Innovation Outcomes and Competing Agendas in Higher Education: Experimenting with Audio-Video Feedback

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Abstract : This paper links distinct bodies of literature around innovation and public services by examining a case of perceived innovation failure. Through a mixed methodology investigating student attitudes to, and behaviour around, technological innovation in higher education, the paper makes a contribution to the public service innovation literature by focusing on the duality of innovation outcomes, suggestive of an innovation typology in public services. The study was conducted in a UK Russell Group university and it focused on a technological process innovation. The innovation consisted of the provision of feedback to students in the form of a digital video (mp4), tailored to each individual submission, with extended voice-over commentary from the course coordinator and visual cues intended to help students see the relevance of comments to their submissions. The sample of the study consisted of a class of 79 undergraduate students. To investigate student attainment, we designed a field (also known as quasi or natural) experiment, essentially a manipulation of a social setting (in this case, the form of feedback given to students), but as part of a naturally occurring social arrangement (a real course which students attend and in which they are assessed). A two group control group design (see figure 3) was utilised to examine the effectiveness of the feedback innovation (video feedback). Two outcome variables of the service innovation were measured: student satisfaction and student attainment. In other words, the study examined not only students' perceptions of whether VF was deemed to be beneficial towards their subsequent assignments; but also evidence of actual incremental benefits in students' performance from one assignment to the next after VF was provided. The results were baffling and indicating competing agendas in higher education.