

FIVE DOS AND DON'TS FOR INNOVATION IN EDUCATION

Presentation by

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**At the 10th Pan-Commonwealth Forum
on Open Learning**

**INNOVATIONS FOR
EDUCATIONAL RESILIENCE
Plenary Session: Setting the context
of the Forum**

Wednesday, September 14, 2022
Calgary, Alberta, Canada

Innovators respond to challenge, uncertainty and complex problems. Faced with what many see as a problem, they see an opportunity and challenge themselves to solve the problem with either a new approach or an adaptation of an existing approach.

Whether it's the creative use of technologies to connect communities, engaging remote students who don't have Internet by adapting Moodle to run offline (Moodle Unplugged!), or designing new and effective ways to build e-portfolios, colleagues around the world are innovating.

And not all innovation involves technology. Some innovators take new approaches to assessment and student performance. Others focus on well-being and wellness for staff and students, or on new designs for learning.

My five dos and don'ts are a starting point for a conversation about innovation in education, especially higher education.

They apply to all forms of innovation: big, small, local, regional and international. My focus is on what each one of us, no matter what position we hold in our institution or organization, can do (or should avoid doing) to enable innovation.

These dos and don'ts reflect what I have heard from many colleagues like you over the years at different venues. These are your ideas.

FIVE DON'TS

1. Don't dwell on failures

As innovators, we know some failures are inevitable — but learning from failure is what helps us eventually be successful innovators.

2. Don't see innovation as “a big idea.”

Innovation is about changing the way we do something. It's about how we work. Sustainable innovation begins with an idea, but it then takes ingenuity, diligence, persistence, commitment and hard work to convert the idea into something that works.

3. Don't let ego get in the way.

Everything we do in education, whether it's technology innovation, a new approach to assessment, or a very creative way to develop skills, is about the learner.

Let's continue to keep our eye on the learner and not let our egos as innovators get in the way. We too are learners, and innovation is a learning process.

4. Don't be impatient.

It takes TIME for innovation to flourish and to work through the start-up challenges.

5. Don't underestimate the EFFORT it takes.

“You know you've got to put in the work to get from idea to execution, so you must build that “effort time” into your plan for success.”

FIVE DOS

1. Encourage risk taking.

Many of the major innovations in our field have been high-risk ventures, such as the UK's Open University. Even right here in Canada, Athabasca University and Contact North | Contact Nord were considered controversial, high-risk developments.

2. Engage stakeholders.

Innovation involves developing programs, courses, boot camps, technologies, processes and learning experiences WITH people, not FOR people.

3. Build on strengths.

Keep identifying teams and groups that are keen to innovate, and set priorities and environments so your chances of success are high. In doing this, break down silos and show leadership to be a champion of change.

4. Learn to tolerate ambiguity.

We all know we will never have 100% certainty that a new idea or process will work.

Let's continue to learn to live with excitement, doubt, anxiety and hope.

5. Get the mindset right.

Encourage your colleagues to experiment, understand, embrace, and lead innovation. Having a clear process is very helpful but preparing your team with the right mindset is far more effective.

THREE REMINDERS:

- Change is constant.
- Just when we think we have a process, technology or competency refined, the context changes — and we must adapt to new demands.
- Innovation is not a one-time event but a commitment to improvement, to meeting needs in the moment, and to searching for the best ways to foster learning in others and in oneself.

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