Blackboard®

6 Characteristics To Increase Technology Adoption

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What it takes to drive successful technology adoption

Institutions recognise how new technology can enhance the learning and teaching experience for staff and students. Increasingly they are looking to technology to support them in achieving their strategic goals. Common goals include:

- Improving the quality of the student experience and positively impacting student performance, satisfaction and retention
- Responding to the rising expectations and the increasingly diverse support needs of the student population
- Extending institutional reach and developing new markets through flexible delivery
- Reducing administration burden on academic staff by improving efficiency and effectiveness of academic administrative processes
- Enhancing student employability and digital literacy skills through exposure to discipline-specific software, resources and online practice

However, there are a range of obstacles to the adoption of technology that institutions must overcome. Change of any kind is daunting, particularly when dealing with long-established methods and systems. Success depends on shifting entrenched culture and attitudes.

This eBook shows how to make it happen, suggesting practical tips, ideas, resources and real-life examples. We've built the story around six key characteristics required of a successful adoption project:

1. Leadership from the top
2. Institutional commitment and investment
3. Robust and reliable infrastructure
4. Effective and available support for academic staff
5. Ability to demonstrate the benefits to the student and staff experience
6. Evidence-based decision-making and a continuous cycle of improvement

1 Leadership from the top

Good leadership is vital to any change process, especially when it comes to introducing new technology within a university.

Strong executive sponsorship - a senior leader in the institution who is endorsing and driving the change is key to ensuring that technology adoption aligns with institutional goals and encouraging participation across the institution.

For learning technology this role is typically performed by a senior academic leader with responsibility for education and/or the student experience. This sponsorship positions technology adoption within the broader academic context, that the technology is not an end in itself but a means to provide a richer and more engaging student experience.

Clear consensus within an institution's leadership team can enable the change process to be embedded more quickly. Public support from the other senior leaders for both the academic sponsor and for the new technology itself helps establish a shared ownership and demonstrates the importance of the change to broader institutional goals. Ideally, this should encompass not just buy-in to the project, but also personal involvement.

Articulating how technology adoption supports the institution's strategic vision provides clear top-down communication of that leadership. It is increasingly common to see educational technology adoption goals referenced in institutional corporate plans, learning and teaching strategies and strategic change portfolios. These documents communicate strategic alignment, validate the importance of adoption and demonstrate institutional commitment.

BLACKBOARD RECOMMENDS

- **Facilitating 'Focus on…' sessions for the executive leadership team. These are effective forums for exploring and clarifying the benefits of new technology among senior managers.**
- **Developing a 3-5 year learning technology strategic plan, specifying objectives, adoption goals and developmental cycles.**

CLIENT SPOTLIGHTS

King Khalid University, Saudi Arabia

A top-down vision has driven adoption of online collaboration technology across 25 departments. Find out how one of the largest institutions in the Middle East used online learning to overcome cultural and practical obstacles to education on a gender-divided campus. A new interactive approach has saved money, increased motivation and raised the quality of teaching. ***Read more >***

Université Paris Dauphine, France

When a potential public health crisis meant Paris Dauphine had to extend online learning, senior-level commitment created the right atmosphere for change. The university knew it was critical to drive adoption among teaching staff, so its president personally encouraged academics to learn how to put their courses online. When demand for training rose abruptly as a result, students were recruited to "teach the teachers". Paris Dauphine now has more than 50% of courses online, with a target of 70% within two years. ***Read more >***

University of Manchester, UK

In order to carry out its 'Towards Manchester 2015' strategic plan, the University of Manchester accepted that it had to create confidence in the central provision of virtual learning environment (VLE) services. It would need strong executive sponsorship as well as calling on external expertise. By bringing together a committed and empowered team from across the university, it was able to progress towards a successful implementation. ***Read more >***

HOW BLACKBOARD CAN HELP

Create a long term plan

Blackboard can work with your leaders to translate institutional vision into a strategic plan for adoption.

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2 Institutional commitment and investment

With leadership from the top articulating how the change supports strategic goals – institutional commitment is further demonstrated through investment and internal resources.

This is not only financial investment or the investment in the technology itself, but also in the internal resources required to deliver the change. These typically include learning technology support infrastructure, change/project management resources, buy-out funding and funds to encourage participation and innovation. This clearly demonstrates the institution's commitment not just to introducing technology but to ensuring its successful adoption. It also provides strong reassurance to the academic community that the institutional leadership is aware that appropriately resourced support is essential to effective adoption.

Staff can be fearful of change and the impact it may have on their way of working. Coupled with higher education being in a state of apparently perpetual change, this can result in 'change fatigue'. Engaging with staff, reacting to individual concerns and showing how important the change is to the institution will help.

Successful technology adoption is about supporting the transition from the current state to the future state. It is important to manage the change process, to reassure the academic community that time spent engaging with this change is valued by the institution and to address individual concerns. This should include a clear acknowledgement that work to incorporate technology within learning and teaching is a valid activity for staff and that it is recognised in work planning and status.

BLACKBOARD RECOMMENDS

- **Establishing an institutional change management programme led by a senior executive that supports the academic community through the transition.**
- **Providing mechanisms to recognise and reward those who make a positive contribution and set standards across the institution.**

CLIENT SPOTLIGHTS

University of Westminster, UK

Where do they want to be; how do they want to teach; how will students want to learn; and what will student and staff expectations be at the University of Westminster in ten-fifteen years' time?

The 'Learning Futures' initiative set about engaging with staff and students in optimising the learning experience by encouraging students and academics to buy-in and sign up to change. They used a range of tools (including surveys, crowdsourcing and focus groups) to gather information from them about the infrastructure and environment stakeholders felt they needed to make step changes in curriculum delivery. Part of the Transforming Learning and Teaching project strand of the Learning Futures work is focused on how technology is used in teaching and how courses can be made more interactive and student centred. By truly understanding how the Virtual Learning Environment was being used by staff and students and exploring how its use in and out of class is bringing results, Westminster has started down the path of a significant change in the learning experience. ***Read more >***

HOW BLACKBOARD CAN HELP

Blackboard Services can help you draw up an effective technology adoption implementation plan.

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3 Robust and reliable infrastructure

Learning technology is playing a central and mission critical role in delivering high quality learning opportunities and supporting the broader student experience.

Students and staff expect learning technology to be 'always on', providing access to the resources and activities they need when they need them. Above all, staff and students must see that new technology is available, accessible and able to perform as expected. It's important to choose a high-quality technology infrastructure (both hardware and software) and establish good support protocols to deliver a learning technology service that meets institutional needs.

Confidence in a robust and reliable infrastructure is essential in enabling institutional leadership to sponsor the change and strive for ambitious goals. It is equally important in encouraging academic adoption of technology and student engagement with the learning opportunities provided. Poor adoption can be seated in a reluctance to rely on something that doesn't appear resilient and might fail at a crucial time, whether in the middle of a teaching session or whilst trying to submit and assignment. It is essential therefore, to establish a stable, reliable infrastructure that can deliver the service required and to communicate the key performance metrics to students and staff to build trust and confidence.

If the technology is reliable, with good uptime and performance, the institution will be able to provide a high quality, sophisticated and engaging blended learning experience.

BLACKBOARD RECOMMENDS

Asking these questions:

- Is learning technology available 24/7?
- Can it perform at the speed users need?
- Does it work as expected?
- Is it accessible across all platforms and devices?
- What metrics are shared with your academic community?

CLIENT SPOTLIGHTS

Edge Hill University, UK

As one of the fastest-growing universities in the UK with aggressive enrolment goals, Edge Hill took a strategic decision to invest in its Virtual Learning Environment. With its IT department stretched, the university chose Blackboard Managed Hosting to benefit from a much more stable and reliable VLE that couldn't be replicated internally. ***Read more >***

University of Groningen, The Netherlands

The University of Groningen is one of the oldest in the Netherlands, but it runs a very 21st century Virtual Learning Environment. In 2010 it made a strategic move to a managed hosting solution, in order to remove any worries about performance and uptime. A meticulously planned migration to Blackboard's Diamond-level Managed Hosting service has led to significant improvements; faster migrations, smoother running, greater innovations and an even stronger uptake of Blackboard Learn. ***Read more >***

HOW BLACKBOARD CAN HELP

Complete the self-assesment survey

Find out how your institution stacks up against best practices in virtual learning environment hosting with a self-assessment.

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Supporting online programmes today, and as they grow over time

When it comes to hosting, only Blackboard has the breadth of resources and depth of experience to help you manage the risk, growth, change and uptime of your online programmes.

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4 Effective and available support for academic staff

For most academic staff, adopting learning technology for the first time is a change to their well-established and proven practice.

It asks them to step away from the comfort of the familiar and try something new. To be able to respond to this request it is essential that they have access to a range of effective and available support mechanisms in the form of training, ad hoc support and self-help resources.

There are generally three pillars of learning technology support that needs to be available:

1. ***Technical support*** – just in time "how to" help to complete key tasks. This is typically provided through a combination of helpdesk (phone, chat, email, face to face) and self-help resources.
2. ***Technology skills development*** – understanding "how to use" the technology effectively and opportunities to develop their own digital skills. This often takes the form of face-to-face training courses but increasingly we are also seeing online self-paced courses, one-to-one coaching sessions and experiential learning
3. ***Pedagogical best practices*** – understanding "why to use" the technology, in particular ways in order to deliver differing pedagogical goals. Again, face-to-face training (indeed sometimes in combination with technology skills development) but also very commonly one-to-one coaching sessions, programme level curriculum redesign, communities of practice and peer "show and share" sessions.

The two most common questions in establishing a learning technology support infrastructure is how many staff and where should they be located? Often, the answer is 'it depends'. Organisational structures and resources vary from institution to institution depending on the overall institutional structure and culture.

For some institutions, it is most appropriate to situate the support resources within faculties/academic departments so the learning technologists are in close proximity to those they support and can develop discipline-specific best practices. For others, they prefer to create a central hub of learning technologists as a highly visible form of support that can be accessed by anyone across the institution and enables inter-disciplinary sharing of practice.

Increasingly common is a structure where the teams of learning technologists are centrally managed but are located within, or assigned to, specific faculties/academic departments. Add in thematic areas of specialism and the institution potentially has the best of both worlds with developing deep discipline-specific networks, whilst having flexibility in how resources might be deployed to cover for each other, share experiences or work together on a large change project. Whichever structure is chosen, the key to its success will be the formal and informal networking opportunities created for the learning technologists, amongst themselves and with the academic community.

Another way to setup a (cost) effective support infrastructure for academic staff, is implementing technology adoption software. Eesysoft, a Blackboard partner provides an in-context support solution allowing institutions to measure adoption and (pro-actively) communicate with faculty and students while they are active in the Blackboard environment.

A key trend is the increase in focus on understanding the support needs and baseline digital skills of academic staff. This is a really helpful way of being able to tailor support to key needs and to ensure that it is pitched at the right level.

BLACKBOARD RECOMMENDS

- ***Developing an informal diagnostic or questionnaire*** – to help understand the training and support needs of academic staff at the institution.
- ***Considering introducing student employees and interns to the learning technology support structure*** – they are a great way of supporting staff and have excellent insights into what works well.
- ***Mentoring each other*** – recruit early adopters as mentors to academics who are just starting out. Administrators and department chairs can use the technology themselves and serve as role models.
- ***Making course development manageable*** – Create a reasonable timeline for development and support academics continuously during the process. Provide release time for course development, encourage academics to use a blended learning (hybrid) approach to their course delivery before considering online-only courses, and provide course designers who can help instructors to build their courses.

CLIENT SPOTLIGHTS

Regent's University London, UK

To achieve its goal of effective institution-wide online coursework submission, the university needed to discover the levels of digital literacy among its teaching staff. Following a comprehensive training needs analysis, it identified the key skills that were required and where there were gaps in academic staff skillsets. Technical experts are now providing tailored support in a range of formats to academics and establishing a recommended standard of skills. ***Read more >***

Maastricht University, Maastricht, The Netherlands

Maastricht University understood that if they effectively want to promote the use of educational technology that they had to establish an adequate support framework for faculty to use technology successfully. They decided to implement a technology adoption solution from EesySoft, allowing them to provide in-context support to their academic staff while they are working in their Blackboard environment. ***Read more >***

Courtesy of Arjen Schmitz

TIPS & TRICKS

Blackboard Collaborate can be used to deliver online training sessions that can be recorded to create future resources.

Academic staff can also be supported by providing them with access to the following resources:

The Blackboard YouTube channel – it is full of resources and training material to help academics get more from their Blackboard environment.

Make sure that academics have a channel to report and resolve technical difficulties quickly – provide links to the campus help desk, open office hours, and to Blackboard Help and Videos.

Training online – academics can enjoy the flexibility of online learning and experience what students experience. If there is not enough time to develop online training from scratch, Blackboard offers training solutions that include ready-made online and face-to-face options that can be customised and delivered on the campus.

Learn from others by attending events – spend some time thinking through what topics, techniques, and tools are important to the teaching and learning process including the things that have been learnt at conferences, Blackboard User Groups or the Blackboard Teaching and Learning Conference.

HOW BLACKBOARD CAN HELP

Blackboard offers training solutions that include ready-made online and face-to-face options that can be customised and delivered on your campus.

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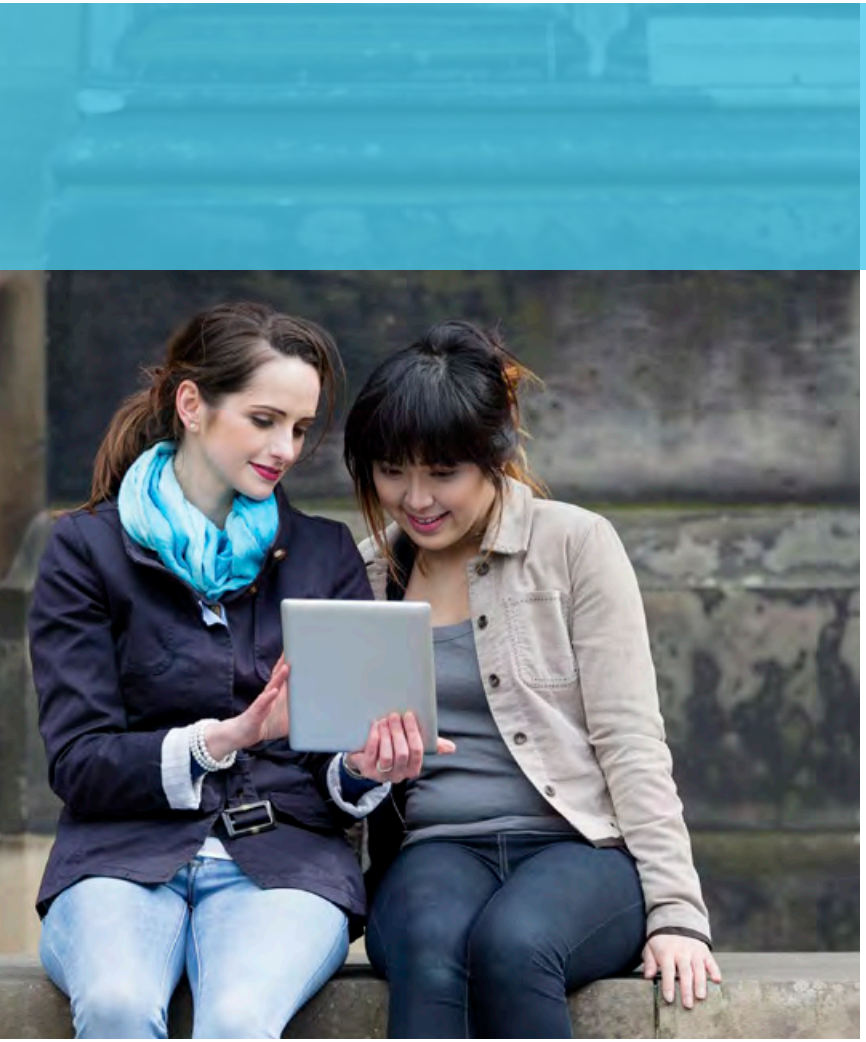
5 Ability to demonstrate the benefits to the student and staff experience



It is vital that the impact and benefits to the learner are considered as well as that of the staff when adopting new technology.

On the technological level, for successful adoption into teaching, academics must perceive the technology as better than previous practice. A key factor is academics attitudes toward technology or intentions to use technology in their classrooms. If they have negative attitudes toward technology, providing them with the very best technology may not influence them to use it in their teaching. Academics need to be assured that technology can make their teaching interesting, easier, more fun for them and students, more motivating, more enjoyable and most importantly will improve student outcomes. Student success will be one of the top drivers for adopting new technology.

Giving academics an idea of what using such technology would mean to the student will help them to understand what their efforts are for and will help them to integrate it into the design principles of courses.

Sometimes technology adoption can initially be time consuming and it is important to be able to demonstrate how investment of time early in the process can reap rewards later. These rewards may be improved performance by students, a more enjoyable learning experience for all or a more efficient use of staff time, freeing up more time for research, learning innovation and/or professional development.

WHERE TO START

A place to start is by reading Chickering and Ehrmann "Implementing the Seven Principles: Technology as Lever". If the power of new technologies is to be fully realised and learning outcomes improved, technology should be employed in ways consistent with the Seven Principles.

Sheffield Hallam University's design principles: Benefits of e-learning

Each of the principles underscores the benefits of integrating e-learning opportunities into the curriculum, and each is supported here by student quotes from research into how students use technology to support and enhance their learning.
Click here >

BLACKBOARD RECOMMENDS

- ***Collating and publishing "one paragraph" case studies*** – in video format that capture real world examples from within the institution showing how the application of learning technology has impacted on student learning and/or the staff experience.
- ***Looking for quick wins that positively impact the learner experience*** – identify how the technology directly affects students and show academics how it helps students succeed and improves workflows. Use data to prove the case.
- ***Recruiting champions and convert the laggards*** – empower the technology champions to sway their peers, but also find academics or staff who are the primary voice of resistance and meet with them. Discuss how greater adoption of technology can aid in student success and help meet student expectations to help convert them to advocates.
- ***Recognising them*** – acknowledge academics who are doing exemplary work through awards, articles, tweets, and other channels available at the institution.
- ***Point out the positives*** – when teaching online, academics can enjoy a new teaching paradigm with more flexibility, more student contact, and more data to base course improvement decisions on. This can be part of the marketing communications plan, and can include stories about academics who are innovating and benefiting from it.

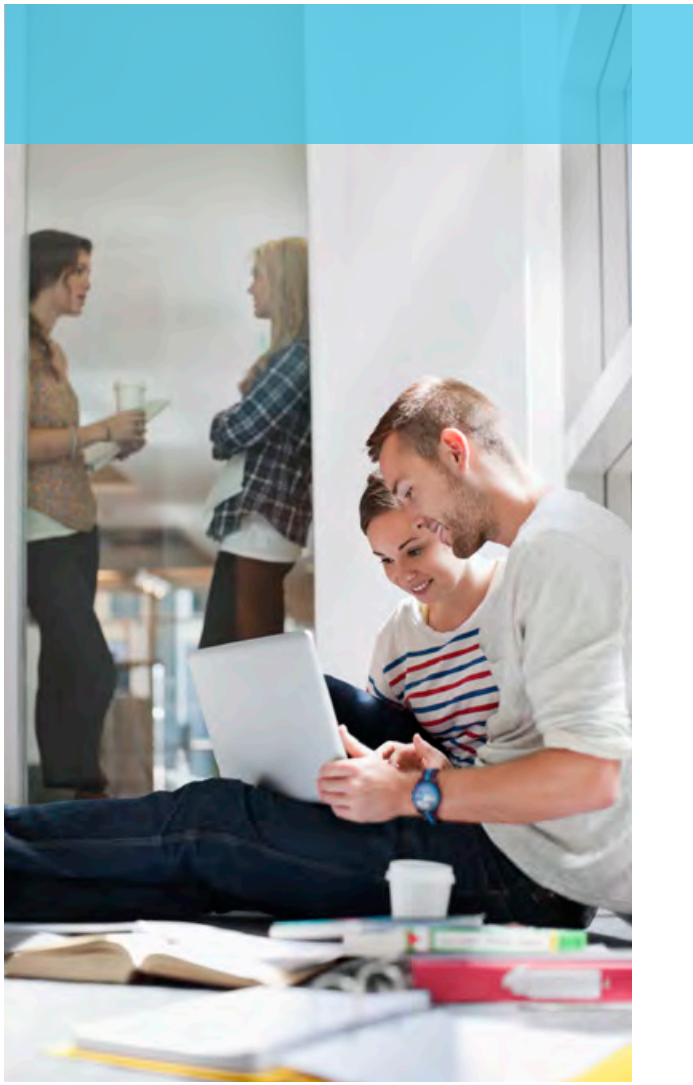
CLIENT SPOTLIGHTS

Sheffield Hallam University, UK

Sheffield Hallam University, in common with many other institutions, faced challenges around a lack of consistency in the student online learning experience and wanted to encourage both more consistent and deeper engagement with technology enhanced learning.

To address the aspects around consistency, Sheffield Hallam identified a set of minimum expectations for what should be available online for all taught provision. This includes having a Blackboard site to support each module which provides students access to core administrative information such as assessment briefs, staff contact details and marks, as well as learning materials and activities which are appropriate for the module.

There was a recognition that online teaching activities cannot be specified consistently in the same way: teaching needs to fit the module content and the learners' needs. A different approach was developed to encourage changes to teaching practice using technology. A 'menu' of teaching approaches was created based on teaching practices across the University. The menu enables academics to see the benefits of different teaching approaches they could use and how technologies can support and enhance those approaches. ***Read more >***



6 Evidence-based decision-making and a continuous cycle of improvement

The adoption of technology in teaching and learning frequently raises questions about how it impacts on students' success, improves the student experience and makes effective use of staff time.

This can lead to exploring:

- ***Is the educational technology initiative working well?***
- ***Is there an understanding of the current level of adoption?***
- ***Are the results that were expected, being achieved?***
- ***If not, is there clear evidence of what changes can move the initiative closer to its objectives?***

Evaluating the initiative can help provide valid, credible answers to these and other questions.

Meaningful data, research and evaluation provide a basis to address any weaknesses, achieve the goals, and extend the success. The resulting evidence can help an institution:

- ***Celebrate successes and identify areas where further investments or other changes may be needed.***
- ***Identify effective approaches and resources.***
- ***Create a cycle of continuous improvement by enabling a positive feedback loop, ongoing support and development.***
- ***Build capacity and skills to enhance evidence-based decision-making, budget planning, and resource allocation.***
- ***Secure continued funding by demonstrating success.***
- ***Secure training or additional technical support.***

Measuring the impact of technology adoption on students 'success is a continuous process. It isn't a project that has a clean ending and it is important that institutions plan for technology management and adoption as "business as usual". Establishing a culture of continuous improvement along with policies and protocols for system management, upgrading, data management and change control is essential in ensuring that the technology and support infrastructure aligns with institutional goals.

BLACKBOARD RECOMMENDS

Asking these questions:

- **How is adoption measured?**
- **What's the baseline?**
- **What is trying to be achieved?**
- **Why and how will it be done?**
- **What evidence is needed to make good decisions?**

Using learning analytics to measure the impact of technology adoption

The ability to obtain evidence through learner data allows leaders to gain insight into staff and learner performance. Broad technology adoption across the learning lifecycle is necessary to drive the deep sets of data that can be acted on to inform institutional decisions, identify trends or even predict success. Institutions are missing out on big data's potential if academics and students aren't using the technology that creates the data to begin with.

HOW BLACKBOARD CAN HELP

Gain insight into learner and staff performance

To find out more about the types of data that could be collected and used for institutional benefit visit the Analytics Resource Centre >

Next steps

In this eBook we have outlined **six characteristics** that we hope can be identified with to embrace the deep usage of technology in teaching and learning across an institution.

1. **Leadership from the top**
2. **Institutional commitment and investment**
3. **Robust and reliable infrastructure**
4. **Effective and available support for academic staff**
5. **Ability to demonstrate the benefits to the student and staff experience**
6. **Evidence-based decision-making and a continuous cycle of improvement**

We have also provided tools, resources and real-life examples which will help make that happen.

HOW BLACKBOARD CAN HELP

Blackboard has the experience and expertise to help all higher and further education institutions succeed in their own technology adoption initiatives.

Contact your Account Manager and find out how our Solutions, Training, Consulting and our new Client Success Team can help you make more of your Blackboard investment.

For more information, please contact your Account Manager or click here.

About the author

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Louise leads Blackboard's International Strategic Services Practice. In addition Louise specialises in supporting clients to develop strategy and to plan and implement large-scale change programmes, particularly around academic adoption of technology, online programmes, and online assessment and feedback. During her time with Blackboard, Louise has worked with many clients advising on how to drive transformational change in the way they engage learning technologies to support the academic experience. The six characteristics explored here have emerged as common threads across institutions that have been successful in growing technology adoption.

Prior to joining Blackboard, Louise was the Head of Academic Innovation at Sheffield Hallam University, where she had institutional responsibility for e-learning, new and emerging learning technologies, and digital literacy attributes of staff and students. Before that she was Head of Learning and Teaching Strategy and Enhancement at the University of Sheffield and from 1999-2003, Louise managed one of the earliest institution-wide Blackboard implementations in the UK, again at Sheffield Hallam.

Louise has published widely on the student experience and expectations of learning technologies and is a review panel member for the British Journal of Educational Technology. Louise has taught at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels initially in business communication and finance and latterly focusing on higher education and learning technologies.

About Blackboard

Blackboard is the world's leading education technology company that inspires over 20 million students and learners around the world every day.

We believe that together we can re-imagine education to focus on the learner and to foster better engagement, interaction, and personalised learning experiences. At Blackboard, we create leading-edge technology, services and data capabilities across all areas of the student life helping to create a happier student and more prepared workforce. In partnership with our clients and partners, our mission is to help every learner achieve their full potential by inspiring a passion for lifelong learning.

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