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It takes a Village: Community of Practice to transition an LMS during COVID-19

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Abstract

Many educational institutes have been challenged with the rapid response to developing appropriate “new norms” in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. This was complicated further at Auckland University of Technology (AUT) with the announced sun-downing of the Learning Management System (LMS- Blackboard) in late 2020. With the forced transition to Canvas during a pandemic, AUT Learning Transformation LAB (altLAB) worked directly with academic and administrative staff to establish a collaborative approach to implementing Canvas tailored for each Faculty.

The Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences (FHES) established a Community of Practice (CoP) with staff from altLAB, “Canvas Champions”, Faculty Academic Advisors, and project Change Manager gaining direct relationships towards both the project management team and academics. CoP employs three key characteristics: (1) Joint Enterprise (shared domain of interest); (2) Mutual Engagement (engagement in joint activities and relationship building), and (3) Shared Repertoire (sharing of resources for practice) (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Nicolini et al., 2016; Wenger-Trayner et al., 2015). Joint Enterprise was readily established by inviting key members to a join a weekly “FHES Canvas Catch Up” with a shared aim of integrating well-designed curriculum and assessment into Canvas courses. Members of the group actively engaged in joint activities that both informed staff of the Canvas project, while opportunistically responding to the pandemic to “refresh” courses with pedagogically informed curriculum, assessment, and delivery of the Canvas builds. “How To” guides and Course Start Checklists were developed when gaps of learning were identified in the Canvas roll out, which were supported and reinforced by regular Q&A drop-in sessions and email-outs facilitated by the Canvas Champions.

All 1837 AUT courses were transitioned for delivery in Canvas from Semester One, 2022. A standard template was developed and utilised to provide consistency across the university, with minor modifications to meet the needs of the individual faculties. As of October 2022, 97% of students (n=1898 responses) were accessing Canvas on a weekly basis with 66% daily; and 86% of students ‘satisfied’ (of which 36% were ‘extremely satisfied’). 83% of students perceived that they had a mostly consistent experience between courses.

While student engagement and satisfaction were paramount and realised during the shift to Canvas (especially in disrupted times); the project was met with some challenges. For example, in response to COVID-19, the planned 18-month project was delayed resulting in a 15-month roll-out. Academics prioritise the transition to online delivery of teaching and learning over communications of the LMS implementation and training opportunities.

This presentation will highlight some key learnings in the context of an LMS transition, with recommendations for future projects that may employ a Community of Practice for pedagogically informed curriculum and assessment design.

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