From funded project to sustainable product: elearning innovations in transition

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Abstract and Symposium Plan

The transition from funded project to sustainable elearning innovation has been problematic for many years. Most elearning innovations rely on seed funding for a research and development phase that is risky and resource intensive. Once proof of concept is achieved, different skills are needed for dissemination, integration and professional development, and a number of other factors are critical to long-term success, i.e. strong leadership, supportive institutional culture, senior management support, effective professional development and integration with existing technology systems.

In the current tertiary context, there is unresolved tension between the need to experiment with new educational concepts and tools, and the provision of standard, centralized and secure elearning environments. Valuable knowledge is lost when project experiences are not analyzed to inform parallel or future developments. This applies equally to small-scale, developments and broad concepts such as learning objects and open educational resources.

The discussion in this interactive symposium will begin with a working definition of 'sustainable' and a brief presentation of the strategies and success ratings from 22 Australasian case studies of funded projects that have achieved varying degrees of sustainability. Delegates will be invited to share their opinions and experience, and to debate the findings from an ACODE sponsored study that concludes:

- The concept of sustainability is problematic in a context of shared, adaptable and transitory 'products';
- Confidence in open source systems is limited, as leadership and resources are still required;
- Committed and capable individuals remain the single most important success factor for sustainable innovations;
- Institutional structures and process are at odds with the management and governance needs of innovations, resulting in some great elearning products with owners that don't care;
- Project funding for two or three years is enough to produce a good working prototype but not a complete and self-sustaining product.

These findings challenge the relevance and expectations of the funded project model. With participants' consent, the outcomes of the discussion will be disseminated with case study findings.