What makes a Tablet PC trial successful?
Comparing approaches at two distance education focused universities

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Background to the trials


OU
- 2005: COLMST Centre (CETL) Teaching Fellowship – 6 tablet PCs
- Workload allocation: 0.5 from 2005-2008
- Focus on marking assignments

USQ
- 2005: 1 tablet PC, used to demonstrate potential
- 2006: USQ L&T Grant (plus additional funds) – 6 tablet PCs
- No workload allocation
- Focus on improvement of communication with students
The participants

**OU**
- **Associate Lecturers** teaching ICT module
- Tablets sent to markers via post
- Geographically dispersed
- **Researcher kept tablet PC**
- All other tablet PCs returned

**USQ**
- **Academic staff** involved in all components of teaching
- 4 team members in L&T Grant bid
  - Mathematics, Statistics, The Learning Centre
- 1 tablet PC for short term loan
- 2 tablet PCs loaned on semester-long basis, various disciplines
- **Project team members kept tablet PCs**
- Others returned at end of semester
  - To encourage requests for additional tablet purchases
  - To involve more lecturers

Technical and pedagogical training/support

**OU**
- Online training manual provided
- Online forum moderated by fellow
- Staff development at distance via electronic communication

**USQ**
- Face to face, often one-to-one basis
- Project team in a group
- Discussions on how to integrate technology in participant’s context
- **Encouragement of innovation, not replication**

Both: Collegial approach, sharing good practice
## Comparison of outcomes

### Number of participants and post-trial use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OU</th>
<th>USQ</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 tablets loaned to 10 participants</td>
<td>6+1 tablets, used by 9+1 participants</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 tablet for the researcher</td>
<td>4 cycles (1 semester duration)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 cycles (9 month duration)</td>
<td>8 enthusiastic tablet PC users, all with access to their own or a shared tablet PC</td>
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<td>None of the 10 participants is using a university-funded tablet PC at present</td>
<td>2 left teaching towards management or left university sector altogether</td>
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<td>New cycle to commence</td>
<td>Tablets still in use in follow-on project (start 2009)</td>
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### Dissemination

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OU</th>
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<tr>
<td>Wiki with good practice, public access</td>
<td>Wide range of good practice examples collected, disseminated at</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extensive dissemination of outcomes</td>
<td>&gt; University L&amp;T events</td>
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<tr>
<td>&gt; Conferences, internally</td>
<td>&gt; Seminars</td>
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<tr>
<td>&gt; Publications</td>
<td>&gt; Conferences (to limited extent)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Limited publications</td>
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Comparison of outcomes

• Pedagogical change

OU
• Innovation expected within marking of online assignments
• Innovations shared online in second cycle
• Deep reflection on the task of providing marks and feedback

USQ
• Emphasis on changing current methods of teaching and supporting students
• Enabled educators to effectively and efficiently communicate with students for the first time
• Range of pedagogical innovations

Comparison of outcomes

• Attitude of university management

OU
• Extensive dissemination, but management has not taken proactive lead in supporting tablet technology
• Reasons: scale, cost of hardware, ICT support infrastructure required
• Narrow focus of trial limited perceived use of tablets to marking
• All dissemination through fellow, no sharing of the load

Tablet technology has not moved beyond trial status

USQ
• Dissemination of pioneering work lead to extension of trial through university L&T Fellowship
• Support from all Deans, CTO, VC
• Addition of student tablet PC trial
• 40+ new tablet purchases following fellowship
• Key drivers behind uptake: academics involved in fellowship trial; critical mass reached

Tablets are supported hardware
Recommendations on how to run a successful technology trial in HE

Bottom up, champion driven approach

• **Choose the participants carefully**
  > It is not the number but the type of participants selected that will make a difference. Choose those who have the ability and drive to take a trial further, e.g. enthusiastic lecturers and those who are regarded highly for their teaching excellence.

• **Ensure at least “best effort” ITS support**
  > This is vital for a successful trial and needs to be established before commencement. The technology needs to be approved by ITS before widespread adoption can occur.

• **Train the participants**
  > It is crucial to provide both technological and pedagogical training, with a focus on the needs of an instructor. This includes the provision of a pedagogical guide and examples. In the ideal case, the champion will be a participant or at least directly involved in the use of the technology, which will give them credibility as they are talking from experience. Training can be done remotely, but should include an initial face-to-face session and/or be followed up by a face-to-face session.

• **Foster collegial support**
  > Encourage “corridor chats”, provide a supportive environment, in which everyone shares good practice and it is safe to experiment.
Recommendations on how to run a successful technology trial in HE

• **Take a sustainable approach**
  > Plan the **use of equipment after the trial** has finished, and the provision of technical and pedagogical support. Choose a wide scope to allow participants the freedom to pursue individual innovative approaches. Keep the focus on the future.

• **Share the load**
  > While it may take only one person to manage a trial, the change will be sustainable when **other academics are on side**, who will then drive the trial to adoption. Sharing the load among several champions will increase the momentum.

Recommendations on how to run a successful technology trial in HE

• **Focus on dissemination**
  > Provide a **workload allocation** for a research assistant, other than the project leader, who will analyse data and support dissemination and report writing. Collect best practice examples, **communicate** upwards and sideways. Create a mechanism for tapping into the enthusiasm of participants for dissemination of outcomes.

• **Overcome fear of change**
  > **Disseminate best practice examples** to ITS, management and administration.