ePortfolios: A bridge from strategy to implementation

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Why me?

• I’ve been around long enough to recognize a repeating pattern – high level statements of strategic intent are rarely backed up with tangible, supportive action

• Experience allows me to work from a basis of evidence, observation & collaboration to aim for positive change
What’s my point?

From ‘the balcony’, I see many different perspectives on the elearning landscape, and know they have to find common ground for sustainable development to occur.
Observations: major investment

- ALTC (Australia), SURF (Netherlands), JISC (UK), TEC (NZ) – to name just a few

- Institutional, even national policy promoting educational and employment related applications of eportfolios
Observations: major initiatives

• Practitioners’ time & effort to experiment, take risks, design & implement creative solutions

• Reports, research outputs & sharing of emergent practice

• Technical systems development & enhancement
Observation: sustainable development

• All studies show that support from senior & middle management is a critical success factor, one that is often not forthcoming

• What does this mean in practical terms?
JISC on institutional perspectives

• Identify what is appropriate & sustainable
• Align curricular practice
• Manage potential risk factors (IP, honesty, security)
• Prepare for future developments

Good high level guidance but not very specific in practical terms
Some tensions

It's fine to put students in charge, but assessment, accreditation & quality standards must be met – practitioners can work this out.
Other perspectives

• The CEO / Director of Finance / HR / Quality / IT Services may not be so familiar with learning design concepts
• They need to understand how new ways of working align with their priorities, also what tangible forms of support they can offer
• This usually relies on relationships of trust, networks of peers, excellent communication & lots of persuasion
Risks of unmanaged development

- Ad hoc development of unstable systems
- Lack of consistency across institution
- No central support
Risks of a centralized approach

• Enterprise systems can limit options

• Sense of ownership is affected

• Incentives to engage are variable
Where is the middle path?

• Strategy to guide and support developments
• Commitment of funding, time & resources
• Choice of a system using informed criteria
• Professional development & support provision
• Alignment with institutional policies & systems
• Integration with related services & centres
• Appreciation of other perspectives & priorities
Whose line is it anyway?

Award of external funding, international standing, quality teaching environment

a) Senior management? ✔
b) Middle management?
c) Practitioners?
d) Students?
Whose line is it anyway?

Decisions about portfolio & learning design & assessment criteria

a) Senior management?  ✔
b) Middle management?
c) Practitioners? ✔
d) Students?
Whose line is it anyway?

Fostering & providing support, representing on committees, being a champion

a) Senior management?
b) Middle management? ✔
c) Practitioners?
d) Students?
Whose line is it anyway?

Engaging in new ways of learning & assessment, making decisions, creating artefacts, sharing & presenting work

a) Senior management?
b) Middle management?
c) Practitioners?
d) Students? ✔
Whose line is it anyway?

Adopting a pragmatic and evidence-based approach to eportfolio initiatives

a) Senior management? ✔
b) Middle management? ✔
c) Practitioners? ✔
d) Students? ✔
Challenging established practice

- Is often a slow, difficult process in institutional environments – maybe more so in traditional universities
- Will only happen with compelling reason – why would academics take on something new, risky & time consuming when PBRF ratings are priority?
What needs to happen?

• Effective operational planning & management of strategy implementation (assuming there is a strategy!)
• Alignment with policy, systems & structures – these may need to be revised accordingly
• A shift in culture to accommodate new systems & changed practice
One colleague’s strategy

• Align teaching eportfolio with performance review, tenure, promotion (accountability)

Compelling reason to engage ✔
Integrated with institutional systems ✔
Address multiple stakeholder perspectives ✔
Build capacity for potential use in learning ✔
Use criteria to guide good practice ✔