

Enhancing the successful embedding of project outcomes

A Generic model

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INTRODUCTION

The approaches and experiences of national projects who have been successful in embedding of new approaches into institutional teaching and learning practices have been reviewed through an study funded by the LTSN Generic Centre. A number of generic educational development projects were reviewed. These have all been funded by UK higher education funding councils under various programmes and initiatives from 1998-2002. The full report on the review findings can be found at the project web site at: <http://www.telri.ac.uk/Transfer/Itsngc/Itsngc.htm>.

This generic model aims to assist projects in planning for sustained impact - or "embedding" - of new approaches in teaching and learning developed through the project life cycle. Factors that appear to be most influential in successful embedding are described. A framework is offered as a tool for considering the contexts in which projects mostly operate. This aims to assist projects in identifying stakeholders and considering appropriate strategies for engagement and collaboration. Some examples are provided of how these might translate into planned activities for implementation, collaboration, partnership development, evaluation and dissemination.

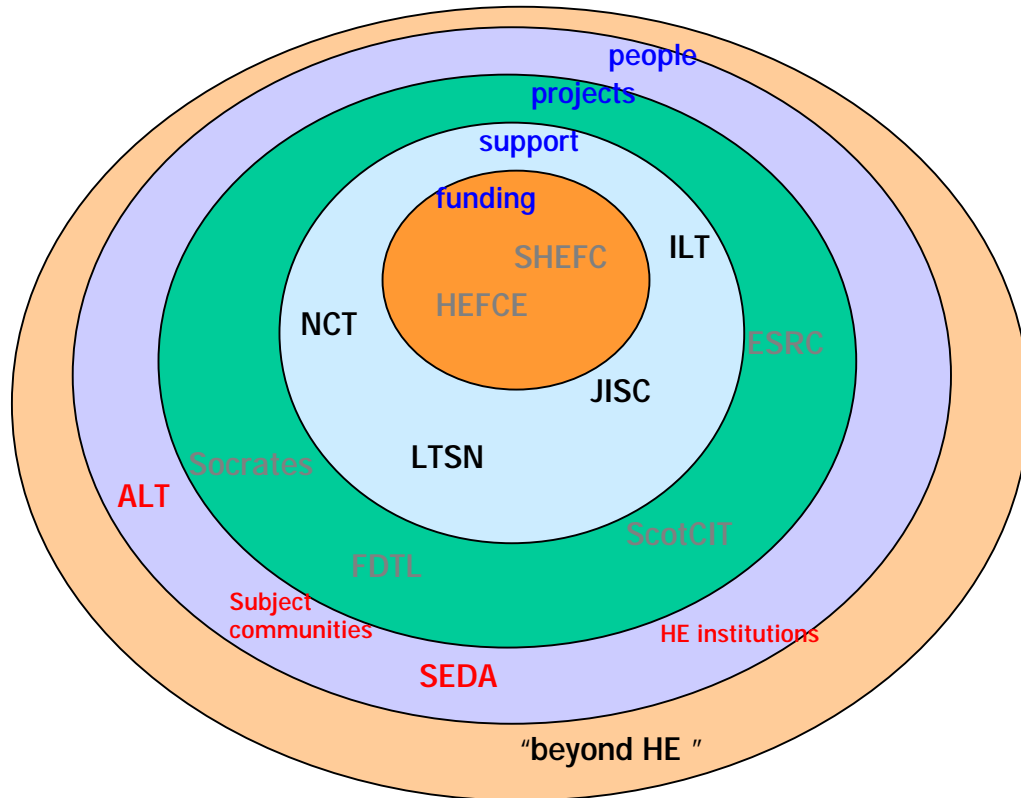
In the context of this study, "projects", as referred here, are seen to be teaching and learning development projects – of an educational development nature, rather than research or product development projects, for which a slightly different model might apply.

AN IMPACT FRAMEWORK

An impact framework emerges from the review of projects outcomes, which provides a useful approach to the project's operational context (figure 1), institutional context (figure 2) and wider context (figure 3).

- **Project operational context:**
-Planning for impact: identifying stakeholders
- **Institutional context:**
-In-reach activities: -informing local knowledge
- **Wider context:**
-Out-reach activities: making things happen elsewhere

Figure 1: Project operational context



The interactions between participating institutions within the project and intensity of the collaboration may vary (see figure 2) and these might be worth considering separating in terms of activities through the project lifecycle. Several different organisational models for consortia are apparent and this could usefully inform priorities for planning project activities.

- Collaborative shared roles/activities
- Parallel within shared framework
- Centralised with development led by lead institution

Figure 2: Consortium partnerships as institutional contexts

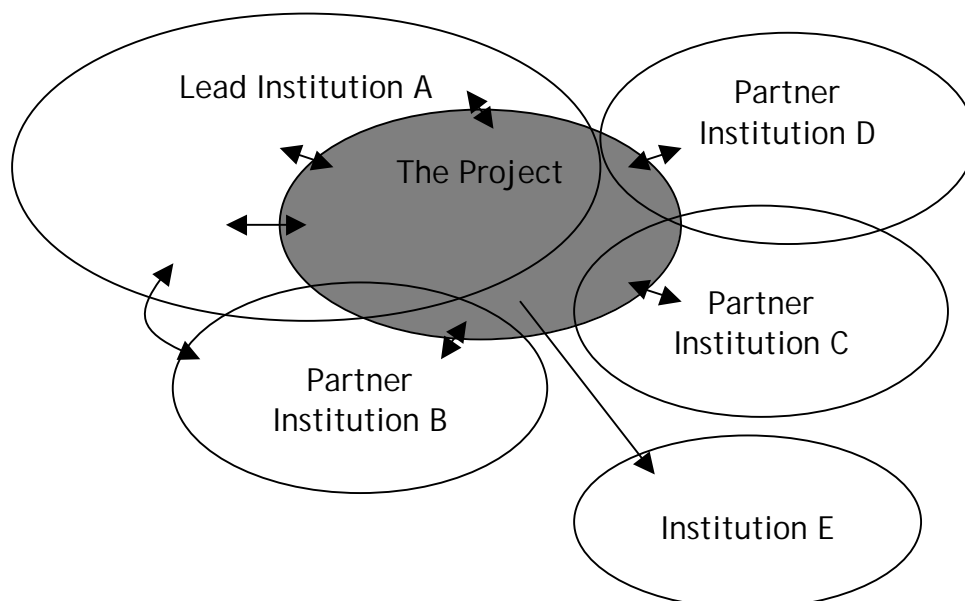
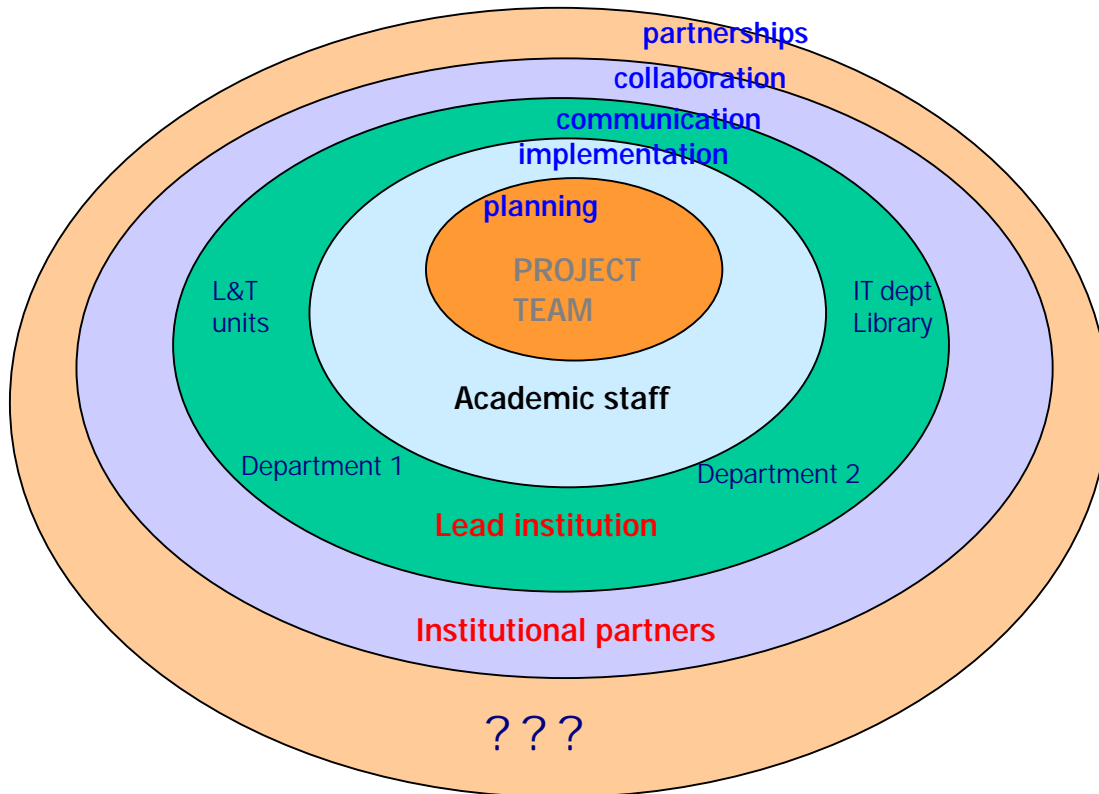


Figure 3: Wider context



The early evaluation by the Tavistock focused on four key implementation strategies:

- Negotiating entry and pitching in at the right level
- Securing institutional support and getting the right stakeholders on side
- Mobilising and engaging teaching staff and other key actors
- Diffusing technology based teaching and learning innovations

PROJECT SUCCESS FACTORS

Factors that influenced the success of projects in embedding outcomes or sustaining new approaches were dependent not so much on specific activities but the strategies that informed these and resulted in a coherent project planning process across the life cycle of the project. The key factors identified by projects and those supporting projects (see Review report) and development programmes at national levels (see Consultation paper) were:

Timing

- *“Timeliness is crucial and impacts a lot.”*

Personal investment

- *“individual enthusiasm “*
- *“incredible energy and commitment of the individuals“*
- *“dedication and hard work despite short term nature of the funding“*

Good collaborations

- *"willing to go and share ideas with others"*
- *"happy for [their] materials to be used and adapted"*

Champion in policy position

- *"People are desperately influential."*

Staff development angle

- *"connecting with academics" and "listening approaches"*

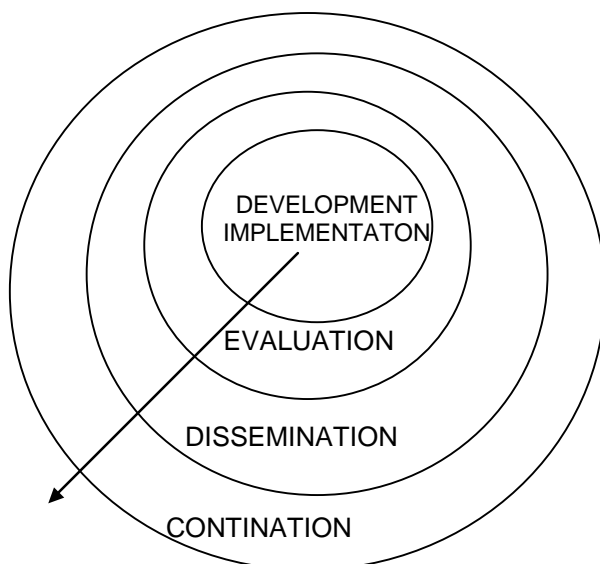
Ability to adapt to local, emerging demands

- *"diversified to meet a wider audience"*

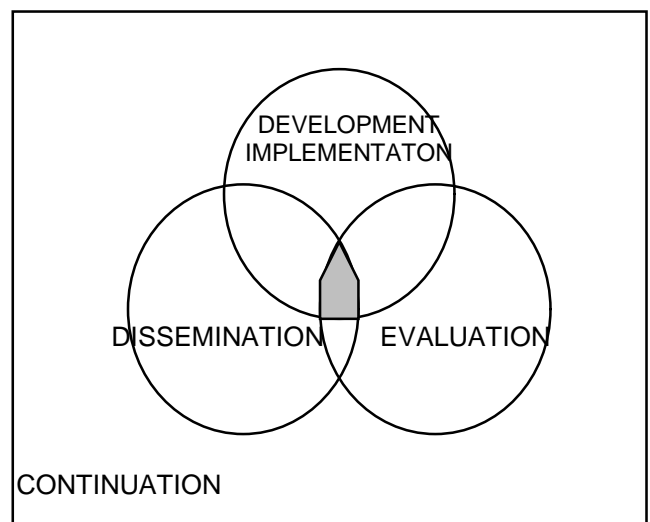
ORGANISATION & PLANNING

Planning activities in educational development projects tend to focus on four strategies: Development/implementation, Evaluation, Dissemination and Exit/continuation - see figure 1 - as a model for working towards embedding. The main development work might include production of tools and frameworks, but predominantly in TLTP and FDTL programmes constitutes implementation activities, such that particular approaches are piloted in specific teaching and learning situations. Staff development is often, but not always, secondary to course development, and is an important part of the embedding process.

Figure 4: Organisation of project strategies



(a) Linear strategy



(b) Holistic strategy

Projects that have been successful have looked at these elements in a holistic and non-linear manner. Planned activities do not necessarily start at the centre and proceed systematically to

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the outer layers, as represented in diagram (a) in figure 4. Planning is aimed at engagement across operational, institutional and wider contexts simultaneously from the outset, as suggested by the diagram (b) in figure 4. Project activities aim at synergy between these strategies; overarching strategies arise within the common areas - shown shaded in fig. 4 (b) and are considered at both at the bidding stage and the development stages of the project. This maximising the likelihood of sustained impact of those new approaches being explored by the project which are found to be successful in enhancing teaching and learning practices.

Activities that lead to the permeation of new ideas at the ground level that might lead to implementation and sustained changes in teaching approaches require some kind of scaffolding. A useful model for many projects - albeit offered under the auspices of a dissemination strategy - has been to plan activities according to the following objectives:

1. Awareness raising
2. Increasing understanding
3. Increasing uptake
4. Embedding.

This is a useful form of impact hierarchy, assuming that lecturers will move forward through the four stages from thinking to doing. The first three facilitate some degree of impact on practice, but do not necessarily lead to sustained changes in practice. It is, of course, not possible to evaluate sustained impact within a project lifetime; this might best be evaluated after a reasonable period of time has elapsed. For example in the review of projects, the majority of projects had been completed at least one year prior to the study. It may be possible to establish certain parameters as indicators of successful outcome for the project, a framework by which such impact might be measured at the end of a project.

Certainly, projects should be capable of planning activities with all four goals in mind. It is perhaps a little ambitious, however, to expect that significant evidence of embedding be produced within the period of funding. Most changes in practice take place over time and in the review of projects, it is apparent that this can vary quite substantially between projects and programmes.

Evaluation questions might therefore usefully address:

- (a) *What approaches led to good impact in the institutions? What kinds of local and external activities were effective?*
- (c) *How the project is moving from innovation to embedding?*

PLANNING FOR SUSTAINED CHANGES IN PRACTICE

Planning for impact is rarely something successful projects contemplate in the latter stages of the project work, but as part of an overall activity planning and an integral part of one's exit/continuation strategy.

Projects might set a minimum and realistic maximum level of impact taking into account the scope of the project and the context within which the project is working. Thereafter, a project might seek to embed its approaches, products or outcomes with these targets in mind and plan accordingly.

Planned activities might aim to address each of these four impact objectives across each layer of the project's operational context as represented in figure 3. A *slice* of the "onion" (figure 5)

provides a useful strategic framework for linking current activities and outcomes with forward-looking ones. Figure 6 shows how a single planned activity at the project team level might be transferred throughout the local, institutional and wider contexts.

Figure 5: Strategic project development

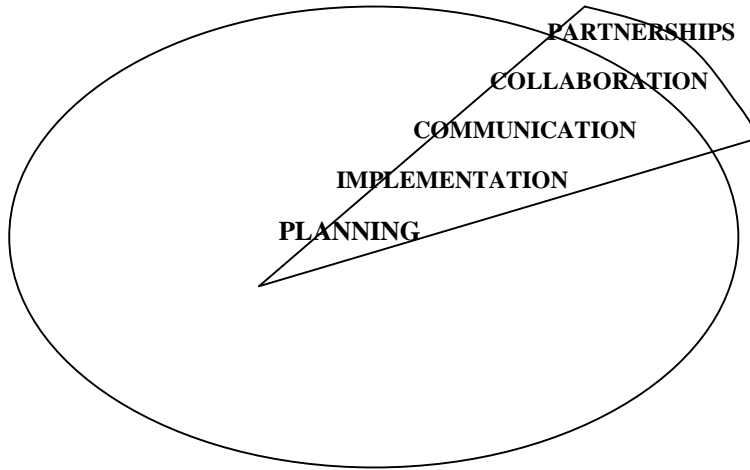
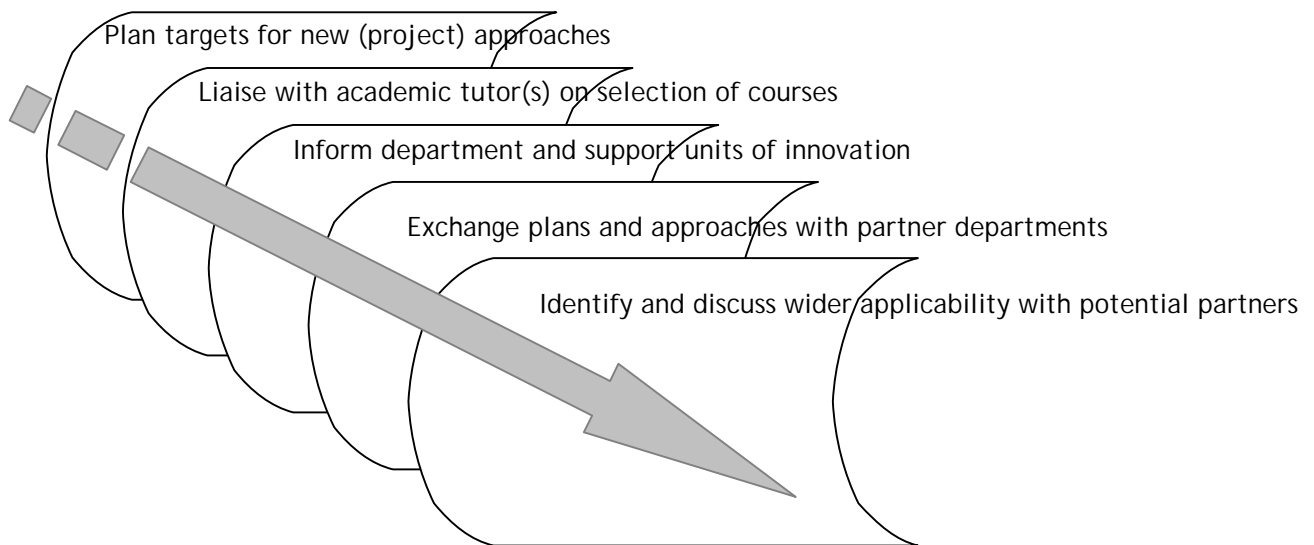


Figure 6: Strategic transfer of project activities from local to wider context



APPROACHES TAKEN BY SUCCESSFUL PROJECTS

In projects that have:

- had a significant impact,
- produced sustained changes in practice, and
- embedded their approaches widely,

the following aspects of project planning (and pre-planning) are typical.

Direction and commitment

- Develop project aims and activities in line with local strategies and objectives where possible.
- Build project and partnerships on timely needs of the field, the sector or the institutions.
- Recruit enthusiastic individuals or second those you know to be committed and who understand the nature of project work.
- Involve schools and department directly in the creation and delivery of the project

Roles

- Clear delegation of activities and responsibilities between project directors –, project manager, and educational developers – as “owners” of the project, academic leaders, operational managers, day-to-day co-ordinators, technical developers, etc.
- Ensure continuation of knowledge and skills by professional development, joint activities and good documentation.
- Aim to involve other support departments closely from the outset of the project (even in the bidding process), particularly IT departments for ICT-related projects.

Organisation and collaboration

- Develop a “community of practice” or user group/special interest group around the project activities and development
- Look early to the wider applicability and plan for it in development, evaluation and dissemination activities – perhaps make use of an experts group or evaluation focus group throughout the project. This also serves to network those involved and bring in a wider range of interests and experiences.
- Ensure regular liaison between sites, and that communication is inclusive of all project staff and local support.
- Involve all sites in evaluation activities, which also serves to enrich the data collected.

Engagement and implementation

- Take a flexible, modular approach to sub-project developments (case studies) where possible, so that if one has to be dropped, others can take their place – Pareto principle.
- Provide written guidance on new techniques or software and aim to empower academics, departments and the project as much as possible in the use of technology.
- Avoid time-wasting on non-committed sub-projects.
- Ensure that those not directly involved in the project (at least from the outset) are involved early on; market the project well from the start – it really pays off.

FURTHER GUIDANCE

The full report and consultation paper from the study can be found at:

<http://www.telri.ac.uk/Transfer/Itsngc/Itsngc.htm>

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