inadequate are accurate. To confirm this would require the definition of online student engagement based on that definition to be finalized, and measurement of online student engagement in the online classroom to be undertaken in accordance with that definition. As this work has not yet been undertaken, the author acts on the conjecture that this is the case. Further, there is conjecture behind the understanding that the inadequate online student engagement in online classrooms could be ameliorated by changes to practice. Sensemaking suggests that even though these factors are conjecture, this should not preclude the author from taking action (Weick et al., 2005). Analysis employing conjecture further supports the need for a clearly crafted definition of online student engagement and improvements to practice.

Social and systemic factors (Weick et al., 2005). Several social factors are at play as this author uses sensemaking in the context of this OIP to determine what changes are required in the organization. Specifically, these include social factors between the author in her role as an online instructor and other stakeholders in the organization: the online instructor and students, the online instructor and administration, and the online instructor and other instructors. The social factors between the online instructor and students is particularly relevant with respect to the conceptual and practice gaps. Past

interactions between the online instructor and students have indicated that there are a wide variety of students studying in her online courses, and that these students have competing demands on their time, including family commitments and full-time jobs. This has resulted in the author's commitment to the development of an inclusive conception of online student engagement that manifests in practice in a way that is respectful of the students' time. Social factors between the online instructor and administration have indicated a shared concern about online student engagement in online classrooms, and a shared commitment to its improvement. Analyzing the social dynamic between the online instructor and other instructors has brought to light the limited contact between this online instructor and other instructors—indicating a potential opportunity for increased collaboration.

Systemic factors include broader organizational and macro factors such as resources, alignment with precedent, interest in external monitoring, and the author's position in the organization. Accessing resources plays a significant role in this OIP due to the peripheral position of this author. This will impact both gaps, as the author will need to approach changes in a way that minimizes resource requirements and, to the degree possible, employs existing resources. Alignment with precedent may prove particularly challenging with respect to the conceptual gap, as the organization may gravitate towards conceptualizations of online student engagement in online classrooms that are consistent with the NSSE. Similarly, an increased interest in external monitoring may impact the conceptual gap, as there may be an organizational interest in conceptions of online student engagement that lend themselves to ready quantitative measurement in the form of learning management system (LMS) statistics and online surveys. Finally, the

author's position in the organization is an important organizational factor. Plans will need to be tailored to respond to this circumstance.

The analysis of social and systemic factors presents depth to a previously identified required change, specifically around developing conceptions of online student engagement sensitive to student's realities. This analysis has also identified some additional required changes, including the need for collaboration amongst fellow instructors. Finally, this analysis has highlighted some constraints, specifically limited resources available to the author, limits on scope resulting from the author's position in the organization, and limits that may be created by organizational and sector precedent and interest in monitoring performance.

Implications for Organizational Improvement Plan: What to Change

There are two fundamental changes required to address the PoP: 1) a change to the conception of online student engagement; and 2) a change to teaching practices designed to improve online student engagement in online classrooms. Assessing the past demonstrates a need to intervene in order for these changes to take place, and social, organizational, and macro factors suggest some specific actions. These actions include the creation of a definition of online student engagement for local use that has the potential to be shared with and developed further with fellow online instructors. Additionally, teaching practice must be refined to support online student engagement in the online classroom. This analysis has also unearthed the potential created by additional collaboration between this author and her colleagues. These changes will occur at a local level within the online classrooms of this author and her peers. The following section details proposed courses of action to bring about these changes.

Possible Solutions to Address the Problem of Practice

Three solutions to address the PoP become apparent by considering the gaps introduced in the preceding sections. The solutions leverage distributed leadership as enacted through teacher leadership. All are viewed through the lens of constructivism.

Solution 1: Modify Individual Teaching Practice in Online Classroom

The most direct way for this author to address this PoP is to modify her individual teaching practice with the specific aim of improving online student engagement in her online classroom. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) note that, “teachers assume leadership roles with students in the classroom” (p. 123). This position is supported by Lai and Cheung (2015) who write that “teachers have long been considered leaders in classrooms, where they enjoy high levels of autonomy in making instructional decisions and initiating activities” (p. 674), suggesting that while the scope of this solution is small, it is nevertheless still a leadership activity. In fact, Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) emphasize the importance of teacher leadership in the classroom, noting, “the first component in our definition of teacher leadership is that the teacher leads within the classroom through excellence in teaching” (p. 102). While their focus is on the face-to-face classroom, the essential point about leading students is relevant in an online classroom.

Inspired by the work of Weick and Quinn (1999), this solution will be cyclical, oriented toward continuous improvement and founded on an understanding of continuous change. The first step of this solution is for the author to develop her own definition of online student engagement, an activity which carries particular importance given the social constructionist perspective on the potential that language has to guide reality (Camargo-Borges & Rasera, 2013; Gergen & Gergen, 2004). This definition will shape

activities designed to improve online student engagement and so is of pivotal importance to the OIP. This will be an individual exercise leveraging existing research explored in this OIP (Berry & Edmond, 2014; Dixon, 2015; Fredricks et al., 2004; Kuh, 2001; McMahon & Portelli, 2004; NSSE, n.d.; Vibert & Sheilds, 2003; Zepke, 2015) and information gathered through outreach to relevant practitioners and researchers.

The author will then measure online student engagement in her online classroom according to the definition crafted in the first step to set a benchmark against which future measurements of online student engagement will be compared. The final step will be to adjust teaching practice with the specific objective of improving online student engagement in the author's online classroom. The author will audit her own teaching practice based on the definition developed and the initial measurement of online student engagement in the online classroom, looking for opportunities to modify her practice that will improve online student engagement.

Once the cycle is complete, it will recommence. The definition of online student engagement will be reconsidered given the observations made during the previous cycle, measurement of online student engagement in the author's online classroom will be conducted, and finally the practice will be refined in the ensuing semesters reflecting the insights gained. In this way, this solution aligns with Loughran's (2002) description of effective reflective practice, which "is drawn from the ability to frame and reframe the practice setting, to develop and respond to this framing through action so that the practitioner's wisdom-in action is enhanced" (p. 42).

While this solution focuses on the local environment of the author's online classroom, the author most frequently teaches at University X in courses delivered in a

hybrid online and offline format with a second instructor. There is no deliberate effort to share best practices with the wider organization embedded in this solution. However, the second instructor may also interact with other online instructors. This provides an opening by which best practices might trickle out and gradually have an impact on the broader organization, subtly influencing other instructors in the organization in alignment with teacher leadership (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009).

Required resources. The resources required for this initiative are limited by design and include primarily time and effort of the author. The author will also leverage existing technological resources in the organization in the form of the LMS. It is important to note that there is some opportunity cost attached to refocusing the author's efforts on online student engagement in the online classroom; the author will need to be mindful of what is being de-prioritized in an effort to increase online student engagement in the online classroom.

Benefits and consequences. The most significant benefit of this solution will be the online student engagement level of the students in the author's online classroom. A corollary to this is that the author will also benefit from professional satisfaction in improving her teaching practice. However, one consequence of pursuing this solution is that the scope of those influenced is relatively small. Additionally, there is risk in this solution as it is heavily reliant on the author's singular perspective. While the author has years of experience as a post-secondary instructor and online instructor, she has limited formal instructional training.

Solution 2: Build a Community of Practice with other Online Teacher Leaders

Teacher leadership and distributed leadership by their nature are collaborative (Gronn, 2000; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; Silva et al., 2000). Yet teaching from a remote home office in an online classroom does not readily lend itself to the hallway chats and lunchroom conversations that might naturally enable collaboration. There is a need for increased collaboration that will allow this author to leverage distributed and teacher leadership and drive improvement in online student engagement in her online classroom and those of her colleagues at University X. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) articulate this, noting, “Teacher leaders experiment and learn to collaboratively solve the problems” (p. 102). This solution therefore focuses on increased collaboration as an entry point to address the conceptual and practice gaps.

Communities of Practice. Wenger’s (2011) Communities of Practice (CoPs) will inform this approach to collaboration. CoPs are well suited to this OIP because they are not formal teams (Wenger & Snyder, 2000) and therefore feasibly implemented by this author in spite of her limited positional influence. But more importantly they are well suited to this OIP because they effectively create the professional network of like-minded instructors that will facilitate collaboration, ensure multiple voices are heard, and enable improvements to online student engagement in the online classes of the members of the CoP. CoPs are “groups of people informally bound together by shared expertise and passion for a joint enterprise” (Wenger & Snyder, 2000, p. 139). Wenger (2011) elaborates on some of the defining characteristics of a CoP, including that they are “practitioners” (p. 2) who “do not necessarily work together on a daily basis” (p. 2). This is the precise nature of the proposed network of online teacher leaders. The work that

CoPs do is closely aligned with teacher leadership (Silva et al., 2000), and includes “sharing and spreading best practices” (Wenger & Snyder, 2000, p. 141) and “foster[ing] new approaches to problems” (Wenger & Snyder, 2000, p. 140).

Alignment between CoPs and social constructionism. CoPs are well aligned with social constructionism. Fairhurst and Grant (2010) describe social constructionist “leadership as a co-constructed reality” (p. 175), reflective of the co-constructed nature of leadership within a CoP, where the CoP collaboratively creates the way in which it will be led. Additionally, some of the mechanics of CoPs reflect social constructionism. Camargo-Borges and Rasera (2013) observe that, “In the realm of professional practices within organizations, social constructionism brings in concepts such as dialogue, imagination, co-creation, and meaning making” (p. 4). Camargo-Borges and Rasera’s (2013) description encompasses some of the activities being proposed for this CoP, including co-creation of a concept of online student engagement, and dialogue as a mechanism to build that concept and develop a plan to improve practice based upon it.

Connection between distributed leadership and CoPs. Hargreaves and Fink (2009) discuss the connection between distributed leadership and CoPs, writing that CoPs, “do not require heroic or hierarchical leaders, but leaders who can help design a culture in which leadership is distributed in an emergent and benevolent way” (p. 184). Hargreaves and Fink’s (2009) vision presents a CoP as a tool which aligns with, enables, and is enabled by distributed leadership.

Application of CoPs. Creating a CoP within University X would involve identifying potential CoP members, crafting and sharing the vision of the CoP and its purpose, generating interest in the CoP, and establishing a mechanism by which those

members can collaborate. The first step would involve engaging with administrators to obtain introductions to other online instructors within the organization. Additionally, the author will need to carefully craft a vision for the CoP and its ultimate purpose, improving online student engagement in online classrooms. Once these introductions are made, the author will conduct one-on-one outreach, ideally through a phone call, to build rapport, share the vision and purposes of this particular CoP, assess each target instructor's interest level in the CoP, and understand the mechanism through which each instructor would like to collaborate. Wenger and Snyder (2000) observe, "people in such communities tend to know when and if they should join. They know if they have something to give and whether they are likely to take something away" (p. 142). It will therefore be important to engage in an open and honest dialogue with fellow instructors rather than present a pitch for the CoP. The mechanism by which collaboration will occur could include emails, a message board, a periodic conference call, or any number of other possibilities imagined by the members of the CoP. It is essential to develop these mechanisms in conjunction with other online instructors in order to create a sense of ownership and egalitarianism amongst members of the group.

Once the initial group and the mechanisms through which it will collaborate have been established, the group will begin discussions of how to improve online student engagement in their own online classrooms. The author will guide the co-construction of a working definition of online student engagement in an activity aligned with social constructionism. Camargo-Borges and Rasera (2013) observe that the "constructionist approach emphasizes the ability to create realities through language" (p. 3). This definition of online student engagement is a creative activity that will provide direction to

the changes to practice made by the members of the CoP. Additionally, the author will lead an initial discussion about how to measure online student engagement given the definition developed, and what refinements to practice might improve online student engagement in online classrooms as conceived of in that definition. Importantly, multiple voices will be heard in this discussion. This includes the members of the CoP, as well as other stakeholders, including students and others with related expertise in the organization. These voices may be incorporated either through inviting such stakeholders to CoP discussions, or through CoP members connecting separately with such stakeholders and bringing their findings back to the group.

The author may need to relinquish control in order to ensure that the members of the group stay invested in the work. Wenger and Snyder (2000) observe CoPs are “free-flowing, creative . . . organic, spontaneous, and informal” (p. 140). In this way, they share important commonalities with emergent change (Higgs & Rowland, 2005) and the emergent nature of distributed leadership as described by Gronn (2000). In fact, Wenger and Snyder (2000) portray them almost as shadow organizations, noting they are “resistant to supervision and interference” (p. 140). Leading an organization of this nature will require careful observation and analysis of the group to determine when to tighten and when to relinquish control to ensure that the community stays on task and engaged.

The work of the CoP will be iterative, and its value will build over time. Wenger and Snyder (2000) observe that “as [CoPs] generate knowledge, they reinforce and renew themselves” (p. 143). The members of the CoP will work on developing their own practices based on their learnings from the community. The community will regroup through the selected mechanisms on either a scheduled or continuous basis to refine the

definition, and suggested practice changes designed to improve online student engagement in online classrooms.

Required resources. This solution primarily requires time and human resources. Specifically, this solution would require the time and knowledge of an administrative contact to identify potential CoP members. Then this solution would require the time and effort of the CoP. The members of the CoP will use existing technological resources in the form of the existing LMS. As with the first solution, there is some opportunity cost attached to redirecting the attention of these instructors to online student engagement in online classrooms. The CoP may require additional technological resources to facilitate collaboration, perhaps through the existing LMS. This may require the time and effort of the IT team. Finally, as the CoP will be developing the practice related to online student engagement in online classrooms, additional required resources may be identified over the course of the plan.

Benefits and consequences. The most significant benefit of this solution will be the online student engagement level in the online classrooms of the students in the courses taught by the members of the CoP. Additionally, the members of the CoP will benefit from the professional development made possible by such a community (Wenger, 2011; Wenger & Snyder, 2000). There is risk to this solution. Wenger and Snyder (2000) observe, “communities of practice are vulnerable because they lack the legitimacy - and the budgets - of established departments” (p. 144). The CoP may have to adjust to insufficient resource allocation.

Solution 3: Modify Individual Teaching Practice in Online Classroom, then Build a Community of Practice with other Online Teacher Leaders

Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) observe that teacher leaders, “influence others through a variety of routes. After successfully using a teaching strategy, a teacher may become an advocate who shares the approach with other teachers” (p.103). The third solution takes inspiration from this observation, modifying it slightly, in alignment with the co-construction inherent in social constructionism (Camargo-Borges & Rasera, 2013) to allow for the co-creation of a definition of online student engagement and related modifications to practice. Specifically, this solution combines Solution 1 and Solution 2, in which a modified version of Solution 1 is the first phase of the plan, and a modified version of Solution 2 is the second phase of the plan. Figure 2 incorporates a visual representation of how the two phases fit together; an extended description follows.

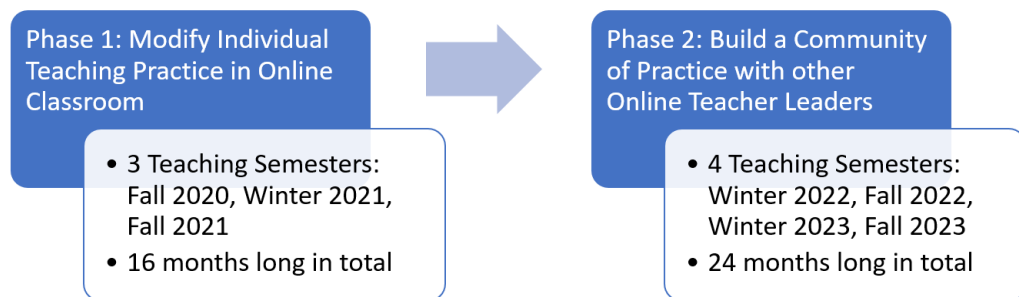


Figure 2. Timing of two phases of Solution 3. This figure presents the timing of the two phases of Solution 3.

Solution 1 will remain very similar to its description above, except that it will have a finite duration of three teaching semesters. During the first semester, the author will craft a definition, build a practice plan, and take a baseline measurement of her students’ engagement at the end of the semester. The subsequent semesters will allow for modifications to practice and revisiting the definition.

In Solution 3, the first phase—the author’s modifications to her individual practice—will function as an incubator, allowing her to refine her definition of online student engagement, and to tinker with ways to measure it and improve her teaching practice. There will be three objectives to this phase. The first will be to impact students directly by improving online student engagement in the online classroom. The second will be to learn, documenting successes and failures to share with the CoP in the second phase. The third will be to build success with the endeavor in order to establish credibility with other online instructors in the organization. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) describe the importance of this, writing that, “before others will accept a teacher as a leader, that teacher must be successful with his or her students” (p. 68).

The second phase will be very similar to Solution 2 above. It will draw on the collaborative nature of distributed and teacher leadership (Gronn, 2000; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; Silva et al., 2000) through the use of CoPs (Wenger, 2011) as discussed in Solution 2. It will also share the social constructionist orientation to co-construct leadership (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010) through the development of those CoPs, and co-create reality through the use of language (Camargo-Borges & Rasera, 2013) as the CoP collaboratively builds a definition of online student engagement.

It differs in that the author will already have done some initial work on defining and improving online student engagement in the online classroom. Therefore, in initial conversations with prospective CoP members and in initial meetings with the CoP, this work will be shared. It is important to share it as information rather than direction in order to allow the CoP to truly co-construct its own definition and best practices collaboratively in keeping with the collaborative nature of distributed leadership and teacher leadership

(Gronn, 2000; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; Silva et al., 2000) and the co-construction of reality through language described by social constructionism (Camargo-Borges & Rasera, 2013).

Required resources. The resources required for this initiative represent the combined resources required for Solutions 1 and 2, and include time and effort of the author, an administrative contact to identify potential CoP members, and the CoP. Additionally, existing technological resources will be employed to facilitate collaboration. It is possible additional resources may be identified by the CoP as its members begin to work together. It is important to note that there is some opportunity cost attached to refocusing the author's efforts on online student engagement in the online classroom, and that this opportunity cost will be significant for this solution as the author will be focused on it over both of its phases.

Benefits and consequences. The benefits of this plan include increased online student engagement in the online classroom of the author's students and the students of the members of the CoP, the professional satisfaction of the author and members of the CoP, and the professional development made possible by the CoP (Wenger, 2011; Wenger & Snyder, 2000). Additionally, this solution allows for a definition of online student engagement and changes to practice to benefit from the joint expertise of all of the members of the CoP, rather than the singular vision of the author. However, like Solution 2 there is risk of limited resources.

It is worth noting that none of the proposed solutions default to employing the NSSE definition of student engagement. There are two reasons for this. The first is that the NSSE is focused on institutional level engagement and is therefore not appropriate to

a discussion of student engagement limited by the confines of the online classroom. The second is that the NSSE is founded on a conception of student engagement rooted in the face-to-face environment.

Assessment of Alternatives

All three solutions improve online student engagement in a subset of University X's online classrooms. However, Solutions 2 and 3 improve online student engagement in more online classrooms, as they engage additional teacher leaders in the organization to improve online student engagement in their own online classrooms. Further, while all three solutions act as a catalyst for wider organizational change, they do so to varying degrees. Solution 1 is focused primarily on the instructor's own online classroom, and any wider organizational change results from best practices developed in that online classroom seeping out to the wider organization by way of the second instructor in the course; Solutions 2 and 3 deliberately widen the scope by incorporating additional teacher leaders. Therefore, if impacting the most students is the objective, Solutions 2 and 3 have an advantage over Solution 1. Solutions 2 and 3 also share the advantage of incorporating the perspectives and experience of other instructors to strengthen the definition of online student engagement and the changes to practice. Where Solutions 2 and 3 differ is in whether or not there is a phase that precedes the creation of a Community of Practice. If there is no first phase, as in Solution 2, the time required to execute the plan is significantly shortened. However, if there is a first phase, as in Solution 3, there is time for the author to refine her own understanding of online student engagement, and, through initial successes in improving online student engagement, establish herself as having some credibility among her peers. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) observe the

importance of such an activity for a teacher leader, as it increases the likelihood that her fellow teachers will accept her as a leader.

Recommended Solution

Solution 3, Modify Individual Teaching Practice in Online Classroom, then Build a Community of Practice with other Online Teacher Leaders, is the recommended solution. There are three important advantages to this solution over the others. The first is that it allows online student engagement in online classrooms to be improved for more students. The second is that it allows the expertise and perspectives of other online instructors to be incorporated into the definition, and related practice improvements. The third is that it allows the author an opportunity to gain some initial successes with improving online student engagement in the online classroom, allowing her to establish herself as an instructor with some expertise. This increases the chances that the author will be accepted as a leader by her fellow online instructors (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009).

Leadership Ethics and Organizational Change

Throughout this OIP, this author makes clear her personal alignment with Stefkovich and O'Brien's (2004) ethical model for educational institutions, in which the "best interests of the student [are] central" (p. 200). Stefkovich and O'Brien (2004) describe the lineage of this model, noting that "ethical paradigms based on models of justice, caring, and critique are merged into a fourth paradigm, that of the profession" (p. 198); the fourth paradigm is the root of the "best interest of the student" (p. 2004) model.

In Chapter 1, this author explored Stefkovich and O'Brien's (2004) work, which prioritizes the needs of the individual student, and clarifies the dimensions involved in

assessing what is best for the student. This prioritization has already driven fundamental decisions, for example about elevating the discussion around the conception of online student engagement. Further, it has already provided structure and direction to decisions about prioritization of the gaps identified between the present and future state. These are among the many micro and macro level decisions and issues to be made in the development and execution of this OIP that have an ethical dimension. In this section, three of the most fundamental ethical issues are considered: the definition of online student engagement, the redirecting of resources to support improving online student engagement in online classrooms, and implications of that definition and the uncompensated work to be done by the CoP.

Stefkovich and O'Brien's (2004) work, with its focus on outcomes, is rooted in teleological ethics. Aronson (2001, p. 248) draws distinctions between three approaches to teleological ethics: 1) ethical egoism; 2) rule utilitarianism; and 3) act utilitarianism. Aronson (2001) directs us to the work of Rallapalli, Vitell, and Barnes (1998) who define act utilitarianism as "examining each act and deciding if it would maximize 'good' to the greatest number of people" (p. 158). Act utilitarianism, which focuses on outcomes for others, underpins Stefkovich and O'Brien's (2004) model, yet it is refined by the prioritization it puts on the interests of students.

An important issue that will be addressed through this OIP is the definition of online student engagement and the resulting practice related to that definition. This decision is steeped in ethical issues. Definitions of online student engagement manifest the values of the definer and paint a specific picture of how that definer believes students should engage in an online classroom. The definition—and language in general—from a

social constructionist perspective are shaping forces that construct reality (Camargo-Borges & Rasera, 2013). Practically, that means how the term is defined shapes how online student engagement is evaluated. How that definition is evaluated may impact how students themselves are evaluated; for example, if online student engagement is imagined to have a behavioral component, instructors may choose to evaluate it and their students by frequency of posts or time spent in the learning management platform. Finally, that definition will shape practice. One would be hard pressed to imagine a definer of online student engagement not believing—or at least expressing—that they are prioritizing the wellbeing of the student. If ethics are to guide the discussion of defining online student engagement, and it is this author's position that it should, Stefkovich and O'Brien's (2004) model provides additional direction. Specifically, it incorporates respect, which Stefkovich and O'Brien (2004) describe, noting, "the emphasis is upon equality, tolerance, acceptance of one's own as well as others' frailties, an appreciation and celebration of diversity, and a commitment to finding common ground in an increasingly multicultural, pluralistic society" (pp. 204-205). Certain conceptions of student engagement, including that in the NSSE, appear at odds with such an orientation. Others, such as the critical conception of student engagement, with its focus on "democratic reconstruction" (McMahon & Portelli, 2004), discussed in Chapter 1, are a more natural fit. An ethical definition of online student engagement will necessarily need to incorporate factors such as these, and this author will also need to ensure that the process through which that definition is developed is crafted with ethics in mind.

If the issue of redirecting resources to support the solution proposed in this plan is explored, Stefkovich and O'Brien's (2004) model suggests the utility of improving online

student engagement in online classrooms needs to be compared to other initiatives from the perspective of its impact on the student. What serves the student best? Could the author's efforts and time, as well as that of the CoP, be better spent on another endeavor? For example, is retention more essential to the best interests of the student than online student engagement in online classrooms? To truly answer this question would require a level of data unavailable to this author and a level of resources devoted to the analysis that in and of itself would present an ethical resource allocation conundrum. Stefkovich and O'Brien (2004) observe, "determining what actions are in the best interests of a student is not easy" (p. 210). However, Stefkovich and O'Brien (2004) provide additional guidance in defining the best interests of the students as encompassing rights, including the "right to an education" (p. 202). If this is used as a guide, equity of access issues become central. Online education is an important device that enables such equity of access. As student engagement is important to students' learning, persistence, performance, and academic achievement (Kuh et al., 2008; Meyer, 2014; Pardo et al., 2016; Phan et al., 2016), online student engagement might reasonably be surmised to be important to those outcomes in an online education environment. Therefore, online student engagement facilitates students' right to an education (Stefkovich & O'Brien, 2004), and the reallocation of resources to support it is justified from an ethical perspective.

The final significant ethical dimension is the uncompensated work to be done by the CoP. The CoP by its nature must engage in work that is outside of the scope of the professional duties of an adjunct instructor. There are, therefore, ethical considerations inherent in creating CoPs. To some degree, the most worrisome of these ethical issues are

diminished by the direction from which the idea of the CoP is generated. A fellow adjunct instructor's request has less of an embedded power dynamic than a similar request from someone who has the ability to hire or rehire instructors. However, the author will need to rely on administrative contacts that have that power to make introductions. Care and thought will need to be given to how that introduction is presented so that it does not appear to be originating with that administrator.

Even if it is clear that the concept of the CoP was initiated by a fellow adjunct instructor, there are still ethical dimensions to asking a colleague to take on uncompensated work. Turning to Stefkovich and O'Brien's (2004) model to make sense of these ethics, the answer appears clear: if the needs of the student are prioritized, one can easily imagine that some amount of unpaid work is not an unreasonable cost of such an endeavor. But Stefkovich and O'Brien's (2004) model does not seem robust enough to address issues that are largely removed from the student's experience. Act utilitarianism provides a broader perspective, yet it too might suggest that the limited number of members of a CoP should sacrifice their time in the service of the increased online student engagement in online classrooms of a significant number of students. It effectively throws a metaphorical train switch, running the train over the adjunct instructors and saving the students. It must be acknowledged that adjunct instructors are, within the context of a university environment, a relatively vulnerable population. Is asking them to sacrifice their time and expertise without compensation ethically defensible?

In an ideal world, adjunct instructors would indeed be compensated for work such as this. As monetary compensation is not a realistic possibility in the context of this OIP,

the author considers other types of value the CoP might derive from the activity. That value could be social, professional pride, or the development of professional marketable skills. The author must stay attuned to the dynamics of the group and the responses of the individuals in the group to ensure her ethical responsibilities to her peers are being met with respect to facilitating the delivery of that value.

Conclusion

The realities of emergent, continuous change have shaped the author's analysis and framework for change. Together with distributed and teacher leadership and a constructivist perspective, these inform the selection of a solution to the PoP that begins with modifying her individual teaching practice and then builds a CoP who will work together to improve online student engagement in their online classrooms. This solution leverages distributed leadership, the collaboration of teacher leadership (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; Silva et al., 2000), and constructivist and social constructionist perspective. Chapter 3 details the specific implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and communication plans that will be employed in that effort.

Chapter 3: Implementation, Evaluation, and Communication

This chapter presents an implementation plan for the recommended solution described in Chapter 2, including its monitoring and evaluation, and related communications. The implementation plan, detailed in the first section below, outlines the goal, specific objectives, and detailed implementation plan to meet those objectives. Resources, potential issues, and related mitigation plans are explored, with particular consideration given to the impact of the author's role in the organization. The monitoring and evaluation plan focuses on two complex and central aspects of the plan: collaborative efforts of the OIP and online student engagement in online classrooms. Finally, the communication plan is considered with messages and strategies tailored to the CoP at various stages of the plan. The importance of the communication plan in light of the author's role is discussed.

Change Implementation Plan

The goal of this OIP is to construct meaningful collaboration with other instructors to improve online student engagement in online classrooms at University X. This goal connects with the emphasis on teaching described in the organizational goals of University X (University X, n.d.b.). This OIP distinguishes between goals and objectives as crystalized by Feliciano (2008), who describes a goal as "a brief, clear statement of an outcome to be reached" and an objective as a "condition that must be attained in order to accomplish a particular goal". To attain the goal, three discrete objectives were set over a time horizon of forty months. These objectives are milestones on the path toward the overarching goal. The first objective corresponds to Phase 1 of the solution outlined in Chapter 2. Phase 2 of the solution outlined in Chapter 2 has been subdivided for planning

clarity and is represented by the second and third objectives. These objectives are: first, to measurably improve online student engagement in the online classroom of the author by December 31, 2021; second, to initiate a CoP of online instructors at University X aimed at improving online student engagement in online classrooms by August 31, 2022; and third, to measurably improve online student engagement in the online classrooms of the members of the CoP according to the understandings developed by the CoP by December 31, 2023 (end of the fall semester, 2023). This plan will primarily benefit online students, as student engagement is connected to important phenomena such as learning, persistence, performance, and academic achievement (Kuh et al., 2008; Meyer, 2014; Pardo et al., 2016; Phan et al., 2016), and will leverage distributed and teacher leadership enacted through the informal teams of CoPs (Wenger & Snyder, 2000) which enable collaboration and grassroots change.

Figure 3 presents the timeline of implementation activities of the detailed plan. This plan will meet all three objectives within a forty month time horizon. The plan begins September 1, 2020, immediately following the completion of this OIP, and ends December 31, 2023.

The plan is divided into three initiatives, each of which aligns with one of the objectives detailed above: 1) modifying individual practice; 2) development of the CoP; and 3) CoP discussions and changes to teaching practice. Each of the initiatives connects to one or more of the three stages of Weick and Quinn's (1999) freeze, rebalance, unfreeze model. In this model, change is imagined as moving through phases of observation and analysis, identifying opportunities for improvement, and relinquishing control, connecting to the process of continuous change evident in the interest in

improving online student engagement at University X that predates this author’s OIP.

Finally, each activity is assigned a lead, or activity owner, and supporting personnel required for the activity are identified. Figure 3 is presented below, followed by a detailed discussion.

Timeline of Implementation Activities

	Lead	Support	Fall 2020	Win 2021	Sum 2021	Fall 2021	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	Sum 2022	Fall 2022	Win 2023	Sum 2023	Fall 2023
Phase 1: Modifying Individual Practice															
Analysis of existing organizational policies and practice	A														
Develop definition and select a evaluation tool. Baseline evaluation at end of Fall 2020 semester	A														
Develop a plan for changes to practice.	A														
Implement evaluation and improvements to practice.	A														
Refine definition, evaluation and suggested practice	A														
Phase 2, Part 1: Development of CoP															
Craft communication of vision and purpose of CoP	A														
Share vision of COP with Program Manager; obtain introductions to other online instructors	A	PM													
One on one outreach to potential CoP members	A	CoP													
Finalize intial CoP and set collaboration mechanism	A	CoP													
Phase 2, Part 2: CoP Discussions and Practice Changes															
Initial CoP discussions: definition, evaluation and practice	CoP														
CoP to develop definition and select a evaluation tool. Baseline evaluation at end of Fall 2022 semester	CoP														
CoP to implement evaluation and improvements to practice based on CoP discussions.	CoP														
CoP to regroup to refine definition, evaluation and suggested practice	CoP														

Legend: A= Author, PM = Program Manager, CoP = Community of Practice (includes author)

Figure 3. Timeline of implementation activities. This figure provides a detailed overview of specific implementation activities, the personnel involved in their execution, and their timing. Please note: Winter 2022 semester has been separated into months for clarity.

Modifying Individual Practice

The first initiative, modifying individual practice, begins September 1, 2020, and ends December 31, 2021. This initiative is Phase 1 of the recommended solution. It represents work that must be accomplished to establish credibility of the author as a teacher leader (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009), and draws on her role as a leader in her

online classroom (Lai & Cheung, 2015). This initiative begins with a freezing (Weick & Quinn, 1999) exercise—an analysis of any policies and existing practices related to online student engagement within the organization. Some of the work related to this activity has been accomplished throughout the production of this OIP. The author will additionally use the first semester of the plan, September-December 2020, to engage in an extended rebalancing activity (Weick & Quinn 1999). Approaching the PoP from a social constructionist perspective, which emphasizes the pivotal role that language plays in constructing reality (Gergen, 1985), she will develop a definition of online student engagement. She will then use that definition to determine how to measure online student engagement in her own online classroom and audit her own practice for opportunities for improvement. This information will be used to develop a plan to modify practice. At the end of the first semester, she will deploy the first evaluation to establish a baseline measurement of online student engagement in her online classroom. Evaluation is used periodically in this implementation plan to help the author understand the impact of her practice modifications. Specifics regarding these evaluations will be discussed in the Change Process Monitoring and Evaluation section.

The next two teaching semesters, Winter 2021 (January-April 2021) and Fall 2021 (September-December 2021) cycle through unfreezing, as the author deploys changes to practice in her online classroom; and then freezing, and rebalancing (Weick & Quinn, 1999), as the author will continuously analyze information from evaluations of online student engagement in her online classroom and look for opportunities to continue to refine the definition and how it is reflected in practice and further evaluations. The author typically does not teach in the summer semester (May-August 2021). This time will

provide additional opportunity to freeze and rebalance (Weick & Quinn, 1999) as the author reflects on changes made during the Winter 2021 semester (January-April 2021) and refines her plans for the Fall 2021 semester (September-December 2021).

A final evaluation will be made of online student engagement in the author's online classroom at the end of the Fall 2021 semester (December 2021), which will allow the author to assess improvements over the course of this initiative by comparing it to evaluations made at the ends of the Fall 2020 and Winter 2021 semesters. Evidence of improvement to online student engagement in the online classroom provided by this evaluation will aid in establishing the author's credibility as a teacher leader amongst her peers (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009).

Development of Community of Practice

The second initiative, development of a CoP, begins January 1, 2022, and ends August 31, 2022, by which time the objective of initiating a CoP will be achieved. This initiative is Part 1 of Phase 2, as detailed in the recommended solution. It draws on the collaborative, synergistic nature of distributed and teacher leadership (Gronn, 2000; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; Silva et al., 2000) in the creation of a CoP. This initiative begins with crafting a communication of the vision and purpose of the CoP. Thoughtfully and strategically creating this communication is essential as securing the interest and commitment of others in the organization is essential to the success of the plan. The next two activities involve deploying that communication. This will include first reaching out to the manager who oversees the programs in which the author teaches to share the vision and request introductions to other online instructors. The author will then reach out individually to each potential member of the CoP to share the vision, share information

about some of the findings from the first phase of the plan, determine how interested they are in the CoP, and, if interested, determine the preferred method of collaboration (e.g., periodic phone calls, an asynchronous message board, etc.). The author will also use this initial contact to establish her credibility as a teacher leader by sharing her successes from the first phase of the project (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009). The author will document each potential member's reaction on the Adoption Continuum, a tool which will track whether they are aware of the effort, interested, desiring action or moving to action (Cawsey et al., 2016). Those in the final two categories will be recruited into the CoP, but the documentation will be kept and revisited if it becomes necessary to expand the membership of the CoP. The initiative will culminate in finalizing the initial membership of the CoP and setting up the group's preferred collaboration method.

CoP creation uses distributed leadership and social constructionism. Wenger (2000) offers that there is a series of components that a CoP must negotiate in the early stages of its formation, including "events, leadership, connectivity, membership, projects and artifacts" (p. 230). Leadership is being negotiated and collaboratively built by the CoP during this stage, in keeping with Fairhurst and Grant's (2010) social constructionist description of "leadership as a co-constructed reality" (p. 175). Further, "concertive action" (Gronn, 2002, p. 429) is being undertaken, in that the CoP is developing the means to collaboratively construct what will be achieved in a synergistic fashion by the individual members. While Wenger (2000) suggests that the design of the CoP is decided upon by the group itself, several of these elements are addressed prior to the group's formation, most notably the membership and learning projects. At this time the group will decide how and when to collaborate. It will be important for the author to focus on

building relationships and modelling enthusiasm for change (Silva et al., 2000), aspects of teacher leadership, in this first initiative. Additionally, initial leadership of the group (Wenger, 2000) may emerge in early conversations as different members may take on different leadership roles, furthering their engagement with the initiative, and in keeping with the collaborative nature of distributed and teacher leadership (Gronn, 2000; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; Silva et al., 2000). The design of connectivity and artifacts (Wenger, 2000) will emerge as the CoP progresses, as such elements emerge as necessary aspects of the CoP's work.

Community of Practice Discussions and Practice Changes

The second initiative, CoP discussions and practice changes, begins May 1, 2022. This initiative is Part 2 of Phase 2 of the recommended solution. It will overlap with the discussions about how the CoP will be run. The specific objective of this initiative is to improve online student engagement in the online classrooms of the CoP by December 31, 2023. The time horizon of this implementation plan was selected to allow for three teaching semesters by the CoP (Fall 2022, Winter 2023, and Fall 2023). While the University offers classes in the summer term (May-August), this author, as an adjunct online instructor, typically does not teach in the summer. This timeline allows for the establishment of a baseline observation of online student engagement in online classrooms, time for implementing changes to instructional practices, and measurement of the impact of these changes.

This initiative begins with a rebalancing exercise (Weick & Quinn, 1999), an initial discussion of the definition and current levels of online student engagement in online classrooms, and consideration of potential practice changes that might lead to its

improvement. The author will initiate this discussion. During this initiative, the author will introduce what she accomplished during the first phase of the plan, in which she modified her individual practice. This work will be introduced not to guide the direction of the CoP, but to share some initial information, and also to establish the author as a teacher leader with online classroom success (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009). While it may seem premature to discuss evaluation at this point, the author will suggest that the CoP evaluate online student engagement in their own online classrooms prior to implementing practice changes in order to establish a baseline against which the metric might be compared after practice changes are introduced. This evaluation is discussed at greater length in the ensuing Change Process Monitoring and Evaluation section of this OIP. The activities of the Fall 2022 semester will be to develop a definition of online student engagement in September and October, select a related evaluation tool in November, and conduct a baseline evaluation in CoP member online classrooms in December at the end of the Fall 2022 semester. This timeline is deliberately selected to ensure that the CoP remains engaged with the initiative by allowing visible progress to be made in a short period of time. A careful balance will need to be struck within the CoP to produce a definition the group unites behind, that incorporates the perspectives of other relevant stakeholders within the organization, like students. In fact Tourish and Barge (2010) comment that one of the benefits of leadership viewed from a social constructionist stance is that it allows different perspectives to be voiced and therefore incorporated. The author will need to take care to introduce her work in Phase 1 in such a way as not to impose that perspective on her colleagues, and will need to be genuinely receptive to the perspectives of her colleagues. Gronn (2002) points to the importance of

such an approach in his discussion of conjoint agency, a concept central to his definition of distributed leadership, in which he notes, “conjoint agents both influence colleagues and are influenced in return” (p. 431). Additionally, ethical considerations of delaying improvements to secure this baseline evaluation will be discussed and weighed within the CoP.

The other activities are designed to be ongoing for the duration of the timeframe encompassed in this implementation plan. First is an ongoing or recurrent discussion by the CoP to refine and improve on the definition of online student engagement that was generated in initial discussion in the Fall 2022 semester. This exercise in analysis fits the description of a rebalancing activity (Weick & Quinn, 1999). Second, an unfreezing activity (Weick & Quinn, 1999), is the periodic evaluation of online student engagement in the online classrooms of the CoP, as conceived of by the CoP, and implementation of practice improvements identified by the CoP. In the final two semesters, changes will be made to practice, and measurements or observations will be collected to determine their effectiveness.

Stakeholders: Reactions to Change, Engagement, and Empowerment

The following section discusses the use of the Adoption Continuum (Cawsey et al., 2016) to monitor tasks related to engaging other stakeholders. This tool will be the primary mechanism used to understand stakeholder reactions to change. The communication plan has a central role in driving change and in responding to stakeholder reactions to change. The final section of this chapter will detail how communications will be employed to engage stakeholders.

Engaging stakeholders, particularly the CoP, is critically important to the success of the plan, as the author must inspire the CoP to collaborate in order to improve online student engagement in online classrooms. A significant means that the author will use to engage the CoP is through empowering its members. For example, one of the early tasks of the CoP is to develop a definition of online student engagement. In spite of the author's experience developing a definition of online student engagement during the first phase of the project, the author will draw on the collaborative nature of distributed and teacher leadership (Gronn, 2000; Gronn, 2002; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; Silva et al., 2000) to allow the group to decide collectively, rather than working to build consensus around her personal point of view. This will allow the group the satisfaction of knowing that they are truly building something collaboratively. Further, this is in keeping with the social constructionist value of incorporating multiple voices into the co-construction of reality (Tourish & Barge, 2010). Camargo-Borges and Rasera (2013) additionally discuss the value of this sort of discourse in social constructionist practice, noting "within organizations, social constructionism brings in concepts such as dialogue, imagination, co-creation, and meaning making" (p. 4).

Cambridge and Suter (2005) comment on the importance of "frequent synchronous and asynchronous interaction, and [a] sense of presence of other community members . . . to keep members engaged with the community" (p. 3). Therefore, engagement will not only rely on empowering members but also on ensuring there is a sense of community developed within the CoP by putting time and regularity into establishing the relationships and a sense of joint enterprise within the CoP.

Required Resources

The resources required for this solution were addressed in Chapter 2. The plan has deliberately been designed to minimize the use of institutional resources. Therefore, the plan will leverage existing resources, including information and technology resources like email and the existing LMS. The most significant resources required for this plan are human resources. Specifically, this includes work and time of the author and the CoP members, and the manager of the program in which the author teaches. There is some opportunity cost attached to this decision, with due consideration being given to other competing efforts that would require those stakeholders' time and effort. While limited time and effort are required of the manager of the program in which the author teaches, a more significant amount of time and effort are expected of the CoP and of the author. While the ethical implications of this were considered in Chapter 2, it is necessary to consider maintaining the motivation and enthusiasm of CoP members during implementation as volunteering their time could lead to implementation fatigue. Indeed, as this time and effort will be contributed voluntarily the author must work to engage stakeholders, focusing on demonstrating the value of the endeavor. The author anticipates a variety of responses from various potential CoP members, ranging from those who are entirely not interested to those willing and eager to participate. The author will focus her efforts on those who might be interested and those who are eager, and the expectation is that this will be a relatively small percentage of potential CoP members, as these instructors are frequently employed on a part-time basis and have competing demands on their time.

Potential Issues and Mitigation Plans

Several potential issues have been identified, which can be grouped into internal forces, unforeseen external forces, and challenges within the CoP. First, internal forces include staffing changes, for example if the manager of the program in which the author teaches changes roles or leaves the organization, the CoP members leave the organization, or competing priorities within the organization make meetings with the CoP or others in the organization impossible. The author estimates the possibility of these risks of occurring to be high, but the impact to be relatively low. Staffing changes are surmountable but will require added time to address. Mitigation plans rely on added time for related activities to be completed. For example, two months are allotted to introductory calls to potential CoP members, in anticipation that additional time may be needed if other instructors have competing priorities. Second, external forces might involve funding cuts, or governmental mandates that result in shifting organizational priorities. The likelihood and impact of these forces vary. Some might be addressed with additional time already built into the implementation plan. For example, an entire month has been allotted to establishing the collaboration mechanism with the CoP, so if funding cuts result in decreased access to IT resources for working with the CoP, time is available to identify and develop an alternative means of communication.

The third potential set of issues is challenges within the CoP. The author envisions the group coming to a common consensus regarding the definition and practice related to online student engagement in online classrooms in order to facilitate future interactions with the rest of University X. However, there might be dissent within the group, difficulty in conceiving of a definition or practice changes related to online student engagement in

online classrooms, or difficulty executing that vision. The author assesses these risks to be low, but the potential impact to be high. Careful recruitment may aid in diminishing this risk, as will careful navigation of team dynamics. This will include the author listening for signs of dissatisfaction and working toward proactive solutions when these occur to ensure they do not grow into significant problems. Additionally, there may be issues connected to maintaining momentum within the CoP. This can be addressed by ensuring that the smaller milestones met are acknowledged and celebrated.

Building Momentum within the Community of Practice and Beyond

Armenakis, Harris, and Mossholder (1993) discuss the value of a form of active participation, which they call “enactive mastery” (p. 690) in building momentum for change. They argue that initial, successful efforts “can be used to prepare a target for change by taking small incremental steps” (Armenakis et al., 1993, p. 690). Change recipients will be more confident of the likelihood of change if they participate actively in early, small, successful ways (Armenakis et al., 1993). In their words, this will “generate efficacy” (p. 690), reassuring the members of the CoP that changes related to online student engagement in online classrooms can indeed be successful. One can conceive of the work of the CoP itself, both as it meets and as it modifies online classroom practice, to be an organizational form of enactive mastery (Armenakis et al., 1993).

Within the CoP, there are a number of small steps that the members of the CoP will take that are forms of enactive mastery (Armenakis et al., 1993). These begin with joining the CoP and include participating in initial discussions. However, these small steps truly begin to look like effective enactive mastery (Armenakis et al., 1993) as the CoP finalizes a conception of online student engagement, makes changes to practice, and

measures the impact of those changes to online student engagement in their online classrooms. A successful initial evaluation will prove empowering to the CoP, persuading them of the efficacy of their work (Armenakis et al., 1993), and motivating them to continue in their endeavors to improve online student engagement in online classrooms.

Limitations

The scope of the goals of this OIP is defined by the author's position, however the author's position also affords her the ability to consider the topic of online student engagement from an outsider's perspective, unencumbered by how things "should" or "have" been done in the past by the organization. There are limitations, certainly, but they can also be understood as strengths that the author's position brings to this OIP.

This Change Implementation Plan lays out a detailed plan to achieve three objectives designed to support the overarching goal of directly improving online student engagement in the online classroom of the author, and in online classrooms of other instructors at University X. However, it does not address in detail how the progress of the plan will be monitored and how the plan will be evaluated, nor does it detail the supporting communication plan, which is essential to the success of this OIP. The following sections consider each of these in turn.

Change Process Monitoring and Evaluation

This section of the paper addresses monitoring the progress and evaluating the success of this plan, focusing on the three objectives established for this OIP: 1) to measurably improve online student engagement in the online classroom of the author by December 31, 2021; 2) to initiate a CoP of online instructors at University X interested in improving online student engagement in online classrooms by August 31, 2022; and 3) to

measurably improve online student engagement in the online classrooms of the members of the CoP according to the definition set by the CoP by December 31, 2023.

Monitoring and evaluation both assess products of the plan, but the focus of monitoring is on assessing the process, while evaluation assesses the outcome. Markiewicz and Patrick (2015) echo this distinction, noting that monitoring “tracks program implementation and progress” while evaluation assesses “program performance” (p. 12). When objectives have been clearly defined, monitoring considers whether the plan is progressing appropriately to achieve those objectives, while evaluation is a determination of whether or not those objectives have been met. Monitoring and evaluation are then employed to ensure that the plan is on course to achieve its objectives, and to assess whether or not those objectives are met. All efforts to meet the three objectives of this OIP will need to be both monitored and evaluated, but this section focuses on those activities that involve considerable complexity: monitoring the collaborative efforts essential to the OIP and an evaluation of the improvement to online student engagement in online classrooms. Table 4 summarizes what will be focused on in this discussion of monitoring and evaluation, and how the author proposes to approach this task.

There are several reasons that the discussion of monitoring and evaluation will focus on these two aspects of the plan. The first is their relative complexity, which necessitates complex monitoring and evaluation plans. The second is their centrality to the plan as a whole. The collaborative efforts that will be monitored are essential as they represent the core of how the plan will be achieved. They include the collective development of a definition of online student engagement in online classrooms,

recommended improvements to practice, and evaluation of online student engagement in the online classrooms of the CoP. The Adoption Continuum will be used as a monitoring tool and is discussed in further depth in this section. Evaluating improvements to online student engagement in online classrooms is fundamental to the plan, which is formed to address inadequate online student engagement in online classrooms. Further, its evaluation will prove the value of the work of the plan to the author in Phase 1, and then to the CoP itself in Phase 2. The specific tool used to evaluate online student engagement in the online classrooms of the CoP will be determined by the author in Phase 2 and the CoP in Phase 2, but may include tools that gather quantitative data, like surveys or passive observational data gathered through an LMS. This is considered in greater depth in this chapter.

Table 4

Focal Topics for Monitoring and Evaluation Discussion

	Monitoring	Evaluation
What	Collaborative Efforts of OIP	Online Student Engagement
How	Adoption Continuum	To be determined; may include quantitative data from surveys or passive observation

Van Kemenade (2014) proposes a model applicable to emergent change evocative of mindfulness: “Attention, Context, Commitment, Reflection and Action (ACCRA ©)” (p. 5); several of these elements will be utilized in the monitoring of this OIP as discussed below. He stresses that these are not steps in a process, but factors that need to be continuously attended to (van Kemenade, 2014). In fact, several of the factors are

continuously monitored. For example, he stresses the importance of awareness of others, “leadership in emergent change processes requires giving attention to the human being continuously” (p. 5) and of “continuous reflection” (p. 7)—constantly observing and mulling over those observations. This constant thoughtful awareness of others is particularly important with respect to the CoP. While van Kemenade does not provide guidance about how this would manifest in monitoring, the tools selected by the author of this OIP are philosophically aligned with van Kemenade’s work. Additionally, the tools selected are aligned with the author’s position in the organization, and therefore also with the leadership theories employed. Teacher leaders do not necessarily have positional authority (Robinson, 2008), which necessitates the selection of the Adoption Continuum, a monitoring tool aligned with this reality.

Monitoring the Progress of Collaboration

The monitoring plan focuses on efforts to engage and motivate others at University X. In this discussion stakeholders will be used to represent those who are being engaged and motivated. This largely refers to members of the CoP, but also encompasses the manager of the program in which the author teaches. Engaging stakeholders includes: involving the manager of the program in which the author teaches sufficiently to secure introductions to possible members of the CoP; and recruiting and retaining members of the CoP. Motivating stakeholders, specifically CoP members, to meet OIP objectives includes: crafting a definition of online student engagement with the CoP; identifying adjustments to practice that will improve engagement; identifying tools for evaluating it; and effecting these changes in the online classrooms of the CoP. While activities which motivate stakeholders will be monitored, this monitoring will focus

largely on ensuring that the progress of the plan stays on course with the planned schedule. Activities that focus on engaging stakeholders will require a more nuanced approach, as discussed below.

The author's approach to change employs strategies drawing on literature on distributed and teacher leadership that include collaboration (Lai & Cheung, 2015) and modelling enthusiasm for change (Silva et al., 2000). They do not involve any sort of official or direct reporting relationship, and it is likely that most of the stakeholders, with the exception of students, will correctly understand their involvement is voluntary or even a mere favor for a colleague. In this context, monitoring methods which are founded on the assumption of hierarchical leadership are inappropriate. Other stakeholders in the organization may not see the author as a positional leader, and the author's effectiveness may in part be enhanced by that fact; potential CoP members may be more motivated if they understand that they are building something collaboratively with peers. Further, the product of that collaborative work will be strengthened by the combined expertise and diverse perspectives of the CoP, a perspective in alignment with social constructionism (Tourish & Barge, 2010). Cambridge and Suter (2005) additionally note that, "assessment of the effectiveness of [CoP] activities have not yet been fully developed" (p. 3).

Therefore, the Adoption Continuum (Cawsey et al., 2016) will be used to monitor tasks related to directly engaging other stakeholders. This continuum has been selected to focus the author's attention on other people involved in the OIP (van Kemenade, 2014), monitoring the likelihood of adoption, particularly by the CoP. Additionally, it will be used to monitor the progress of the CoP discussions and implementation of suggested practice in their online classrooms.

The goal of the Adoption Continuum is to move stakeholders through the continuum to the point at which they are taking the desired action (Cawsey et al., 2016). This tool is valuable as it may provide guidance about specific communication tactics and messages that might be appropriate to the audience (Cawsey et al., 2016). The Adoption Continuum (Cawsey et al., 2016) does not require responses from other stakeholders, such as supplying responses to survey questions. The Adoption Continuum can be represented as a table that considers each stakeholder’s progress towards adoption of a change (Cawsey et al., 2016). It can be executed in such a way that it is invisible to other stakeholders, documenting the author’s observations of the stakeholder’s progress along the continuum. Figure 4 is an example of what this might look like.

Stakeholder	Awareness	Interest	Desiring Action	Moving to Action or Adopting the Change
Stakeholder 1	X			
Stakeholder 2			X	
Stakeholder 3		X		
Stakeholder 4		X		

Figure 4. Example Adoption Continuum, adapted from Cawsey, Dezca & Ingols, 2016. This figure provides a sample of how the Adoption Continuum might be used to track the likelihood of adoption with stakeholders.

To ensure that the author stays focused on the interest level of others with whom she is working, the author plans to record her assessment of each member’s placement on the Adoption Continuum (Cawsey et al., 2016) after each major contact with the stakeholders. These points of contact will be further discussed later in this chapter as part of the communication plan. This would include after such events as the initial email, initial call, and first meetings of the CoP. Early contacts may sort stakeholders into groups of potential and non-potential allies, but as the work progresses, monitoring of the existing CoP members becomes more critical: an increasingly disengaged CoP member

who has been working with the group for a year or more would be a great loss. This type of observation resulting from monitoring would result in direct contact with the CoP member to attempt to retain and re-engage them in the effort. The messaging and strategy utilized are discussed in the Communication Plan which follows this section.

Evaluating Online Student Engagement in the Online Classroom

This OIP is constructed to address inadequate online student engagement in the online classroom; therefore, evaluating changes to online student engagement in the online classroom is an essential component of the solution. This evaluation will occur in two separate phases of the plan. First, online student engagement in the online classroom of the author will need to be evaluated in the first phase, in which she modifies individual practice. Then online student engagement in the online classrooms of the members of the CoP will need to be evaluated in the second phase, in which the author works with the CoP to develop evaluation that corresponds with the definition of online student engagement co-constructed by the CoP.

Potential methods of evaluation. Literature addresses the relative value of different methods of evaluation of online student engagement, including those based on passive observation and those based on surveys (Dixon, 2015; Ma et al., 2015). Passive observation, including employing data gathered by an LMS about student behavior online, has been recommended or used by a number of researchers (Draus, Curran, & Trempus, 2014; Looyestyn, Kernot, Boshoff, Ryan, Edney & Maher, 2017; Ma et al., 2015); its currency and unobtrusiveness (Henrie, Halverson & Graham, 2015) cited as reasons. Data includes number of contributions (Draus et al., 2014; Looyestyn et al., 2017), length of contributions (Draus et al., 2014) and number of times visited

(Looyestyn et al., 2017), and achievement of tasks (Ma et al., 2015). More detailed data is available in many LMS platforms. The lack of bias (Ma et al., 2015) is among the reasons cited for the use of passive observational data. However, surveys, commonly used for course evaluations and mid-semester feedback at University X, might capture important insights about online student engagement in the online classroom—particularly if online student engagement is defined in a way that incorporates non-behavioral dimensions. Ma et al. (2015) suggest surveys “examine the cognitive and emotional issues in the man-mind” (p. 33); such internal matters are not readily captured through the data available in an LMS, making a compelling case for the use of surveys to evaluate online student engagement in the online classrooms of the author and the CoP if it is conceived of as having such dimensions. Such a survey may be used by itself, or as a complement to data gathered through an LMS.

If it is determined that a survey should be deployed to evaluate online student engagement in the online classrooms of the author and the CoP, an existing instrument worth considering is the Online Student Engagement Scale (Dixson, 2015). It is founded on a conception of online student engagement described as being “about students putting time, energy, thought, effort, and, to some extent, feelings into their learning” (Dixson, 2015, p. 4). This description certainly incorporates elements not observable through passive observational data, justifying and necessitating a survey.

A consideration that arises if a survey is to be used is how to operationalize it. The LMS used by University X includes a feature that allows online instructors to create and deploy their own surveys. The author uses this tool to gather mid-semester feedback from students in the form of an anonymous survey. This tool could be used instead for the

purposes of distributing a survey to the students in the online classrooms of the CoP. The CoP would ideally coordinate to release these surveys on the same date in each of their online classrooms.

The author will ensure that whatever tools are selected are used in accordance with related University X protocols, collective agreements and ethical guidelines, and for the purposes of quality improvement in the program. LMS use would focus on data pertaining to the online classrooms of the author and/or members of the CoP only.

Evaluation during the first phase, focusing on changes to individual practice.

During the first phase of the plan, evaluation will assess online student engagement in the online classroom of the author as defined by the author. The author will develop this definition during the Fall 2020 semester and select a tool that evaluates online student engagement according to this tool over the course of that semester. A baseline read will be taken using that evaluation tool at the end of the Fall 2020 semester (December 2020) in the online classroom of the author. The author will then implement changes to practice in the following two teaching semesters. At the end of each semester, online student engagement in the online classroom of the author will be evaluated using the selected tool to allow the author to compare it to the benchmark developed in December 2020. These evaluations will occur in April 2021, and December 2021.

Evaluation during the second phase, focusing on CoP collaboration. During the second phase of the plan, evaluation must be used to assess online student engagement in the online classrooms of the CoP as defined by the CoP. The CoP is scheduled to begin developing this definition in September 2022; to establish a baseline evaluation of online student engagement in the online classrooms of the CoP according to

the definition at the end of the Fall 2022 term (which extends from September-December 2022); and to begin implementing practice changes and periodic evaluations of these changes in ensuing terms. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the author will propose that an initial evaluation be conducted at the end of the Fall 2022 semester to assess the current level of online student engagement in their online classrooms. This will be used as a benchmark to compare to similar evaluations conducted in future semesters which will show the change in online student engagement in the online classroom. The evaluation will be conducted at the same point in the semester, towards the semester end, during the Fall 2022, Winter 2023, and Fall 2023 semesters.

The specific tool used to conduct this evaluation will be developed or decided on by the CoP, leveraging existing research and drawing on the experiences that the author had with evaluation in Phase 1. Care will need to be taken to introduce this experience in a balanced way that does not impose a singular perspective of online student engagement on other members of the CoP, many of whom may not have spent the same amount of time considering the topic in advance of the group's founding. This is in keeping with the collaborative orientation of teacher leadership (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; Silva et al., 2000) and is very important given this author's orientation to social constructionism (Gergen, 1985). An activity such as this truly undertaken as a social constructionist would necessarily allow for the sincere co-construction of concepts and tools (Tourish & Barge, 2010). An initial plan for evaluation will be determined in the middle of the Fall 2022 semester, but the evaluation may be revised over the duration of the CoP's work.

The CoP will also need to collectively address sensitive issues including who has access to data gathered when evaluating online student engagement and who will interpret

the data. Related issues may include CoP members uncomfortable with their results and collecting the data in a way that presents it as unbiased to members outside of the CoP. In the spirit of the CoP these issues will be addressed collaboratively, allowing for various concerns to be voiced in alignment with social constructionism (Gergen, 1985).

Initial research by this author, referenced earlier in this section, indicates a preference for quantitative data when evaluating online student engagement in the online classroom, whether that data is generated through surveys or passive observation. However, the collaborative nature of the CoP will require a genuine consideration of alternative perspectives potentially held by members of the CoP, and while this initial research may inform the beginnings of that conversation, the true value of the CoP will not be realized without listening to those alternative perspectives. This point aligns with the value that Tourish and Barge (2010) see in leadership approached from social constructionism—that it allows different perspectives to be incorporated.

Refinements Resulting from Monitoring and Evaluation

There is no point in monitoring or evaluating the products of a plan if no action is to be taken based on that monitoring or evaluation. While additional time has been built into the implementation timeline to account for unanticipated challenges, time may not be enough in and of itself—additional refinements may be required to the plan. For example, if the author were to observe limited movement of stakeholders along the Adoption Continuum, changes may need to be made to the communication plan. The nature of these changes would vary based on the stakeholder and might include efforts to persuade potential CoP members to engage with the CoP, attempts to retain or re-engage CoP members whose interest is waning, or significant revisions to the approach used to

connect with the broader organization to amplify the work of the CoP. This communication plan is discussed in depth in the ensuing section; its role is significant in this plan.

Plan to Communicate the Need for Change and the Change Process

The communication plan is particularly important to this OIP given its context and nature. An effective communication plan is essential to inspiring the planned change, particularly during its second phase. Communications take on particular importance as a generative tool in light of the author's orientation toward social constructionism (Camargo-Borges & Rasera, 2013; Gergen & Gergen, 2004), and particular importance given the collaborative nature of distributed and teacher leadership (Gronn, 2000; Silva et al., 2000). This section addresses communication plans, including the messages that will be crafted and the specific strategies that will be used to communicate those messages. It focuses on an audience essential to the plan: the CoP. This section traces planned communications for this audience from initial contact with the author onward.

The Message and Strategies to Convey the Message

Communications will focus on readying the audience for change, including the message appropriate for such an effort (Armenakis, Harris, & Feild, 2000) and strategies to convey this message (Armenakis, Harris, & Mossholder, 1993). Armenakis, Harris, and Feild (2000) posit that the message to such an audience should anticipate and address concerns about change, including: "discrepancy" which refers to the audience's assessment of the importance of change; "appropriateness" of the proposed solution given the circumstances; believed "efficacy" of the change; "principal support"; and "personal valence" or value of the change to the audience (p. 103). It is worth emphasizing that

“principal support” is described by Armenakis et al. (2000) as being of both “formal and informal leaders” (p. 103). This is a critical nuance given this OIP is produced by an online adjunct instructor leveraging insights about informal leadership from distributed leadership literature (Robinson, 2008). The message must therefore address the personal and organizational reasons for and benefits of the change, that the change is the correct course of action, and that it is likely to occur as a result of this OIP, including having the necessary support (Armenakis et al., 2000). The effectiveness with which the change messaging addresses these points is important. Armenakis et al. (2000) propose that “[t]he degree to which organizational members receive adequate answers to their core questions is a prime determinant of the nature of their ultimate commitment to the change” (p. 104). In order to ensure the change messaging is as effective as possible, the specifics of the content of the message will be crafted with the specific circumstances and needs of the audience in mind.

Armenakis et al. (1993) propose a number of strategies for communicating the messaging types described above, which include direct, one-way communications, described as “persuasive communication” (p. 688), supporting communications with third party information through the “management of external information” (p. 689), and “active participation” (p. 689), which shares some of the collaborative and community based elements of distributed and teacher leadership (Gronn, 2000; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; Silva et al., 2000) and CoPs. In fact, Armenakis et al.’s (1993) description of active participation is reminiscent of the envisioned nature of the CoP in this OIP, in that “a change agent may manage opportunities for organization members to be exposed to information which influences readiness, the message is generated through the activity

and is therefore outside of the explicit control of the change agent” (p. 689). This is an exact description of how the CoP in this OIP is conceived, in which the author initiates the CoP but the specific direction it takes with respect to conception, practice, and evaluation of online student engagement in the online classroom, is emergent based on the interests and decisions of CoP members. Further, it is reflective of the co-construction of reality embedded in social constructionism (Camargo-Borges & Rasera, 2013).

Table 5 outlines the messages and strategies that will be used during the communication plan for this audience, and breaks down the communications to the CoP into the Initiation Phase and Work Phase.

Table 5

Messages and Strategies of Communication Plan

	Messages	Strategies
CoP: Initiation Phase	Discrepancy, efficacy, appropriateness, personal valence, and principal support	Persuasive communications
COP: Work Phase	Discrepancy, efficacy	Management of external information
	Personal valence and principal support	Persuasive communications

(Armenakis et al., 2000; Armenakis et al., 1993)

Persuasive communications are employed extensively in this plan, as is the management of external information (Armenakis et al., 1993). All of the messages suggested by Armenakis et al. (2000) are drawn on over the course of the communication plan. The specific discussion of how and why these messages and strategies are used is included in the following sections.

Inspiring and Driving Change Forward with the Community of Practice

There are two main phases to the communication efforts with the CoP: the initiation phase of the CoP and the work phase of the CoP. These phases correspond to the second and third initiatives of the implementation plan: Development of the CoP, and CoP Discussions and Practice Changes. The message and strategies used in each of these phases are tailored to the specific phase.

Communications during the initiation phase of the CoP. During the initiation phase the message will focus on discrepancy (Armenakis et al., 2000), specifically sharing information about inadequate online student engagement in online classrooms and about the importance of online student engagement to other student outcomes. Further, the author will employ messages of efficacy (Armenakis et al., 2000) related to the endeavor— that the members of the CoP can actually effect change through the CoP. Additionally, the author will need to incorporate a message of “principal support” (Armenakis et al., 2000) which will establish her as a teacher leader by sharing her individual successes during Phase 1 of the plan (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009). Finally, the author will need to communicate that the CoP is indeed an appropriate (Armenakis et al., 2000) mechanism by which to drive these specific changes. Armenakis et al. (1993) propose that “[p]ersuasive communication is primarily a source of explicit information regarding discrepancy and efficacy” (p. 688). In this situation, persuasive communication (Armenakis et al., 1993) will take the specific form of a direct one-on-one communication between the author and each potential CoP member. Unfortunately, because online instructors at University X do not necessarily live in close proximity, these communications will need to take place by phone, video chat, or email. The author would

initiate contact with a brief email outlining the concept of the CoP as an approach to address low online student engagement in online classrooms and ask for a phone call or video chat. The email will focus on persuading the potential CoP member to commit to a phone call or video chat, incorporating information about the author's individual efforts during Phase 1. More detailed information about the initiative would not be shared in this initial contact, but messages of discrepancy, efficacy, principal support, and appropriateness (Armenakis et al., 2000) would be foreshadowed in anticipation of a follow up call. A colloquial, friendly tone would be applied in this initial communication.

The follow-up phone call or video chat would focus first on building rapport with the potential CoP member. The author would then share the concept of the CoP and its purpose, focusing the message on discrepancy—the inadequacy of online student engagement in online classrooms and its link to other learning outcomes—and efficacy—that the CoP can be effective in its work. The latter message will incorporate the control the online instructor has over their own practice in the online classroom. Additionally, the author will communicate the appropriateness of a CoP as a mechanism to address the needed change (Armenakis et al., 2000). As discussed in the monitoring and evaluation plans, the author's assessment of where the potential CoP member falls in terms of potential commitment to the CoP will be tracked on an Adoption Continuum (Cawsey et al., 2016), and follow-up communications will be tailored based on that assessment. The purpose of the initial call would be to ensure all potential members of the CoP are aware (Cawsey et al., 2016) of the initiative. Those that are assessed as interested or desiring action (Cawsey et al., 2016) will receive a follow-up email with more detailed information, and request for a second phone call after they have had an opportunity to

consider the information provided. Those that decide to join the CoP on the call—referred to by Cawsey et al. (2016) as adopting the change—will receive an email confirming the decision and detailing next steps. The author will ask those that are aware but have not yet moved forward in the Adoption Continuum (Cawsey et al., 2016) if they are receptive to further contact; if so, the author will send a planned email after an appropriate amount of time has elapsed.

Two additional messages will need to be communicated during this initial phase of creating the CoP: personal valence and principal support (Armenakis et al., 2000). Professional pride and the sincere interest of instructors in improving their practice will be reflected in communication messages as the author uses persuasive communication to communicate personal valence (Armenakis et al., 2000). The focus of the message will be largely on improving one's teaching practice in the interest of pursuing excellence in teaching. This message will not necessarily resonate with all of the potential members of the CoP. However, as participation in the CoP is entirely voluntary, and many of its members may be adjunct instructors with competing demands on their time, those potential members with whom it does not resonate may well self-select out of the CoP.

Communicating principal support presents some unique challenges in the context of this OIP. Armenakis and Harris (2009) are careful to detail that the “principals” referenced in principal support include “opinion leaders who can serve as horizontal change agents” (Armenakis & Harris, 2009, p. 129). It will be particularly important for the author to communicate her passion and commitment for the work of the OIP in her role as a “horizontal change agent” (Armenakis & Harris, 2009, p. 129). This can be done both verbally, through the language used to convey enthusiasm for and value of the work,

but also nonverbally through cues such as tone of voice and regular communications with the CoP that will signal commitment. Additionally, this can be achieved by sharing information about the author's initial individual efforts and successes to improve online student engagement in the online classroom, to establish her credibility as a teacher leader (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009). This strategy additionally echoes Silva et al.'s (2000) discussion of teacher leader's modelling receptivity to change. Figure 5 depicts the flow of communications during the initiation phase

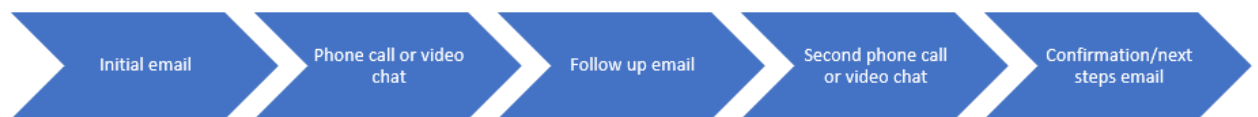


Figure 5. Flow of communications during the initiation phase. This figure depicts the flow of communication during the initiation phase for those potential CoP members receptive to the messaging.

Communications during the work phase of the CoP. Once the CoP has been formed, communications will shift to driving change forward. Specifically, this will focus on defining a conception of online student engagement and deciding on relevant changes to practice. Armenakis et al. (1993) describe a form of active participation that is relevant to this work, which includes engaging others in endeavors that expose them to “potential discrepancy and efficacy messages” (p. 689). In this case, this might include “management of external information” (Armenakis et al., 1993, p. 689), as the author will direct the CoP to academic and practitioner literature around online student engagement, enabling them, from a social constructionist perspective (Gergen, 1985), to co-construct their conception of online student engagement (Camargo-Borges & Rasera, 2013). The author has found this literature to include discrepancy messages (Armenakis et al., 2000), which discuss the value of improved student engagement in online classrooms, linking it

to learning, persistence, performance, and academic achievement (Kuh et al., 2008; Meyer, 2014; Pardo et al., 2016; Phan et al., 2016). As the CoP reads and considers this literature first-hand, rather than the digested observations of the author, they will have the opportunity to form their own judgments about the need to improve online student engagement in online classrooms. Armenakis et al. (1993) make a compelling case for this type of communication strategy, noting “individuals tend to place greater trust in information discovered by themselves” (p. 689).

While Armenakis et al. (1993) directly address that discrepancy and efficacy messages will be included in active participation, appropriateness (Armenakis et al., 2000) will also be communicated to the CoP. As the CoP will produce its work collaboratively, the collectively crafted plan will presumably be understood to be appropriate by the members of the CoP. The CoP will be structured and guided in such a way as to arrive at such a plan.

During this period, it will also remain important to continue to communicate principal support and personal valence to the CoP (Armenakis et al., 2000). This can be accomplished through the use of persuasive communications, which may include direct one-on-one communications like emails and phone calls or video chats, or group communications that may take place on a conference call. The author will communicate the message of principal support (Armenakis et al., 2000)—in which she will be a horizontal “principal”—by continuing to display enthusiasm and commitment through the language used, but also nonverbally through visible regular contributions to the work of the CoP and enthusiasm displayed through tone of voice or physical cues if a visual medium like video chat is used. Personal valence (Armenakis et al., 2000) will need to be

intentionally woven into contacts with the CoP. This might for example be achieved by suggesting an agenda item be added to any regular meetings that addresses the professional development value of the contributions made by the CoP members.

Conclusion

This chapter presents a feasible approach to implementing, monitoring and evaluation, and communications surrounding this OIP, consistent with the position of the author. Engaging colleagues is an essential aspect of this work. As a result of this, the communication plan takes on extra significance for this plan. This plan ensures that the author strategically crafts communications that allow her to build a CoP of instructors that deliver improved online student engagement in online classrooms at University X.

Next Steps and Future Considerations

The scope of what is to be accomplished directly by this plan is designed to align with the author's role as an online adjunct instructor. This was a deliberate choice made to scope change in a way that manages risk and maximizes the chance of success.

One possible positive next step for the organization would be to broaden the CoP initiative begun by the author, to invite more online instructors throughout the organization to participate. If this were to occur, there would be two valuable outcomes. The first would be that more online students in the organization would be impacted by the efforts to improve online student engagement in online classrooms. The second is that the discourse around online student engagement would be strengthened by the additional expertise and insights of a larger CoP. A second implementation, evaluation, and communication plan would need to be crafted at this moment to plan for and design a CoP that would maximize the positive potential of the newly envisioned CoP. The value

derived from this activity would be the dissemination of the ideas, and also the dissemination of the concept and application of a CoP.

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