

Decisions, dialogues, dilemmas: the drama of technological innovation in higher education

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A sales representative from the New Shiny Tool company approaches the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Innovation) at a mega-conference, or an academic comes to their Associate Dean Learning and Teaching to request the installation of an ideal small plug-in for the learning management system. Is this how innovation in higher education happens? What might happen next? In this experimental session, we will, with the help of the session audience, chart the characteristics of a robust innovation project and map some institutional case studies against this benchmark to foster greater understanding about the complexity of change and the implementation of new technologies for learning and teaching. Decision points and the perspectives of the decision-makers will be acted out in rapid scenarios, highlighting the choices available at each stage.

Keywords: change management, innovation, implementation, ICT, TEL, educational technologies

Perspectives on innovation

The processes that universities use to implement new technologies for learning and teaching, research and administration have been refined by decades of experience and in symbiosis with the corporatisation of the sector. This history might lead to expectations that innovation in higher education proceeds smoothly along a rational path, but its progress can be uneven and surprising. Institutional strategies, the tools available for planning and communication, the people involved at each stage of the implementation, and the choices that they make, all contribute to the drama of innovation.

To exemplify these complex interactions, this experimental session will enact a set of scenarios depicting phases in the implementation, in a higher education setting, of 'New Shiny Tool' (a very large TEL platform) and 'Tiny Integrated Plug-in'. Stakeholders are introduced via dialogues that present choices and branching points in the implementation timeline, and strategy, people, processes and enablers (Margherita & Petti, 2010) feature as factors in managing change. The dilemmas that the scenarios depict will resonate with ASCILITE attendees who are veterans of technology projects but also, we hope, interest fresh recruits to the academic environment.

The facilitators for this session are members of ASCILITE's TELedvisors SIG, and represent the perspectives of learning designers, educational technologists and academic developers on technological implementation and change in universities: we also welcome and will make use of other perspectives on innovation from the session audience. University staff with responsibility for any components of technological change and innovation (leaders and managers, academics, ICT professionals, business leads, as well as TEL professionals) will be able to identify with the issues raised in the scenarios and expand on them from their own experience.

Session scripts and choices

Short scenarios of key events in implementation case studies will be used to:

1. articulate the strategies, enablers, motivations and perspectives of each decision-maker and actor
2. involve the session audience in a workplace narrative where they can contribute their own insights and add to the scholarly conversation
3. experiment with drama and mapping as tools for reviewing project progress and failure.

The scripts for the scenarios have been extracted from anonymised stories from the TELedvisors SIG and from innovation case studies such as Wang and Paper (2005), University of Central Lancashire (2013), Porter et al. (2016), and Bayerlein and McGrath (2018). Several of these authors write from the stance of their own role, whether that be as Executive, project manager, course coordinator, academic, or ICT manager: according to Snyder (2013, quoted in White, 2017), the viewpoints of actors within complex systems provide important perspectives.

Discussion and live polling: With each short scenario, the session attendees will be invited to consider the aims, motivations, emotions, and priorities of the different people and roles involved. A combination of discussion and technology (Flux polling tool) will be used to enable the audience to effectively participate in the session.

Mapping: As the diverse goals of the stakeholders and the enabling issues and barriers are identified through the scenarios and by the attendees, we will add them to a timeline of key events. This mapping will show relationships with stakeholders over time and highlight tension points that appear and may delay implementation.

The session is constructed around two aspects of this year's theme for the ASCILITE conference, **diverse goals** and **one heart**. It has been claimed (Maloney & Kim, 2019) that universities and their staff represent a much wider set of goals and objectives than even the most diversified of corporations, objectives that can perhaps all be brought under the university's expressed mission of care for learners ("one heart"). As Philip Uys (2010) noted, however, care for students might be compromised when large-scale technology implementations exacerbate structural issues such as the educator's budget of effort between research and teaching, reducing the transformative possibilities of technology for learners, teachers and the institution. We will be in part guided by our session attendees as to how these concerns might be balanced through innovation.

Audience takeaways

Attendees will contribute to the development of an implementation map which can be shared and used in charting the progress of a complex project. The session organisers also hope that, through experiencing different personas, we and our attendees will learn more about and have greater empathy for the perspectives of others in our institutions.

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