WED: Who teaches the teacher? Networking professional staff to implement learning technology innovations (Stefanie Anyadi)

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Stefanie Anyadi
14 December 2014

Recent years have seen rapid development in the area of technology to support learning. This presentation will explore how innovation in technology enhanced learning (TEL) can be encouraged and supported in complex organisations like universities. Roger's Diffusion of Innovation concept will provide a framework to discuss and address some of the difficulties.

TEL is supported by a wide range of staff groups in UK universities. We will focus on teaching administrators (TAs), professional services staff based in academic departments in student-facing roles. A case study will show how a network of TAs might be able to encourage and support innovation in TEL and the benefits and difficulties associated with this approach. The network has made it possible to roll out updates, enhance staff development, and implement TEL-related guidelines and standards. It has improved collaboration and sharing of best practice across traditional boundaries but has also highlighted difficulties such as variability of resources and management support.

We will discuss the development of the project artefact, a multimedia presentation about this case study which will demonstrate the benefits of networking teaching administrators to support innovation and best practice. The artefact will include interview extracts with teaching administrators, students and academic staff to illustrate the points made, and some of these will be shown as part of the presentation.

The final part of the presentation will report on the results of a survey which aimed to establish how wide-spread the involvement of teaching administrators is in supporting and developing TEL at UK universities. Early indications are that there is an increasing interest in involving this staff group and some of the reservations and perceived benefits will be discussed.

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Text version of poster

Title

Who teaches the teacher? Networking professional staff to implement learning technology innovations across complex organisations

Author

Stefanie Anyadi

Conference Theme: Implementation

Purpose

The poster is designed to give a brief taster of the multi-media presentation for the H818 conference in February

Description of Poster

Below the boxes containing the title and author, there are five icons for sources which the presentation will draw on for some background information and statistics. This includes the UCISA Report 2014 (with a link) which summarises the results of a comprehensive survey of technology enhanced learning support at UK universities. It also includes icons for relevant professional associations, namely the AUA (Association of University Administrators) and ALT (Association for Learning Technology), HESA (the Statistics Agency for UK Higher Education) and JISC (a charity which supports and develops the use of Information Technology in UK Higher Education).

Underneath these icons, under the heading "Barriers to developing technology enhanced learning", a chart provides an image on Everett Roger's theory on the diffusion of innovation (with a link to the Wikipedia article). Then, under the heading "Opportunities for supporting technology enhanced learning" an arrow points to an image showing teaching administrators in a central position between students, academic staff and central divisions. Another arrow leads on to an image of a workshop group.

From this image, an arrow leads on to the lower part of the poster, with an image of a computer screen at the bottom left, under the heading "Case study". This links to a Youtube video of some teaching administrators talking about their role. There is a smaller "Digital Department" icon on the computer screen which links to the UCL Digital Department blog, which provides some additional information but is not essential for understanding the poster. A final arrow then points to the heading "Implications and opportunities for UK HEIs and FE colleges"

Links

- UCISA report: http://www.ucisa.ac.uk/~/media/groups/dsdg/Tel 2014 Final 18 August.ashx
- Wikipedia page on Diffusion of Innovations:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diffusion_of_innovations
- Teaching administrator clips on Youtube: http://youtu.be/xYa-J_fd_g0
- UCL Digital Department blog: http://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/the-digital-department/

Interested? Please join my H818 Conference Session in February to find out more!

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Stefanie Anyadi

07:18 on 27 December 2014

Summary of the content of the presentation

Background:

- HESA (Higher Education Statistics Agency) reports show a significant increase in the number of students in recent years for UK universities.

  These increases in numbers, the increased student expectations in the light of large tuition fees and new technologies have transformed teaching in Higher Education in recent years.

- UCISA (Universities and Colleges Information Systems Association) carry out a bi-annual survey into technology enhanced learning (TEL) in UK universities and further education colleges. Their 2014 report found that staff are aware of the opportunities for improvement. The main barriers are lack of academic staff knowledge and a lack of time. The top challenges they identify are lack of support staff, specialist skills and resources, and issues with staff development.

- Roger's (1962) model of the diffusion of innovations shows that innovation happens gradually, and Moore (1991) developed the model further to emphasise the chasm that an innovation has to cross to become used widely.

- Support for innovation varies considerably between different institutions.

Case Study:

- very large and complex university, de-centralised.
- teaching administrators are involved in supporting TEL across the organisation; these are professional services staff working in academic departments at the interface between academic staff, students and central divisions like the Registry with very varied job roles. They have made it possible to implement some TEL innovations unexpectedly smoothly and quickly across the university, e.g. the introduction of minimum requirements for the virtual learning environment.
- Networking this staff group has led to an active Community of Practice which has given teaching administrators the confidence to suggest improvements and challenge less good practice, and to appreciate the value of their contribution, unlike colleagues investigated by Regan et al (2014).

Project:

- I plan to produce a short multimedia clip to include video, animation and graphs to showcase the work of this network, encourage new colleagues to get involved, and to demonstrate to their line managers and to senior management the value of this activity.
- some of the components are already available (video clips of teaching administrators and academic staff).

Wider implications:

- teaching staff are extremely busy so need tailored, just-in-time support to encourage the use of innovative teaching and assessment methods; local but networked support is ideal for large organisations.

- collaboration between professional and academic staff can improve the student experience (see also Parkes et al 2014).
- there is interest in involving this staff group to support TEL at a number of other universities, as a survey I carried out recently has shown, but concerns about teaching administrator work load and job descriptions would have to be addressed (see also Graham 2013).
- it would be useful for all higher and further education organisations to think about who supports innovation in their organisation, and how these colleagues can be supported and networked.

Bibliography:

Stefanie Anyadi
16:54 on 13 February 2015

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Moore, Geoffrey A. 1991, Crossing the Chasm, New York, HarperCollins Publishers.

Parkes, S., Young, J. B., Cleaver, E., & Archibald, K. 2014, Academic and professional services in partnership literature review and overview of results, Higher Education Academy, viewed 1 February 2015, http://scotland.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/research/Prof_Service_Partnerships_report_final_200214_updated.pdf.

Regan J-A, Dollard, E and Banks, N. 2014), 'A comparative study of the perceptions of professional staff on their contribution to student outcomes', Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management, vol. 36, no. 5, pp. 1-15.

Rogers, E. 1962, Diffusion of Innovations, Free Press, Glencoe.

UCISA 2014, 2014 Survey of Technology Enhanced Learning for higher education in the UK, viewed 6 January 2015, http://www.ucisa.ac.uk/~/media/groups/dsdg/TEL Survey 2014_29Sep2014.ashx.

Stefanie Anyadi
16:55 on 13 February 2015

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Contribute

Discussion (7)   Links (0)   Academic References (0)

Alison Walker
10:15pm 27 January 2015 Permalink

Hi Stephanie Your presentation sounds very interesting and addresses the management of a topic I hadn't considered (or was even really aware of) before. I am interested inTEL as an AL at the OU but hadn't given innovation in this area much thought at all so your presentation is certainly going to add another dimension of knowledge to my AL repertoire. Was there a particular reason why you have addressed the TA population? I'm guessing it's because they have a student facing role as well as being within an academic team so they are uniquely placed? This may just be showing my lack of knowledge about their role as I'm not entirely certain what they do! I'm looking forward to hearing about your case study and the outcome of networking, particularly how it is enhancing staff development. I'm interested in how this is working and how it is enhancing development as I'm looking at developing remote workers and so I am interested in how networking can support learning. I guess the same principles would apply whether in commercial or HE?

Stefanie Anyadi
7:13pm 30 January 2015 Permalink

Hi Alison, Thank you very much for your feedback.

I've addressed the TA population because I'm one myself, and have worked with many others over the years. It is only in the last few years that we have realised how pivotal our role is (or has become) in connecting students, lecturers and central services. This has to a large extent come about through networking, which helped us to make the significance of our roles more explicit to ourselves and others. I do think that networking can support learning for remote workers and in all sorts of organisations. It would be interesting to have a chat about what you'd like to do and how our experience may help.

Alison Walker
12:49pm 31 January 2015 (*Edited 12:49pm 31 January 2015*) Permalink

Thanks for the clarification - it will be great to grow my understanding of your role and I am really looking forward to seeing the way you can influence innovation in TEL.

It would be good to catch up on networking, thank you. It is encouraged in some of the

organisations I work with but in a very 'light touch' way. Most employees see it as a way of profiling their career and this turns most of them off - they are also very task focussed customer facing businesess and so anything that doesn't have a deadline or is not measured tends to get neglected. Lets connect up.

Sheila Greenwood
5:08pm 3 February 2015 Permalink

Thank you for your help and support Stefanie you have been awesome.

I hope to take time out to viiew most of the conference. Such a diverse mix of presentations. Looking forward to viewing yours and perhaps learning a thing or two about TEL.

Dr Simon Ball
10:26am 12 February 2015 Permalink

Your questions and comments from the live conference presentation are below:

- sounds like these people are the key role that holds the other parts together
- What they use in healthcare sector are champions in different areas - does this relate?
- at southampton uinversity they have students doing arole of 'digital ambassadors' (i think that is the term
- nice storyboard
  Will check out 'Storyboard That'
- How do teaching staff consider your role?
- Great presentation. In terms of Community of Practice, have you considered social network theory analyse with whom/why/what people were developing their technological expertise/innovation? Or alternatively, how do you think about individual characteristics of teachers (e.g., TPACK) influence/hamper/encourage technological innovation?
- Do you approach the academics or do they approach you?
- I used to train the staff in my college to use learning technology, Moodle, creating resources etc. I was part-time hourly paid as a business/ict lecturer and was paid additional hours by management to do CPD training in Staff Development slots. This seemed to work well as no-one who was teaching full-time had enough hours in the day - was difficult enough for me!
- interesting problem about how you encourage innovation in a complex organisation

Stefanie Anyadi
7:24pm 12 February 2015 Permalink

Questions and Answers

sounds like these people are the key role that holds the other parts together: Yes, I think in many respects staff like teaching administrators are holding everything together (and you may not think about them unless things get unstuck!)

What they use in healthcare sector are champions in different areas - does this relate?: Yes, our E-learning team are developing a network of e-learning champions and have made a point of including (at least) one academic and one professional services staff from each department. It'll be interesting to see how this will develop.

at southampton uinversity they have students doing arole of 'digital ambassadors' (i think that is the term: At my organisation, they are called "changemakers" but the programme is only just starting. Will be interesting to see the projects they'll propose.

nice storyboard Will check out 'Storyboard That': I reallly enjoyed using that, can only recommend it!

How do teaching staff consider your role?: Generally, there is very close collaboration between teaching staff and teaching administrators. Setting boundaries can be difficult, as some staff may want to pass responsibilities over to administrators which should be carried out by an academic. The added complication is that teaching administrator roles vary considerably from department to department, and even within departments - and they are also developed by postholders. Some departments have developed some guidelines to clarify some of the contentious issues (not only learning technology related!).

Great presentation. In terms of Community of Practice, have you considered social network theory analyse with whom/why/what people were developing their technological expertise/innovation? Or alternatively, how do you think about individual characteristics of teachers (e.g., TPACK) influence/hamper/encourage technological innovation?: Thank you for these suggestions. I will investigate these theories and see how apply to our experience. We're only just starting to document the activities and outcomes of this network, so will be good to take into account the theories you mention.

Do you approach the academics or do they approach you?: Academics generally work closely with teaching administrators so I think either may start a conversation about a difficulty they have encountered or a good idea they have come across, and this will start a conversation which may lead to a different way of doing things. Teaching administrators who have taken on the role of e-learning champion will more actively approach teaching staff (and other teaching administrators) to support and develop good practice. We hope to provide some support for these champions to help them with this leadership role.

I used to train the staff in my college to use learning technology, Moodle, creating resources etc. I was part-time hourly paid as a business/ict lecturer and was paid additional hours by management to do CPD training in Staff Development slots. This seemed to work well as no-one who was teaching full-time had enough hours in the day - was difficult enough for me!: Yes, I think the lack of time is a huge issue (also picked up by the UCISA 2014 report as one of the main barriers to developing technology enhanced learning)

interesting problem about how you encourage innovation in a complex organisation: Yes, it will be interesting to see how it works elsewhere. I sent out a questionnaire to see how other organisations support learning technology, will have to

analysise the data...

Jane Ballans
1:59pm 13 February 2015 Permalink

Hi Steph, sorry not to have heard the live presentation however I have listened on the recording. I just wanted to say how interesting I found the presentation and in particular the slide discussing wider relevance.

Well done on answering the questions so clearly.

Contribute to the discussion

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