THE PRACTITIONERS' FIELD GUIDE FOR IMPLEMENTING EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY

Maintaining connections

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Maintaining connections

How can educational technology expertise be shared across networks?

Adopting educational technology can be a daunting task for many staff members. Exchange with trusted colleagues serves an important role in facilitating the implementation of educational technology at universities. Networks can be powerful resources for exchanging knowledge, building confidence with new technologies and finding moral support. For example, digitally experienced teaching staff can provide less experienced colleagues with practical advice for dealing with problems and help them to overcome their reluctance to use technology.

While this exchange may be especially beneficial for teachers who have limited experience with educational technology, our research has shown that these networks can be mutually beneficial for all staff members regardless of their digital expertise. In building such communities of practice, groups of people bonded through common tasks and challenges, new knowledge can be created and shared.

> Network learning
> " … one of the best ways of dealing with teachers who were reluctant [to teach online] is for them to talk to colleagues … just talking to people who are more used to online teaching" (Central-level leader)

Networking within the institution

Collegial networks can lead to the emergence of informal leaders, individuals who have expertise in educational technology. Such informal leaders, we found, were intrinsically motivated to share their digital experience and knowledge. This interaction led to peer learning groups forming.

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Peer Learning
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"We made small training videos, which were then available in our learning management system … and together we then tried to create, as the most experienced people or experts, some kind of support platform that you could look at later." (Prorector)

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Collegial networks
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" … [one colleague] is very committed [with educational technology]. We are all very close to each other, in terms of work. You can write an email [saying], 'I have a problem with this and that' depending on the content, and either cc the whole team or explicitly just this one colleague, 'Can you help me out?' And then you have the answer and sometimes immediately, 'Do you want to have a quick phone call?' or 'Do you want to try it out right now live on the computer?' That's how it works for us." (Lecturer)
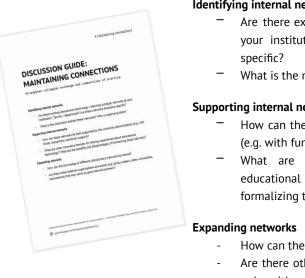
Networking beyond the institution

External networks, we discovered, can also become relevant sources for sharing knowledge. Individual university teachers, who are embedded in networks outside their home institutions, may have access to a vast amount of knowledge and digital study material. Such networks may vary in their size and focus and involve different actors, e.g. policy makers, funders, external colleagues and university associations.

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External networks
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"[interuniversity collaboration] is totally based on informal trust, on a one-to-one basis. I would just send a link to colleagues and like a small library of courses that people could browse through and see … it just happened to be a sort of shared economy amongst frontline staff without any formal university involvement." (Head of study program)

Learning about educational technology from a trusted colleague, one who understands the subject area, opens up new possibilities for teachers to engage with educational technology. Such networks make the road of educational technology seem less perilous.

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MAINTAINING CONNECTIONS

Identifying internal networks

- Are there existing educational technology / teaching collegial networks at your institution / faculty / department? Are these networks discipline specific?
- What is the motivation behind these networks? Who is organizing them?

Supporting internal networks

- How can these networks be best supported by the university administration (e.g. with funds, recognition, technical support)?
- What are other innovative formats for sharing experiences about educational technology? What are the benefits and disadvantages of formalizing these networks?

Expanding networks

- How can the knowledge of different (disciplinary) networks be shared?
- Are there other external organizations and actors (e.g. policy makers, other universities, associations) that may serve as good network partners?