

Understanding the Experiences of Instructors as They Adopt a Course Management System

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Research Question

What have been the challenges, successes, and decisions affecting instructors as they have adopted features of a course management system and have worked to integrate this technology into their teaching?

Context

- Average university enrollment each semester is 30,000 students
- 8,000 academic courses for both fall and winter semesters in 2004.
- There were slightly more than 4,000 Blackboard courses created during each semester
- Over 300,000 students and faculty are estimated to have used Blackboard at least once.

Method

- Semistructured interviews with faculty Blackboard users ($n=31$)
- Open-ended survey questions with faculty Blackboard users ($n=124$)
- Thematic, constant comparative analysis

Findings

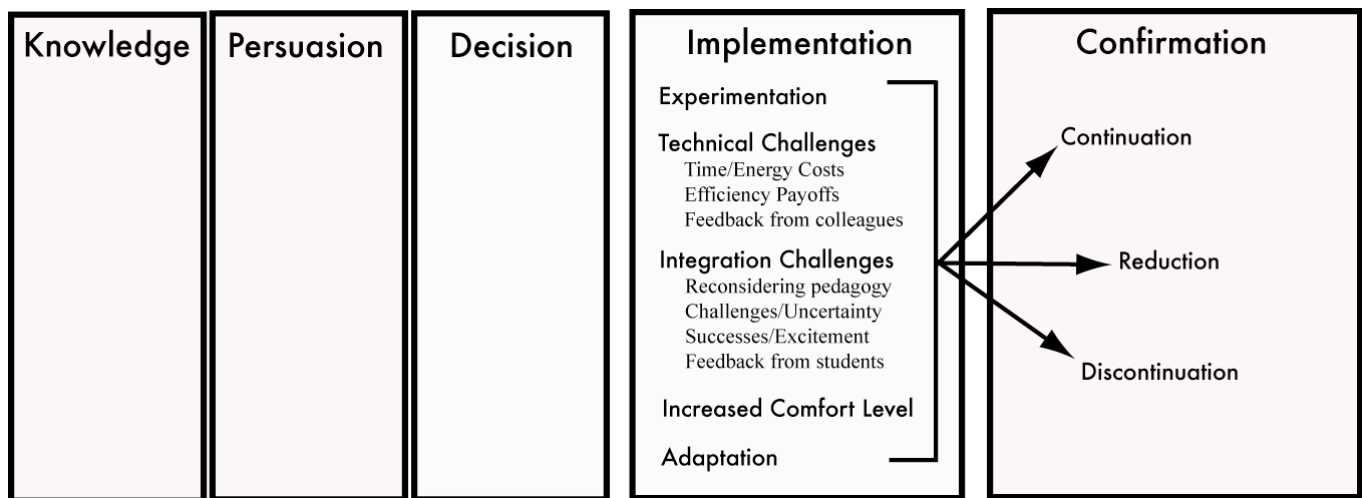


Figure 1. A depiction of the implementation and confirmation patterns found in this research study, and how they relate to Rogers' (2003) Innovation-Decision Model. The additions made by this study explain in more detail the kinds of experiences instructors have as they implement Blackboard features into their practices and the kinds of decisions they make in the confirmation phase.

Dissecting One Instructor's Experience

Mr. Maddux teaches biology to both large undergraduate and smaller graduate courses. His first introduction to Blackboard came about three years ago, when he became acquainted with some Blackboard features through talking with colleagues in his department and observing how they were using Blackboard. After creating his first Blackboard course, Mr. Maddux did not experiment with very many of the features at first, but used Blackboard only for email. At this same time, Mr. Maddux was learning how to use PowerPoint, and it was easy to post his PowerPoint lectures on his Blackboard course for his students to download. His students liked this, and their feedback encouraged him to use Blackboard more.

For the most part, Mr. Maddux has enjoyed using PowerPoint and Blackboard to deliver his instructional materials, and like most instructors, he seemed to feel that the two tools compliment each other. He is worried, though, about the tendency to give more to students because it is so easy to do in digital form. As Mr. Maddux said, "The one thing that I've noticed . . . sometimes I get, I find myself wanting to give too much information. . . . It's almost like replicating the chapter in a visual way."

Slowly, over time, Mr. Maddux experimented with more and more of Blackboard's features. He also began using group discussion boards for his smaller classes. He has never tried using discussion boards with his larger classes, and is scared to do so. He is not sure how to moderate such large discussions because he likes to read the things the different groups are posting and give his input on occasion. "I'm afraid, I think I'll be overwhelmed. The smaller class I have anywhere from 8 to 12 students. It's something I can go in everyday and check on," he said. "It's probably been more fear oriented, fear that it might take so much time."

This past semester, Mr. Maddux and his wife, who is also a part-time BYU instructor, experimented with a new feature: online tests. They chose to start doing tests online so that it would save class time, and allow them to do other activities during class. For Mrs. Maddux especially, who gives a weekly quiz, this was anticipated to be a great timesaving feature. However, they found that Blackboard was agonizingly slow to create tests because they could only create one test item at a time. Because their tests require a lot of pictures, it took "hours" to upload the images one by one into Blackboard. Mr. Maddux found an easier way to adapt the testing feature by posting a PowerPoint full of images, and then having the test be only text-based with references to the PowerPoint for the images the students will need. However, this requires students to download the PowerPoint.

Overall, Mr. Maddux's feelings about Blackboard are mixed. "Some aspects I really appreciate, and other aspects I have grown to dislike intensely," he said. However, because Maddux and his wife have invested so much time in setting up their Blackboard courses, they hope the university never stops supporting Blackboard in order to acquire a new tool, unless there would be a way to set up their course in the new CMS without re-constructing all of the quizzes again. Now that they have their courses set up, they want to use these courses for many semesters to come. They have grown dependent on the tool to some degree because of the time and energy they have invested into setting up their courses. "If the decision was to pull the tool and to utilize another one, it would have to be one that could be easily learned by faculty members because if not there would be an outright rebellion."

Knowledge

Experiment

Persuas/Dec

Integrate challenges

Integrate challenges

Technical challenges

Adaptation

Reduction

Increased comfort level

