

Chapter 6

Leadership and the Adoption of Innovative Planning

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ABSTRACT

Schools have become places filled with digital tools. Despite this fact, school leaders find technology planning to be an area of relative weakness. This chapter describes the experiences of four school leaders who adopted an unfamiliar strategy for making technology decisions. The leaders participated in a series of semi-structured interviews. Two leaders displayed characteristics of early adopters of the innovative planning strategy and two displayed characteristics of early majority users of the strategy. Profiles of the two types of leaders are presented. The aspects of the planning strategy that differentiated it from more familiar planning strategies for these leaders are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

As information and computer technology (ICT) has become more deeply embedded in curriculum and instruction, technology planning has become an essential part of school leadership. School leaders are expected to take steps to ensure students use technology for diverse learning activities, so infrastructure must be installed and managed, and teachers must be trained in its use and supported as they integrate it into instruction. School leaders play an obvious role in ensuring the decisions are appropriate for the classroom, aligned with established policy and procedure; and can be reasonably supported by the available resources. Because of the dynamic nature of this work, school leaders need on-going support and training, so they become effective and collaborative in this aspect of their work (Dexter, Richardson, & Nash, 2017; Millman, 2019). It is generally accepted that planning proceeds from goals which are articulated by school leaders; systems are developed and deployed to meet those goals, then the degree to which the goals have been met is established (Gülbahar, 2007). This approach to planning is applied to both plan for ICT used for instruction and ICT used for administrative purposes.

This chapter describes the experiences of several school leaders who led projects in which ICT was designed to improve the nature of curriculum and instruction. Each necessitated strategic planning, and the leaders agreed to follow a strategy that was grounded in educational design research (McKenny & Reeves, 2012), which is an iterative process for understanding a problem, designing an intervention to address the problem, then assessing the degree to which the problem was resolved. Educational design research is differentiated from other research methods as practitioners “attempt to solve significant real-world problems while at the same time they seek to discover new knowledge that can inform the work of others facing similar problems” (McKenney & Reeves, 2014 p. 131); it is also an activity in which practitioners attempt to design and understand the local nuances of a situation that affect the effectiveness of the interventions. The purpose of this study was to explore educational design research as a planning framework for school leaders.

The qualitative data reported in this chapter were collected after the projects were complete and focused on the experience of using innovative planning methods for the leaders. Analysis suggests the leaders share the characteristics of those who are either early adopters of innovations or in the early majority of users as defined by Rogers (2003). The leaders also appear to have internalized the methods of planning because of these projects. Each describes encouraging nonlinear approaches to planning and to encouraging those who are involved with implementing plans in their school to be more accommodating to changing situations and to redefine goals even as projects are incomplete.

Background

Between 2014 and 2016, the author was retained as an internal or external consultant by individual or groups of school leaders to plan and complete projects in which ICT was applied to instructional problems (Ackerman, 2017; Ackerman, 2018). Each articulated a different motivation for the project. One leader explained, “this has been a ‘thorn in my side’ for more than a year, and we need to fix it.” Another noted previous work to solve the problem had not been successful and noted, “we have had a few failed attempts at fixing this, so we need to try something new.” Another observed she was taking a risk as, “this was a new initiative and the school board was skeptical, but I convinced them we could make it work.” Because the leaders were highly motivated to resolve pressing problems, each was amenable to trying new methods.

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