

Managing Technological Change: Strategies for College and University Leaders

A.W. (Tony) Bates
San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000, 320 pages

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Most readers of *Distance Education* will be familiar with the work of Tony Bates, but none has read a more important book than Tony's latest epistle to the mandarins of higher education. Tony goads, inspires, advises, and informs decision-makers as he guides them through decision-making in the confusing and expensive domain of technology for teaching and learning. University presidents and senior administrators are daily being bombarded with requests for expenditure, appeals to support incredible schemes and dreams, and relentless pressure from students, staff, and board members to guarantee that they aren't moving either too fast or too slow in the race for technological advantage. Tony provides our leaders with an operating manual. It doesn't tell decision makers how worried to be or how much money to spend, but it does provide them with tools and insights to help make and implement these crucial decisions.

During the past 20 years Tony has produced a continuing series of books (5) and articles (over 350) related to the effective use of technologies in distance education. His latest book moves his analysis beyond the domain of distance education and places the issues squarely in the context of every institution of higher education—be they campus-bound, distance, or distributed.

Tony remembers that presidents rarely read past the executive summary, so the book starts with a six-page summary. Here he overviews the chapters and the recommendations that follow. His final summary point, "the changes proposed in this book may be too rich, too drastic, or too threatening to the core values on many institutions," works on at least two functions. First, it appropriately challenges the leader to dig into the meat of the text and venture to the scary ground past the executive summary. Second, it lets all of us know that Tony does, and we all should, take the opportunity and threat of these distributive technologies very seriously indeed!

In the first chapter Tony tries to outline what the technologies are and how they are being used. Fortunately, he ends the chapter with four short case studies that breathe a bit of life into a rather dull opening chapter. Perhaps it's necessary to get everyone up to speed in this chapter, but don't buy this book to find out what e-mail is—even though it is described—it gets much better later on!

In chapters two and three Tony moves directly to issues of leadership and planning. I liked his review and description of strategic planning because it is focused not on the

usual effusive verbiage of strategic plans, replete with references to excellence and celebrity, but directly on concretely defining the goals, scope, and measurement of teaching and learning. Only from these ends is technology as a means appropriately harnessed. In the planning chapter Tony outlines the various ways to organize production of courses from laissez-faire, through “Lone Ranger,” to project management. It’s pretty obvious which of these Tony personally endorses, yet he realizes that no single model of production or distribution fits all institutions, and so he provides suggestions for improving whichever model your institution adopts.

The next two chapters focus on two of the toughest and most expensive challenges: how to provide equitable and affordable student access and how to support faculty effectively. You’ll have to buy the book to find out if Tony recommends you listen to the siren song of hardware manufacturers championing a “notebook” advantage for every student. In addition, for your \$45 dollar investment you’ll be better able to understand why these student access decisions are not made easily or lightly. Faculty support issues related to technology use are also contentious, but Tony doesn’t avoid the tough issues and devotes 14 pages to issues related to intellectual property and copyright—don’t tell me your Faculty Association isn’t interested in this issue!

The chapter on costing is interesting—somewhat rehashed from previous books, but one part I especially liked was the detail of the expenditures incurred by Tony’s unit at the University of British Columbia. He provides the actual costs incurred during the creation of a Web-based course for international delivery. I get *real* tired of people telling me that it cost \$2,000 or \$880,000 to create their latest Web course, without providing enough details so that I can grasp any understanding of the economics of this business or their application of it.

My favorite chapter (and the one I couldn’t resist photocopying for my vice-president) is related to organization of the human resources to support educational technology. Many of us have been on the pendulum as it swings between decentralized, “do it in the trenches” approaches, to centralized “leave it to the professionals” strategies. Tony has been there too; and he helps us differentiate between those tasks that are best done at the departmental level and those best done at the center—at least using today’s technologies.

Tony’s last chapter leaves us considering what is gained and what is lost when technology becomes a part of everyday life on and off campus. Our Amish friends consciously make this same decision and come up with different conclusions than either Tony Bates or me. But after reading this important book you’ll be better able to decide and implement the type of technological addition to the teaching and learning program that makes most sense at your school. A final suggestion is to buy a copy of *Managing Technological Change* for the president of the alumni association of your alma mater in addition to one for your president—doing so will help ensure there will be an alma mater for your grandchildren to attend.

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