

TITLE OF PAPER: Factors that Influence Take Up Individual University  
Lecturer Take Up of an Institutional VLE – Preliminary Findings

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institutional readiness for networked learning  
staff development issues

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PROPOSAL:

Many universities and colleges in the UK have a policy to install and embed an institution-wide VLE in the course of the next two or three years. The institutions and the developers have a keen interest in this process being successful. The University of Wolverhampton is currently halfway through its Technology Supported Learning Project and is using its in-house VLE, WOLF, available commercially as Granada's Learnwise system. It has a TSL Strategy that is broadly similar to many other institutions in the sector and finds itself facing similar problems.

The University has installed the system and created the structures and support units. A considerable volume of training has been delivered and exemplar material has been created but beyond the champions and the early adopters, the take up by individual lecturers has been slower and less systematic than originally envisaged by the University.

In an attempt to improve our understanding of this problem both at Wolverhampton and elsewhere, the DELTA Institute, the original developers of WOLF, has set up a project to explore the non-technical factors that influence the nature and extent of VLE take up by individual lecturers.

The first phase of the project used interviews and documentary evidence to define the cultures within the constituent Schools of the University and attempted to place the project within the literature of “the diffusion of change” and “academic tribes and territories”.

This phase clearly indicates that within an institution as devolved as the University, local departmental cultures are quite clearly discernible. These cultural differences are reinforced by objective differences in infrastructure and physical environment.

This first phase has also provided considerable secondary evidence of the variety of factors that might be at work at an individual level within the complex departmental environments and cultures.

The second phase will work with individual lecturers and examine how the nature and extent of their engagement with the VLE is shaped by the local environmental and by purely individual factors. In order to move onto this second phase, the project has had to acknowledge the need to access efficiently and accurately types of information that individuals might not readily volunteer. This might be information that they assume is “taken-for-granted” or “not-worth-mentioning”, as well as information about their attitudes, abilities and expectations with which they might be uncomfortable. A variety of elicitation techniques borrowed from the fields of marketing and artificial intelligence are being piloted

The paper will review the issues outlined above and some of the techniques available and will discuss results so far.