

There is nothing like a pandemic – to force rapid change and upskilling in higher education

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The challenge

To improve the teaching and learning experience for both students and academics, our institution formed the Business Co-Design (BCD) team. The BCD team consists of both professional and academic staff and we work with the unit coordinators (UCs) and the teaching team together to redesign existing units or design new units. Our activities range from one-on-one consultations, educational innovation, and development project support to professional development programs (Cerimagic and Khanna, 2020; Vallis, Bryant and Huber, 2020).

During the height of the pandemic, we had to rapidly transition to online learning (Rohman et al., 2020). This required educators to move all content, activities, and assessment tasks very quickly onto Canvas, our university's Learning Management System (LMS). The role of the BCD team in this change was to collaborate with and support the content experts and educators in transitioning their pedagogy to the online context. This required the educators to re-work traditional didactic content into more 'bite-sized' chunks of content and create modules that students could work through (Simon, 1974; Cram et al., 2020). The online modules were enriched with multimedia (Britton, et al., 2020) and interactive tools to maximise student engagement and learning. External eTools (such as Jamboard, Padlet, etc.) were used to test student knowledge and promote collaboration, which could then be embedded into the LMS.

The main challenges that the BCD team faced during this period included:

- (1) Increased number of educators who needed our assistance – without a commensurate increase in resources.
- (2) The requirement to upskill educators in the use of the LMS, eTools, and good quality DIY video/multimedia content creation.
- (3) Ways to provide content so that it could be created with fast turnarounds, attention to detail, and minimal disruption.
- (4) The content also needed to be sustainable – for example, so that academics did not need to create new multimedia content every semester.

The response

As our work increased exponentially without a commensurate increase in resources, the only way we could scale up the support that we would usually offer to individual units was to upskill the educators, so that they learnt how to be more self-sufficient.

The workshops we chose to run were based on (1) the educator's needs and (2) on educational pedagogies and literature (Atkinson and Shiffrin, 1968; Simon, 1974; Mayer, 2001; Mayer, 2002; Mayer and Moreno, 2003; Hodges et al., 2020).

This was done by running 30-to-60-minute workshops for each of our disciplines individually on:

- How to use the Canvas template.
- Using Canvas + asynchronous tools.
- How to do Chunking.
- How to add interactivity (synchronous and asynchronous).
- How to build community (online).
- Teaching online intro session (MVP).
- Using Zoom - features and practice session.
- MSTeams.
- Media workshop incl. DIY.
- OBS and avatar multimedia workshops.

We continue to offer a variety of workshops through the semester as required and we have monthly two hour drop-in sessions that are run by the media and LD teams where staff can Zoom in or attend in person and get assistance with any multimedia and LD related enquiries.

Our survey data indicated that most of the workshop participants found the workshops helpful and felt more comfortable redesigning their units. However, upon reflecting we realised that we had two major issues: (1) the BCD team spent a lot of time in preparing and running the workshops and this took the team away from all the other work that had to be done; (2) as the workshops were run for each discipline individually, we sometimes had no one turn-up to the workshops or we had only one or two participants. An additional minor issue was the day, time, and length of the workshops. Through surveys, we realised that most of our academics preferred short workshops (between 30 to 45 minutes, with 15 minutes Q&A), preferably not on a Monday or Friday, and preferably not too late in the day (not after 4:00pm). This minor third issue was easily fixed.

To deal with the two major issues in Semester 1 2021, we decided to run the workshops for the whole school, instead of running the workshops for individual disciplines, and we recorded each workshop. This meant that the workshops had a higher attendance rate, and that the BCD team did not have to run the workshops multiple times (this was more efficient and sustainable for the team). Each workshop was recorded on Zoom and the recording was shared with all educators – which was useful to staff who were unable to attend the workshop session(s).

The team also built a Canvas page for the school which included short 'how to' videos and written instructions for academics on: how to do chunking, how to add interactivity and multimedia to their units, how to create H5Ps and use other eTools, and how to use MSTeams, Zoom, etc. We also created a page that had several Q&As of 'most frequently asked questions' by academics. Additionally, we added a page that contained contact details of all the relevant faculty and university departments and centres.

One of the biggest challenges that we as an institution faced during the pandemic was some academics' lack of LMS, multimedia, and eTool knowledge and skills. Yet, we all had to rapidly move our lectures and teaching online in 2020 and online and face-to-face

in 2021. The goal was not just to cut and paste existing unit content into our LMS, the goal was (and still is), to improve the units/courses and deliver engaging content. The result was that by up-skilling our academics they were more confident in using LMS, eTools, MSTeams, multimedia, and chunking, and were able to be creative and innovative with their course content, teaching approaches, and assessments.

Recommendations

In 2020 this was new territory for us; therefore, we piloted our workshops by running them for each discipline. This created too much work for our team, it was not sustainable and the workshops (because there were too many of them) were not well attended. From the feedback that we received from the academics we knew that the workshops were sometimes too short (i.e., only 30 minutes) and that sometimes they were run on days/times that were not favourable for the academics.

However, we very quickly learnt from our mistakes by evaluating the workshops through a Qualtrics survey that was sent after each workshop session, where we asked the academics for feedback.

Simultaneously, we as a team learnt the art of reflecting (Gibbs, 1988; Driscoll, 2006; Hegarty, 2011; Ross, 2011) and feeding forward to improve our own processes and the way we offer workshops, deciding the number of workshops, and ensuring the efficiency and sustainability of our work.

In reflecting on the type of support that we offer, and if indeed we accomplished what we set out to do, one of the lessons we learnt is that we are constantly improving and finding new ways to support our educators better.

The workshops met the purpose of enabling educators to take ownership of their units and the LMS site maintenance and rollover in future semesters, teaching the appropriate skills required to create content and/or eTools (Prieto et al., 2020). The academics not only upskilled but, in most cases, vastly improved their units through chunking and multimedia and by directing the students' attention to the key features of the material to learn (Simon, 1974; Mayer, 2002; Mayer and Moreno, 2003).

Others can benefit from our experience, by not repeating our mistakes. Our advice to anyone who is planning to run workshops is: (1) ensure that the workshops are based on the stakeholder's needs, (2) that the workshops are evaluated, and that they are (3) improved in a timely manner. The workshops need to be (4) sustainable and should not take your team away from doing their everyday tasks/projects – hence, (5) find complementary avenues (such as your university's LMS), where you can house additional useful 'how to' instructions, 'most frequently asked questions', and add a page that contains contact details of all the relevant faculty and university departments and centres.

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