

**The blended professional : Jack of all trades, and master of some?**

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# THE BLENDED PROFESSIONAL: JACK-OF-ALL-TRADES AND MASTER OF SOME?

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Within the last decade we have experienced an unprecedented growth in the use of technology in education. The adoption of Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) for many universities has been widespread. Granted the speed of which this has been integrated is influenced by local policy, the academics themselves and the support available to learn how to use the VLE and its suite of tools. However there has been a shift from just having a small central eLearning team who reached out to encourage staff to use the VLE, to a growing need for a wider pool of people to support colleagues who want to learn why and how technology can be used to enhance their teaching practice. Today the VLE is just one aspect; mobile learning and educational Apps, social media and webinars are just some of the many examples being used to develop communication, collaboration and social learning. Some institutions (or indeed faculties within them) have looked to create roles for Learning Technologists to support such development, and yet others have relied on the early adopters and enthusiasts to assume this role. This chapter will look at some short case studies and reflections of the 'blended professionals' who are advocates of #EdTech and how the need to wear different hats to meet very different objectives can present surprising results when supported within a community of practice.

## INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I am going to begin by sharing with you my personal account of what it means to be a blended professional and the wearer of multiple hats. When I moved into my role ten years

ago as an Educational Developer, technology was not in the job description. However as time moved on it was clear to me that there were many new ways we could look to enhance the way we approached learning and teaching. I consider myself as an early adopter in the use of educational technology and have explored this for my own benefit as a lifelong and lifewide learner as well as helping others to do so. However I am hesitant to say that I am a Learning Technologist and will explain why. I will also share some mini case studies of other colleagues who have become EdTech champions within their own roles. Finally I will guide you through some approaches to consider as a blended educator and advocate of the use of technology in education.

## **WHAT IS A BLENDED PROFESSIONAL**

Being a blended professional for me is where an individual takes on a variety of different roles. These hybrid roles often overlap and can provide the individual with a growing knowledge of multiple areas. The ability to absorb and understand information from different perspectives is key, as is the ability to be 'multilingual' and communicate in a variety of ways and to different audiences. Whitchurch (2008) describes the blended profession as those "*not only crossing internal and external institutional boundaries, but also contributing to the development of new forms of third space between professional and academic domains*". To add the individual can take on hybrid responsibilities resulting in the need to be both multi-skilled and working within and across multifunctional teams. The development of inter- and intra-team communication is also important and they may work within and with a number of different teams. A hybrid professional often needs to undertake new CPD to develop skills in the additional areas of responsibility as they emerge.

## **MY PERSONAL CASE STUDY**

The role I applied for doesn't formally have technology in the job description. I assumed responsibility for eLearning over the course of time because of my interest in educational technology and how if used well it can enhance the learning experience both for the student and the academic seeking to undertake professional development. This interest, which has developed into a passion for exploring new innovative ways to manage my own learning as well as to help others, has developed through undertaking a broad range of CPD myself.

If I had to pinpoint when my interest in educational technology was first piqued, I think it would be as a result of my somewhat uncomfortable experience as a distance learning (DL) student on a short course. The feeling of isolation and loneliness was a stark contrast to the one I was

experiencing for the classroom-based Masters course I was taking concurrently. At the same time my daughter had just gone away to start her undergraduate degree and, through texts and social media (plus the odd phone call), we exchanged experiences, provided moral support and, to some extent, I was able to mentor her and help her navigate the swamp of academic 'speak and protocols'. Both our experiences were enhanced by the use of technology as we developed our new peer networks. This use of digital tech we refer to as social media or social networking, provided the mechanism to extend the conversations within the classroom to outside of, and this also became a place to socialise and feel part of a community. What was missing from the DL course I was taking was the opportunity for students to socialise and get to know each other. Yes there was a Moodle discussion forum but (for me) it never seemed to be used to build a sense of community. It felt like a billboard to post your mini bio or CV.

During the research I undertook for my first Masters thesis in 2009, I looked initially at computer-mediated technology with a particular interest in how texting was being used. As I started to look more deeply at the use and appropriation of social media, I realised there were many new ways being adopted to enhance the way we communicate. This then led to how it could impact on the learning experience and learning journey of both me and my daughter, and also my peers. What was also interesting was that educators were starting to openly share how they were using social media and other technology through social media channels. What they shared was much richer than simply what they were doing, but also why, how and what the impact was. At this point I was hooked! The realisation that I had at my fingertips the most incredible learning network was to me phenomenal. Not only could I read and learn from these golden nuggets shared by this community, I had the opportunity to raise questions and in time answer those raised by others.

## **TAKING ON AN EDTECH ROLE**

In 2008 I was given the opportunity to recruit and line manage a placement student who would take on the role of eLearning Assistant and work with me within one Faculty to engage academic staff with Blackboard. A new policy was introduced where every module should be supported by a Blackboard site. This to some degree was quite a steep learning curve for both of us as within this same year the university upgraded the VLE from Blackboard 8 to 9.1. For those of you familiar with such a step you will know that this is not simply the IT team doing techy stuff in the background! The new version meant that all staff needed to be updated on the changes and this required us to work with the eLearning teams across the university to roll out training sessions to maximise reach; to create new written resources and provide different ways to communicate with staff why it was important to engage with this in readiness for the new

academic year; and to be there to provide at elbow support as academics began to use the new version.

As I began to grasp the various aspects of this new dimension to my role I realised I had to learn on the hoof. Drawing upon the expertise of other eLearning teams across the university and of the central Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) team was a crucial and incredibly supportive. Shadowing peers as they ran workshops is possibly one of the most useful ways to getting started. Having an online network to reach out to and ask questions or table ideas is also key. However, as this was just part of my responsibilities, there was a concern that I wasn't able to devote time to grasp a deeper practical understanding of the multiple functionalities of the VLE. However my eLearning Assistant could. It took me a while to accept that as a Manager I did not have to know everything.

Fast forward to 2014 and EdTech is now so much broader than the VLE. The affordances of technology present us with a myriad of shiny tools and apps that can and are being used. A growing interest in the use of social media, mobile and smart technology, Apps and software has piqued curiosity from others and as a consequence an increased demand for support. The growth in the sharing of open educational resources and EdTech has in itself opened a floodgate of exciting innovative practice. This for many has contributed to the increased interest and also presented a forum for support too. It certainly has for me.

## **BLENDING TECHNOLOGY INTO MY BLENDED PROFESSIONAL ROLES**

During a typical working week my blended role includes being:

- An educational developer
- A lecturer
- A researcher
- An eLearning or TEL faculty lead
- A manager
- A Learning, Teaching and Assessment (LTA) coordinator
- A student

For each of these roles I may work with different individuals and groups of people. The one common theme is that for both myself and others with a blend of any of these roles, we all engage to some extent with learning and teaching in higher education. Having multiple roles can often mean that we are required to consider decisions from a variety of different angles and

perspectives. Equally the way we approach using technology may differ, but can also overlap.

As an Educational Developer and Fellow of the Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA) I work with others within higher education to provide academic staff with educational and professional development. This could be one to one very individual support, advice on curriculum development, or to support the implementation of change and new policies. I am committed to putting into practice the SEDA values which are:

- Developing an understanding of how people learn
- Practising in ways that are scholarly, professional and ethical
- Working with and developing learning communities
- Valuing diversity and promoting inclusivity
- Continually reflecting on practice to develop ourselves, others and processes.

Within this role I not only work with colleagues within my own university but with Educational Developers across the UK. Digital collaboration using, for example, Google Apps, has been a very useful application of technology and broken down geographical boundaries through the use of Google Hangouts and Skype.

As a *lecturer* I look to adopt new ways to enhance the way I teach and engage learners, but also in the way I introduce assessment for learning and feedback of learning. Technology has played a part in this and provided variety in the way this is approached. Integrating the opportunities for my students to develop valuable digital skills is a key focus.

As a *researcher* I am striving to explore, understand, evaluate and share how technology can enhance learning. More often than not this is done outside of my day to day responsibilities, but is an area I feel very passionate about. From my own personal perspective, the use of technology has helped me to organise my own learning.

As a *TEL lead* I have faculty objectives to meet and as a manager of my small team, a responsibility to ensure that together we achieve these, but also that my eLearning Assistant is supported in his role and developed with the skills to do his job. Together we are using technology to create resources to support the use of technology, for example screencasts as how to guides.

As an *LTA coordinator* I am responsible for delivering a variety of workshops to enhance and develop the curriculum and the LTA orientation of new academics; leading the organisation of the annual faculty LTA conference; am a member of a variety of committees including the HEA

Recognition Panel; and am the coordinator of teaching enhancement projects. Using technology to communicate and disseminate this work is enhanced through the updating of the LTA website and blog, utilising multimedia where appropriate.

As a *student* I have gone on to take a second Masters degree in Technology Enhanced Learning, Innovation and Change to better my understanding of how to inspire innovation and overcome barriers to change. As I have referred to earlier this has been a most inspiring and innovative sandpit and learning space. I have gone on to apply much of what I have learned across my various roles.

So you can see that learning technology is associated and ingrained within each of my different roles, through the examples given above. However because EdTech is not 100% of my focus due to having mixed responsibilities I have never thought of myself as a Learning Technologist. Yet when you look at the definition of this role I am contributing to and actively involved in each of the areas mentioned.

*Learning technologists are people who are actively involved in managing, researching, supporting or enabling learning with the use of learning technology. (ALT 2014)*

In many higher education institutions there are people with a Learning Technologist role, where the individual has a dedicated role relating to the use of technology and learning. Learning technology (ALT 2014) is the “*broad range of communication, information and related technologies that can be used to support learning, teaching, and assessment.*” I know many Learning Technologists across a variety of universities and personally look to them for their deep understanding of both the technical use of technology but also the pedagogical application and evaluation of a broad range of learning technology. Indeed many are authors within this book! My skills do not match theirs in the sense of scope, however I do specialise in some areas.

Am I therefore perhaps a ‘Jack of all trades and master of some’? Perhaps, but I would forward the suggestion that I am an educational innovator and that through the use of EdTech I am making positive steps and enhancing the way I learn and teach others. I am also not alone. Having had a number of conversations with colleagues in my valued personal learning network that might too be considered blended professionals; I feel their stories should be heard too.

## **MINI CASE STUDIES OF OTHER ED TECH BLENDED PROFESSIONALS**

Below I have chosen five colleagues from my own university, each with different roles, but all sharing the concept of being a blended professional to some extent. They all share an interest in EdTech and this has become implicit in the way they work. These are individuals who have never had EdTech written in to their job description but are individuals who seek to innovate their own practice, but also go on to inspire and mentor peers within their own community to do so too. These are not just early adopters, but digital champions.

### **Julie Gillin - Journalist Lecturer**

*"As a journalism lecturer I'd witnessed technological advances which had brought incredible disruption and change to journalism practice. Like many of my colleagues, I'd spent a lot of time working to keep my own skills up-to-date and to ensure these changes were reflected in our curriculum. However, I became increasingly aware that while my discipline was being transformed, the way I was teaching wasn't. I was interested in the way technology could improve my teaching but I was also somewhat overwhelmed by the possibilities and by a concern that I wasn't as digitally literate a lecturer as I'd like to be. It was this which led me to join the TELIC (Technology Enhanced Learning, Innovation and Change) course at Sheffield Hallam University.*

*"Joining the course had an incredible impact on my teaching and on my own CPD which, I have to be honest, had lacked focus. The biggest change was the development of my own PLN which began with working collaboratively with fellow students. Supported by our tutors and each other we used technology in our learning. Sometimes it went wrong! Realising that this happens to everyone and is not a reflection on you and doesn't mean you are somehow inadequate was incredibly liberating. Right from the first few months of my TELIC course I found I had the confidence to introduce technology into my teaching. At first this was often using tools or apps we had used on the course as I felt comfortable using them but gradually, as my PLN developed mainly through social media, I discovered new tools and, more importantly, if I found something I wanted to achieve in my seminars I looked for tools to do it, rather than the other way around. I don't think of myself as particularly 'techie' and there is sometimes the odd glitch but I'm confident about trying different things and I know if I'm struggling I've a network to lean on to help me out just as I'm keen to help others. As a result, I've a whole new range of teaching and learning tools which allow me to adapt to the different students and topics I come across. I've stopped thinking about this being 'new' or 'different' but rather technology enhanced teaching and learning is just what I do, it has become a natural part of my teaching and learning."*



Julie has been a mentor to many of her peers within her team and beyond and certainly inspires me with her innovative ideas.

### **Claire Ridall - Learning and Information Systems Portfolio Manager, Learning Centre**

*"The library was invited to act as a client with a cohort of students from a level 5 module in ACES to develop a two minute animation showing the benefits of using the libraries. During the first session, it transpired that over 50% of the group had not used the library before other than to access resources online through the library gateway. The best advocate of library services and resources would ideally be the student voice, and two fully developed animations by chosen students were commissioned to create shareable content that showcased the library offer in an entertaining and accessible format. One student delivered an animation in an interview setting, with a journalist asking questions of the main protagonist, 'Giles'. The student chose to portray all characters apart from the interviewer as different organs of the human body to ensure there was no prejudice or discrimination against gender or race, and to avoid stereotyping the concept of students.*

*"Both of the final versions of the animations were presented to library staff at an away day, to University senior staff from academic departments as a way of showcasing student talent and as a reflection of the library's offer to students and the value that it holds in the student journey. The videos were added to online YouTube channels, promoted on Twitter to students and staff, played in induction sessions and played on corporate plasma television screens on-campus. Feedback from students was resoundingly positive to the point where further animations on different library facilities are being developed by more students, and awareness of the library offer through conversations on Twitter and in demand and usage across the library services and facilities."*

Claire makes effective use of social media to share the many resources and events from the Learning Centre and personally through her own Twitter account, consistently sharing useful information with her personal learning network. She works with a team who co-write the Library blog and Twitter, which is managed using Sprout Social as it's a useful tool to plot engagement and audience demographics.

### **David Eddy -Teaching Fellow for Distance Learning**

*"EdTech has played an increasing role in my teaching over recent years and is now absolutely integral in a context where this is all undertaken via online distance learning.*

*Whilst pedagogical approach and learning design are the foremost drivers, EdTech offers a number of affordances in terms of access and the utilisation of synchronous and asynchronous communication, which has enhanced my practice. These affordances also extend to the documentation and recording of CPD evidence and reflection on my practice via e portfolio, digital profiles, peer review and professional accreditation. EdTech affordances have allowed me to develop a digital voice and more readily collaborate, share, present and showcase work I have undertaken.”*

To add David has utilised a wide range of EdTech in his teaching and has inspired those within and beyond his peers by openly sharing and talking about his work. He is a regular user of Twitter and uses this forum to interact with educators across the globe.

### **Professor Mike Bramhall - Assistant Dean Academic Development**

Mike in his senior role continues to teach and has been a keen advocate of the use of video with students utilising video cameras, flip cameras, and more recently iPads and mobile phones. Digital video reporting was introduced to replace the more traditional written report and oral PowerPoint presentation for students in Materials Engineering. The main identified outcomes were:

- Increased student motivation
- Enhanced learning experience
- Higher marks
- Development potential for deeper learning of the subject
- Development of learner autonomy
- Enhanced team working and communication skills
- A source of evidence relating to skills for interviews 4
- Learning resources for future cohorts to use
- Opportunities for staff development (CPD).

Mike told me his decision to innovate the way he was teaching was down to him valuing the use of technology to aid student creativity and enabling opportunities for his students to do something different from the norm to make it more fun and interesting.

### **Professor Roger Eccleston - Pro Vice Chancellor, Faculty of Arts Computing Engineering and Sciences**

My final colleague is Dean of the Faculty I work within and holds an overarching role that spans teaching, research, technical and professional services. His use of technology has seen him

become a role model for others in the use of social media and multimedia as a communication channel to share the work of students and staff across the faculty. For so many this has been welcomed as a visual acknowledgement of their work. It has also encouraged others to start to use Twitter and develop a LinkedIn profile.

Such case studies are important to share so that others can see a broader range of activities that extend beyond the traditional classroom and impact on the wider student experience. It can also serve to demonstrate that those engaging with innovative EdTech are not techy people. Curiosity, enthusiasm and willingness to try something new are what is needed and my colleagues certainly demonstrate this!

## **CONFESSIONS OF AN EDUCATIONAL INNOVATOR**

I'm not a tech expert by any means, however I do consider myself as an early adopter of technology, an educational innovator and someone that is willing to dive in and try new things. In particular technology that can enhance the way we can connect with others to communicate and collaborate. As a student on the MSc in Technology Enhanced Learning Innovation and Change at Sheffield Hallam University we (myself and my peers) were positively encouraged to explore and experiment with new technology, Apps and approaches to the way we were learning. As a cohort we created our own support network and Julie Gillen and Phil Vincent played a significant part in this for me. Where one got stuck, there was always someone to reach out to. This was a distance learning course so we learnt quickly how to make good use of Google Hangouts and other collaborative tools. My experience has gone on to influence the way I consider the use of technology in all aspects of my role.

I recently read a book called the Six Thinking Hats (de Bonu 1985). As I was reading I thought it would actually be useful to consider de Bonu's six different approaches to thinking in relation to my own role, given the many hats I seem to wear. As I go on to explain what these are, you will begin to understand why it is important for me (and you may also resonate with this), to take off my favoured green thinking hat and consider the other five, but also to give the people I work with the opportunity to do so too.

Let me introduce you to de Bonu (1985) who reminds us of the value of thinking and how we should use this to open our minds, but also how we can 'focus in' by considering things from different angles. He presents six thinking styles, which are colour coded, and each signifies a different perspective (1985:13). The colours he uses are white, red, black, yellow, green and blue. These are explained as follows:

<p><b>WHITE HAT THINKING</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• White is neutral and objective.</li> <li>• The white hat is concerned with objective facts and figures.</li> <li>• White Hat thinking focuses on data, facts, information known or needed.</li> </ul>	<p><b>RED HAT THINKING</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Red suggests anger (seeing red), rage and emotions.</li> <li>• The red hat gives the emotional view</li> <li>• Red Hat thinking focuses on feelings, hunches, gut instinct, and intuition.</li> </ul>
<p><b>BLACK HAT THINKING</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Black is sombre and serious.</li> <li>• The black hat is cautious and careful. It points out the weaknesses in an idea.</li> <li>• Black Hat thinking focuses on difficulties, potential problems. Why something may not work.</li> </ul>	<p><b>YELLOW HAT THINKING</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yellow is sunny and positive.</li> <li>• The yellow hat is optimistic and covers hope and positive thinking.</li> <li>• Yellow Hat thinking focuses on values and benefits. Why something may work.</li> </ul>
<p><b>GREEN HAT THINKING</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Green is grass, vegetation and abundant, fertile growth.</li> <li>• The green hat indicated creativity and new ideas.</li> <li>• Green Hat thinking focuses on creativity: possibilities, alternatives, solutions, new ideas.</li> </ul>	<p><b>BLUE HAT THINKING</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blue is cool, and it is also the colour of the sky, which is above everything else.</li> <li>• The blue hat is concerned with control, the organisation of the thinking process and the use of the other hats.</li> <li>• Blue Hat thinking focuses on managing the thinking process, focus, next steps, action plans.</li> </ul>

(de Bonu 1985)

Well, as I confessed, I am frequently the wearer of the green hat. Green hat thinking focuses on creativity: possibilities, alternatives, solutions, new ideas. I can quite cheerfully identify a new technology and jump in to try it out and consider how this might be used as a new creative approach to learning and teaching. I am however equally happy to share the failures as well as the successes and I try to present a balanced view holding my hand up when things don't work so well and sharing why this is so. Whilst this is fine for my own teaching I am also aware that creative thinking and ideas can be for some a little daunting or considered risky. Through my enthusiasm I have to take care I don't get carried away at times.

I have found using de Bonu's different thinking styles a useful exercise. It can be done either individually or as a team to consider the way you approach the work you undertake. I will now

share with you how I have considered the different thinking styles in relation to different aspects of my multiple roles, why I feel that each is important, and how acknowledging and providing space for different thinking styles can be of great value.

## **WHITE HAT THINKING**

*White Hat thinking focuses on data, facts, information known or needed.*



In my role I need to consider the annual TEL objectives I have been set and how together with my colleague how we plan to achieve these. An example would be to introduce online assessment and feedback across the faculty. de Bonu (1985: 25) suggests our starting point has to be:

- What information do we have?
- What information do we need?
- What information is missing?
- What questions do we need to ask?
- How are we going to get the information we need?

Considerations might be how many are already using online assessment and feedback, how many need training and support to consider using technology for this purpose, how will this data be collected.

## **RED HAT THINKING**

*Red Hat thinking focuses on feelings, hunches, gut instinct, and intuition.*



Here I need to consider my feelings towards the implementation of educational technology, but more importantly need to give the staff I am working with the opportunity to voice their feelings. Each individual may have a different reaction. It is important to acknowledge this and not pass judgment. Where colleagues are perhaps resistant to using technology, it is helpful to provide exemplars where possible of where it has been used in their subject or discipline area. Giving the person I am working with the time to explain their concerns could reveal a fear of the technology, a concern about the time it will take to implement, or unclarity about how it could

enhance the student experience. Talking through such issues will allow me to offer support of at elbow training, show how their time can be saved and how it can be of value to the students they are teaching.

### **BLACK HAT THINKING**

*Black Hat thinking focuses on difficulties, potential problems.*

Why something may not work. This is where I need to consider issues raised by the individuals or groups of academics I work with. There are going to be occasions where they are critical of a suggested approach. Where there are weaknesses and potential problems identified, these can and should be discussed. It is important to give the space and time to get beyond the just critical comments such as this will never work in our subject area. It may be the individual is just being cautious. Sharing experiences with peers in similar roles is also very useful as one it can identify a common issue for all or two it can provide useful exemplars where issues have been overcome.



### **YELLOW HAT THINKING**

*Yellow Hat thinking focuses on values and benefits. Why something may work.*

Now this is where there is an opportunity to get others to rethink and consider previously dismissed innovations. Working with an optimist can encourage others within the group to explore the new innovation presented. Focussing on the benefits such as saving time on writing feedback by introducing an online marking rubric or introducing an online assessment submission area so that students can do this from wherever they are can be positively received. De Bonu (1985: 94) suggests that 'self-interest is a strong basis for positive thinking' so using this as a starting place for discussion is helpful. This can then lead into sharing scenarios and exemplars of practice; then a discussion on what went well, why it was effective and how do you know.



### **GREEN HAT THINKING**

*Green Hat thinking focuses on creativity: possibilities, alternatives, solutions, new ideas.*



Another approach when working with a group is to ask individuals to share their ideas. This is space to consider new options and different approaches. Going with 'all ideas are good ideas', these can be gathered and then reviewed. This might start with how a learning activity is currently being approached and what the concerns are. Thinking creatively gives the permission to look at perhaps doing a task in an easier way or approaching it in a different way. So for example students are not collecting their assignments with the attached feedback as they already retrieved their mark online. Exploring whether online feedback is accessed more is one measure but experimenting with different types of feedback and then getting feedback from the students could reveal that written feedback with no opportunity to question it is unhelpful.

## **BLUE HAT THINKING**

*Blue Hat thinking focuses on managing the thinking process, focus, next steps, action plans.*

In the context of my work this might represent my conscience. Have I given due consideration to the different approaches to thinking and have I given others the opportunity to do so too. I might want to consider if I have understood a problem presented by a colleague and whether I have asked the right questions before coming up with a plan of action.



## **OVERCOMING OBSTACLES**

For some the use of technology is still seen as unnecessary, a threat or an inconvenience. Why change when we have always done it like this?

Henry Ford is famously quoted as saying "If I'd asked people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses". Instead he developed a motor car that they could afford. This was initially only available in one colour - black. Of course today we know that not only can we choose different colours for cars, we have a vast and varied choice of models and specifications. We have embraced these changes and see the choices as positive enhancements. How can we adopt this mindset in relation to innovating teaching with technology? From my experience this begins with starting with basics. Give too many choices and options and the very person you are trying to help can become overwhelmed.

## **STRIKING A BALANCE**

Keeping up with the growing array of educational technology is no small task. I am often reminded that we cannot in our roles as EdTech educators support every technology there is. Yet there is a tension that where the technologies are determined as a list that our very creativity can be stifled. Once you see the value of technology you want to try out new approaches. Time can be a concern, but my innovative journeys of exploration are often done in my own time and tested by me in my role as a lifewide learner.

In companies such as Google and LinkedIn employees have dedicated innovation time. Hackathons are frequently seen to bring people together to work on a time limited project. Developing the developer (Cowan 1998) is an important aspect to consider and more so where you undertake a blended role and don't work within a team focusing on technology. If we are all to become users of technology to enhance learning and teaching, then perhaps it is now time to review the support needed for such development to take place. There are now different ways we can approach this and not all have to be face to face. Webinars and screencasts using free tools such as Google hangouts, Skype, YouTube, Vimeo and Screencast-o-matic are excellent ways to introduce initial tutorials that can complement face to face sessions. Organised workshops need to be planned in advance so that these can be communicated and interested attendees can find space in busy diaries. Planning group co-learning sessions are often well received.

Wojkicki (2011) and Google's Eight Pillars of Innovation provide a useful framework to work within. I have used this to present some examples of the steps I have taken; in the hope that this can demonstrate that like many others we all had to start somewhere. Using technology to innovate learning begins with you. Playing and experimenting with technology is a vital step in building your own confidence.

Wojkicki (2011) and Google's Eight Pillars of Innovation provide a useful framework to work within (see Figure 1):



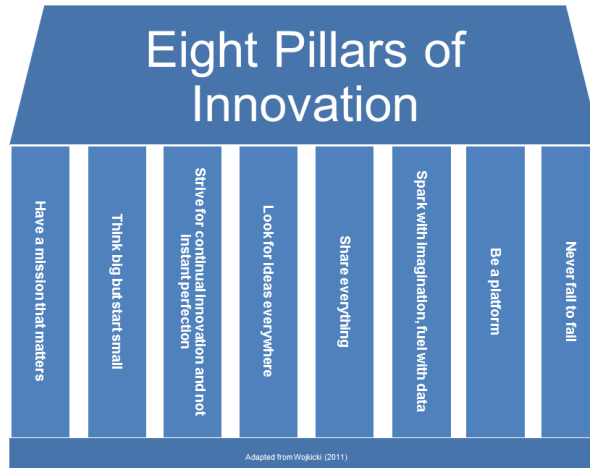


Figure 1. Wojkicki (2011) adaption of Google's Eight Pillars of Innovation

### **1. Have a mission that matters**

Consider what you want to achieve. Helping others realise the value of a professional online presence (educators and students) is one example I wanted to achieve.

### **2. Think big but start small**

Starting a blog using WordPress was the platform I chose to use to write about online presence and the role of social media. It was free and easy to use.

### **3. Strive for continual innovation and not instant perfection**

Adding screencasts to provide a voice over for PowerPoint presentations can add value to a post - speaking naturally means that there might be the odd 'erms' and 'ums' but it doesn't detract from what you are saying. It really does not have to be polished and perfect.

### **4. Look for ideas everywhere**

Twitter is possibly the richest space for finding useful information, primarily as these short posts can link to a wide variety of sources that include books, articles, journals, videos, blog posts, lesson plans, debates and more.

### **5. Share everything**

As I developed information about the topic of professional online presence (and others) I wrote blog posts and added presentations to SlideShare - these were then shared via Twitter, added to LinkedIn and Google+. I give my work a Creative Commons licence. I also share the work of others through the same forums.

## **6. Spark with imagination, fuel with data**

Using images in posts and tweets catches the eye. Numbers also speak volumes and can be shared visually as infographics and digital posters. Express information in different and creative ways by utilising the many free tools that are now available to us.

## **7. Be a platform**

Find an area of interest and gather information. Start with a private blog tagging useful resources. Go on to share this information through the digital forum of your choice. Share with others where this is and provide links to interconnect your profiles.

## **8. Never fail to fail**

It is how we learn. If something goes wrong, don't worry. There is always someone to ask and increasingly this is done online through help forums, Twitter and via comments on blogs.

## **SOME FINAL THOUGHTS**

Two decades ago Cowan (1998:123) gave the following advice on becoming an innovative university teacher and how to get started. His following list of bulleted points is equally applicable for the Learning Technologist and the Educational Developer. They are now pinned to the wall of my office as a reminder.

When introducing innovation of any kind but especially technology, keep a log of what your intended outcomes are, the steps taken to introduce the innovation and collate feedback from students and peers along the way. This informal diary can be invaluable to reflect upon and serve as notes to help you decide on future interventions. Evaluating what we do differently is possibly the one area we are not always so good at completing or indeed sharing, and yet in doing so we can all benefit and learn together going forward.

Innovative Teaching (Cowan 1998):

- Taking risks
- Iterating
- In any pilot, entering into a partnership with the students concerned
- The almost evangelical impact of some innovatory personalities
- Basing what you attempt on your beliefs about what matters in learning, and for learners
- Watching out for mismatches, and reacting positively to them

- Turning mistakes into positive lessons learned
- Benefiting from reflecting on teaching, as much as getting learners to benefit from reflecting about learning
- Using inputs from those with experience, once a first declaration of interest has been made
- Experiencing teaching and learning situations as a learner, especially when these are unfamiliar or novel
- Publishing accounts of innovation
- Repeating previous research or development studies, in your own field
- Formative evaluations verging on action-research, with students joining in interpreting the lessons to be learned for development
- Partnership with kindred spirits who are not necessarily experts in the field, which lead on to valuable cooperation
- Cross-disciplinary transfer of ideas and contacts
- Experimentation off one's own territory, where it is easier to recover from failure
- Being almost Machiavellian in the activity outlines you devise, in order to achieve certain learning outcomes or even win space to attempt them
- Being tactical in relations with colleagues and institutions
- Making provision to develop the developer, in all of this
- Being prepared to get it wrong.

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