CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE: THE EXPERIENCES OF EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY LEADERS IN IRISH HIGHER EDUCATION

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https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/dont-get-caught-in-the-middle/

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Leadership in Educational Technology

Leadership is required at many levels to more fully integrate educational technologies in higher education yet …

there is a lack of empirical research in "educational technology leadership" (Arnold and Sangrà, 2018; Jameson, 2013) …

particularly in relation to leaders "in the middle", who are often in informal positions (Bates and Sangrà, 2011).

EdTech leaders "in the middle"

- Work on own or in small teams, with many different "hats"

- Rely on exerting influence on positional leaders and on colleagues

This study aims to explore the stories of these leaders to provide insights into their roles and experiences.

Image by Yeshi Kangrang on Unsplash

Research Question

What can be learnt about educational technology leadership from the stories of those who work "in the middle" of implementing institutional change in Irish Higher Education?

- Perceptions of leadership

- Leadership influences

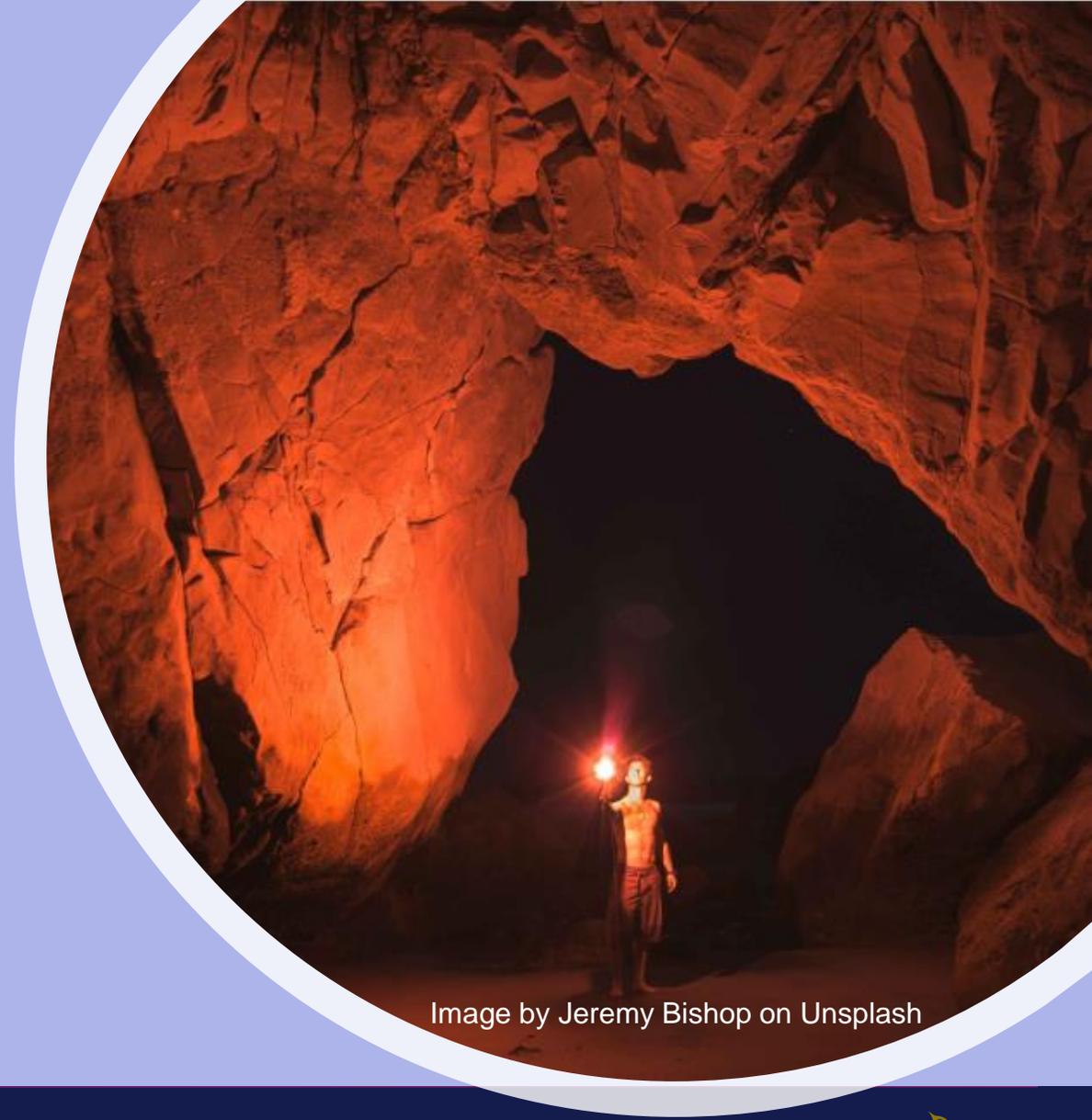- Effective approaches

- Challenges

- Supports required

Image by Jeremy Bishop on Unsplash

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Methodology

Narrative Inquiry (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990)

Two phases:

1. Online survey of a sample of educational technology leaders in Irish Higher Education

2. Semi-structured interviews with sample of approx. 12 leaders

Phase 1 – Online survey

Sample of 122 educational technology leaders invited to participate

Identified from

- institutional websites and
- regular presenters at annual Irish EdTech conferences 2011-2018.

Piloted in DkIT (January 2019)

Invitations sent February 2019

64 responses received

Approach to leadership(n = 64)

Approach	Number	%
Expert; sharing knowledge; colleagues' confidence	12	19%
Engagement with tech essential; identify tools; CPD	5	8%
Integration a collaborative effort; shared responsibility	21	33%
Influencer; building relationships; modelling	17	27%
Enthusiastic adopter; share experiences; give advice	6	9%

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Most satisfying aspects of your role

Free-text responses (n = 52)

1. Working with teachers, building confidence, improving teaching

   "enabling",, "collaborating", "developing competence", "integrating …into daily practice" , "effectively using…", "energised", "engaged"

2. Impact on student learning directly or indirectly - increased engagement and enhanced student experience.

Effectiveness of approaches (n = 59)

Effective, Very Effective or Most Effective

1. Accredited CPD modules/programmes in educational technology (98%)
2. Working with small teams of academics (96%)
3. Working with programme development teams (94%)

Not at all Effective or Somewhat Effective

1. Recognition of achievements e.g. awards, digital badges (52%)
2. Instructional notes (34%)

Challenges in integrating educational technology (n = 59)

List of 17 possible factors

Challenging, Very Challenging or Most Challenging

1. High workload of academics (96.6%)

2. Insufficient support staff - educational technologists/champions (78.0%)

3. Lack of recognition for innovative teaching (74.6%)

Most challenging aspects of your role

Free-text responses (n = 53)

1. Finding time – multi-faceted roles/staying up-to-date
   "Too much to do, too little time"

2. Engaging academics – getting buy-in

3. Insufficient resources – funding, personnel and infrastructure

4. Changing institutional culture/views of management

Being an educational technology leader in my institution is like …

Being a salesperson

Leading a horse to water and hoping …

Being a jack of all trades …

Being a bull on a sheep farm

Being a bridge … sometimes get caught in the middle

Pushing a boulder uphill

Banging your head against a Wall

Being part of small but enthusiastic cult

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"I'm just a little bit caught in the middle" (Lyrics by Lenka)

Educational technology leaders

- Have a range of roles, often ill-defined, still evolving; time poor
- Seek to influence in different directions
- Are frustrated by scarcity of resources – time, people and infrastructure
- However, they remain enthusiastic about enabling colleagues integrate technology and, in this way, affect student learning

Being an educational technology leader is like "playing a game of snakes and ladders"

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