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Creating a common vision

How can institutional strategies guide the use of educational technology?

Forming a central strategy is often a first step for institutions seeking to incorporate educational technology. Such strategies can provide a platform to share institutional visions and values as well as offer guidance for decision-makers and practitioners alike. For example, strategies on educational technology can outline different technology options, clarify the responsibilities of different actors, highlight common goals as well as communicate the institution's approach to outsiders.

The strategy conundrum

The absence of a strategy has been found to be a barrier for implementing educational technology across an institution. Without a strategy, <u>university teachers may feel abandoned</u> with the challenges that accompany educational technology – left alone to sort out their own solutions. At the same time, strategies can be counterproductive, when they are <u>unclear</u> and disconnected from the practices of teaching and learning.

Our research showed how there was often confusion surrounding such strategies. We repeatedly found that staff members within the same institution were not in agreement regarding the purpose of a strategy or if one even existed. In this vein, strategy was often something that happened to teachers, not with them.

Case Study Snapshot: Does your institution have a strategy for educational technology?

Responses from a mid-sized research university

"I suppose so, but somehow I'm not aware of [the strategy] directly right now. We have several boards and committees that deal with this."

Member of IT services

"I would say there is no real strategy. So sure, maybe if you look, you can find something on paper somewhere. So there's always a mission statement or something like that ... but in everyday work, if there were a real strategy, it wouldn't really be present."

Instructor

"We have a strategic mission statement for teaching and digitization processes, which are of course subordinate to each other."

Member of IT services

"The new [strategy] was adopted in 2019. But before that, there was an e-learning strategy. I think. But I'm not quite sure about that. [The strategy] provides various points ... something like making good practice examples at the university visible."

- Member of the vice rectorate

"I'm always a bit skeptical about the strategy at universities because, of course, you can formulate it as a guideline, but the individual teachers have to implement it ... but if they don't implement it, then we have to try to work with incentives. But, of course, there are some [teachers] who refuse to do so."

- Central-level leader

This conundrum leaves us with lingering questions: Are strategies for implementing educational technology necessary or just cumbersome? And how can an institution create a strategy that fits everyone's needs?

Going back to the basics

Drawing on our research, we recommend starting with the basics by creating a common vision for educational technology. This involves fleshing out what the purpose of educational technology is and aspires to be for individual teachers, departments and the larger institution. A common vision is the basis on which to build a strategy for implementing and using educational technology.

Strategies built on a common vision can become lighthouses for teaching staff, offering guidance and clearing up ambiguity. When creating a common vision, equal participation among stakeholders – teachers, managers, technicians, and administrators is key. Collectively forming a vision can closely align it with practice, which is vital for increasing the acceptance of educational technology.

A common vision can be organized by the central university management as well as be formed at the level of faculties and departments. These visionaries may work in different areas of the universities and the focus should be placed on including diverse voices and encouraging reflection and engagement.

STEPS FOR CREATING A COMMON VISION

Step 1: Getting started

- Who should become involved in administrative discussions about educational technology? Where are these individuals located? How can their expertise and time commitment be recognized?
- What are our motivations for implementing educational technology at our institution / faculty / department?

Step 2: Clarifying expectations

- Should a strategy on educational technology guide daily practices or be more in the background?
- Should a strategy include subgoals for different units (e.g. study programs / departments / faculties)?
- Should a strategy solve specific problems related to the implementation of educational technology?

Step 3: Forming a common vision

- What is the common vision of our institution combining the ideas and topics collected in step 2?
- Break down the common vision into actionable steps: How can our vision be put into practice? What are concrete ways the vision can be reached?
- How can the vision be communicated to the larger institutional community for feedback and reworking?

Step 4: Ongoing evaluation

- Revisit the vision at intervals: Does our vision still fit the needs of the community? Have our motivations, communities or practices changed?

