THE PRACTITIONERS' FIELD GUIDE FOR IMPLEMENTING EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY

Unpacking resistance

5

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Is resistance to educational technology a bad thing?

The classroom has traditionally been the domain of teaching staff: reinforced by decentralized university structures, disciplinary subcultures and the protected value of academic freedom. Educational technology impacts various organizational processes and brings changes to the protected terrain of the classroom. Research has shown that centrally-led technological changes to teaching have resulted in reluctant responses from staff members, and even in some cases resistance.

In our imaginations, resistance conjures up dramatic scenes of picket lines and organized walkouts, however what we label 'organizational resistance' embodies a wide range of actions. For example, employees may resist changes in their workplace by arguing against the change, opposing and obstructing it as well as in more subtle ways by ignoring, avoiding and undermining change.

Subtle resistance to educational technology was more commonplace in our data, such as investing minimal effort in engaging with technology, discrediting its quality and waiting for a return to in-person teaching (after the COVID-19 pandemic). These subtle forms of resistance were often the result of educational technology challenging personal ideologies about teaching and institutional identity.

Data Dive: Where does resistance to educational technology come from?

Less engagement in digital classrooms
"I was pretty anxious to be honest and uncomfortable [with teaching online], specifically, because in my particular personal style of teaching, I like to form relationships with the students and get to know them. I can look around the class, I can see who is not engaged and who is. I move people around quite

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> often. I get them talking to one another, all of those things about being face-to-face with people." (Head of study program & Instructor)
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> The campus is missing
> " … we are a very campus focused university and our students and many of our staff haven't been particularly happy to have to move online" (Central-level leader)
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> Restrictions on discourse and discussion
> "With Corona, it was a forced changeover from one day to the next, which is still not easy for us. Well, not for me … but because it contradicts my idea of the university. University is discourse and discussion with individuals and groups. And under digital conditions, that only takes place with great restrictions. So that's no longer possible." (Lecturer)
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> Lack of personal interest
> "I'm not a digital person. That means I had to look up what a flipped classroom is. And to be honest, I'm not interested in it … that's related to my subject. I want to exchange arguments. I don't do that in the flipped classroom or in group work …" (Faculty member)

Resistance can also be fueled by an individual's emotional response to change. Some teachers associated new technology with fear: a fear of failing, fear of looking incompetent in front of students and a fear of losing one's authority.

> Fear of educational technology
> "… there is a real fear among teachers [concerning edtech] of losing their positions. When you understand digital teaching as a canned product, which some people still do, that is, a lecture recording can simply be played back over and over again for the next five years. If you're stuck with that concept, then there's the feeling that you lose control, that you're just not important … I think that actually scares a lot of people … they are afraid of losing their positions [and] that others will be able to copy or evaluate what they have done." (Faculty administrator)

There was also a common concern that educational technology would significantly increase teachers' workloads.

> Simply too much work
> "I'm skeptical of any reassurances given that [educational technology] will be time neutral … whenever the university says minimal effort, or light touch, I think most of us are hiding under our desks … there is reluctance to use some [digital] tools that are typically born out of worry that it will substantially increase our workload." (Instructor)

When we think of resistance, it is often seen as something to avoid or an obstacle to overcome. We found that unpacking resistance to educational technology revealed insight into other underlying factors at work – negative emotions, fear of increased workload and ideological and identity conflict.

Instead of seeing resistance in a negative light, we pose [repurposing it as an opportunity](#) to understand the personal impact of workplace changes. Thus, the occurrence of resistance becomes an [opportunity for reflection](#) and means to rethink the consequences of digital change and how we go about implementing educational technology.

EMPIRICAL EXAMPLE: UNPACKING RESISTANCE WITH PROFESSOR X

The Story of Professor X:

The story of Professor X draws on aggregated data from our empirical studies. Professor X embodies common themes related to resistant behaviors and rationales identified in the data.

Professor X is a well-respected researcher in their field and also widely considered a great lecturer by students and peers alike. When their institution canceled in-person teaching as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Prof. X along with their colleagues had to move their lectures online. While their colleagues struggled and put in extra hours to redesign their lectures, Prof. X avoided making changes to their lectures. Instead, they decided to just move their regular lectures to video calls, not changing the didactic approach or format. After a while, students and colleagues noticed a steep drop in the quality of Prof. X's lectures — student engagement and attendance were poor and student performance was lower than usual. When asked about this, Prof. X stated that they were just waiting until the situation returned to normal and hoped to get back quickly to the lecture hall. However, as time passed, educational technology continued to be used and efforts were being invested in maintaining its presence in the curriculum. Yet, Prof. X still refused to change their ways of online teaching and lecturing.

Unpacking Professor X's Resistance:
- What do you think are the reasons behind Prof. X's behavior?
- Is Prof. X's behavior justified? If so, why?
- What do Prof. X's actions mean for their colleagues and the work with them? How do these actions impact students?
- Should Prof. X be convinced to act differently? What can be said or done?
- Who should be the one(s) doing the convincing?
- Have you managed to convince a Prof. X at your institution to behave differently?
- What reasons were given by Prof. X at your institution for their behavior?
- What institutional practices can help Prof. X?