Chapter 5
Introducing ICT-Services in a University Environment

Simon B. Heilesen
Roskilde University, Denmark

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case discusses the development and management of ICT-services at a Danish university. A special characteristic of the case is that the development has taken place on the basis of participatory design and voluntary adoption. On the one hand, this approach furthers the adoption of ICT-services. On the other hand, it may hamper the development of a uniform and universally accepted set of services. Some concrete examples of ICT-services are discussed from the point of view of factors favorable to the adoption of technological innovations. These include services for administration, communication, education, and integration. One lesson learned is that developing services for education is a cultural challenge as much as it is a technological one, and that the rate of adoption tends to be slower.

ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND

Framework

This is an account of the development of ICT-services (Information and Communication Technologies) at an institution of higher learning. The term “service” will be understood in three different meanings as: 1) facility supplying some public demand,
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2) the *process of producing an intangible commodity*, and 3) an *administrative division in an organization*. The case thus discusses the planning, implementation, organizational integration and wider perspectives of several information and communication technologies designed for facilitating work processes. These work processes may be distinguished according to purpose into: *administration, communication, education, and integration*.

Focus is not on e-learning, but rather on providing the administrative framework for managing a university. Some general literature on the transformation of university management include Oblinger & Katz (1999), Duderstadt et al. (2002), and Cornford and Pollock (2003). Also, a number of case studies on the implementation of administrative systems are available (Chae & Poole, 2005; Okunoye et al., 2008; Pollock & Cornford, 2004; Todorova & Falls-Anderson, 2007). The present case differs from these cases, however, in its emphasis on participatory design and voluntary adoption.

Even in the sense of “supplying a public demand”, the availability of a service does not automatically lead to general acceptance and widespread use. Nor can it guarantee that there will be positive derived effects—in the present case, increasing computer literacy and a keener awareness of the potentials of ITC for professional use. This, however, may have been an implicit assumption in the case that follows, where the purposes of administration and integration have been far better served than those of education.

Institutions of higher learning are complex both in terms of *organization* (administrative units versus academic units, central administration versus local administrative units) and in terms of ICT-users (McClure, 2003). Faculty, students, administrators, government agencies, suppliers, and the general public are all potential users of university ICT-services. Some of these groups will be using the same ICT-services, maybe in different roles. Other services are specific to just one group. In the present context, focus will be on intramural ICT-services, excluding e.g. electronic invoicing and general information web sites. Excluded from the discussion are also general management tools (e.g. finance systems and human resource systems) that are operated only by specialists in the institution’s central administration, and where the service consists simply in automation of routines (e.g. payment of salaries) or easier access to information (e.g. statistics on sick-days).

The rationale for introducing ICT-services may seem self-evident in an age of “effectiveness” and “rationalization” where universities are becoming knowledge providers that have to compete in the market. To some institutional users, however, the new electronic services are not readily understood as “supplying a demand”, regardless of whether they simply remediate existing practices or offer something entirely new. This is particularly true in the present case of an institution characterized by a fair degree of departmental and individual autonomy and a history of
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