

Breaking down the barriers to collegial engagement at the program level

Sven Venema

School of Information and Communication Technology (ICT)
Griffith University

Samantha Jeremijenko

Learning Futures, Program and Teaching Quality
Griffith University

Overview

- Background
- Teaching context
- Approach
- Kotter's 8 stages of change/accelerators
- What we did: Getting timely feedback (Closing the loop)
- Improving Closing the loop (Connecting through feedback)
- Connecting through feedback and the 8 accelerators

Background

Rationale

- Higher Education sector literature advocates a cultural change that values teaching quality as well as research quality (Anderson *et al.* 2011)
- Developing leaders' abilities to implement change is a priority in Higher Education (Fullan & Scott, 2009)
- Leading change is complex and difficult, with high risk of the change effort failing (Kotter, 1995)
- We discuss our learnings related to successfully shifting a cultural norm where teaching was considered more or less a private activity and generally not spoken about between academic staff members

Teaching context

School of Information Technology Griffith University

3 campuses

- Bachelor of Information Technology (BIT)
- Bachelor of Computer Science (BCS)
- Bachelor of Applied Information Technology (BAIT)
- Double degrees (Engineering, Science, Criminology, Business...)
- Master of Information Technology, Enterprise Architecture, Information Systems

Students

- OP cut off for BIT is currently 14 but has been as low as 17
- Large number of students in 13+ range
- Many students are first in family university students (typically > 60%)

Approach

Approach

- Introduced a school based reflective practice process (**Connecting through Feedback**) in the school of ICT in 2014
- Designed specifically to shift norms related to how academic staff relate with
 - students
 - their peers within the school
 - faculty and Learning and Teaching experts
- The Connecting through Feedback process extends the scholarly practice of individual critical reflection (Potter & Kustra, 2011)

Approach

- The Connecting through Feedback process uses a group setting to create the conditions for *double loop learning* (Argyris & Schön, 1974)
 - Double loop learning can be described as
 - A reflective practice which stretches and challenges assumptions and conceptions in order to improve as well as innovate (Wilson, 2014)
- Connecting through feedback consists of reflective practice cycles that continue across semesters/trimesters
- We discuss the factors that **enhanced the success** of the Connecting through Feedback process using Kotter's 8 stages of change (Kotter, 1995, 1996, 2012, 2014)

Kotter's stages of change

- Kotter (1995) describes the eight reasons why most organisational change efforts failed
- Kotter (1996) made recommendations on how to lead transformational change using eight stages of change.
- Kotter's revised model (2012, 2014) incorporates a dual mode operating system for organisations.
 - In this revised model, one system is the traditional slow to react hierarchical system, the other is an agile network of volunteers that is able to react more quickly
 - The two operating systems are complementary and assist each other

Kotter's stages of change

- We believe that Kotter's revised model maps well to the university sector as:
 - The university sector generally has a traditional slow to react hierarchical structure
 - This structure is supported by passionate individuals and groups that form an agile and responsive secondary network
- We chose Kotter's revised model as a useful lens through which to view the implementation of the connecting through feedback process
 - Particularly as it relates to the second agile network

Kotter's stages of change

Kotter's model has 8 accelerators for supporting the second agile operating system

1. Create a **sense of urgency** around a single big opportunity
2. Build and maintain a **guiding coalition**
3. Formulate a **strategic vision** and develop initiatives to capitalise on the big opportunity
4. **Communicate the vision** and the strategy to **create buy-in** and attract a growing volunteer army
5. Accelerate movement towards the vision and the opportunity by ensuring that the network **removes barriers**
6. **Celebrate** visible significant short-term wins
7. Never let up. Keep learning from experience. **Don't declare victory too soon**
8. **Institutionalise** the culture

What we did: Getting timely feedback

Closing the loop

- In 2012 a new initiative called “closing the loop” was introduced
- Supported by Dean Learning and Teaching
- Implemented throughout Griffith Sciences group

Premise

- Gather feedback early in each course, not only at the end
- Formalise the feedback process, everyone does it
- Close the feedback loop by formally responding to the feedback
- Students can see the impact of their feedback

Closing the loop process

Week 4

- Teaching staff perform a data gathering exercise
- Staff can choose how to gather data, but must be anonymous
 - Types of data collection processes have included
 - Harvard Minute Paper
 - Stop Start Continue Change
 - Plus Minus Interesting
 - Focus group (with non-teaching staff facilitator)

Closing the loop process

Week 5

- Teaching staff analyse the data that has been gathered
- Top two or three issues are identified
 - Weighted by relative importance and impact
- A response is developed for each of the top issues
 - Each issue has an implementation plan

Note: Something **that is missing from this process** is an evaluation on how well the implementation worked

The analysis of the impact would usually happen after the course has finished, when the course is reviewed.

Closing the loop process

Week 6

- Teaching staff close the feedback loop by:
 - Discussing the feedback that was received with students
 - Disseminating the action plan to students

Ideally, teaching staff also check in with students to see if the proposed action plan will meet the student needs

Note: Something **that is missing from this process** is sharing what has been learnt with peers

What we did: Improving the Closing the loop process

Aim

- A feedback process that academics want to engage with
 - The benefits should be self-evident
 - The process should create value for academics
- A feedback process that enables academics to share their experiences
 - Learn from each other
 - Develop collaborative strategies for implementing change
 - Enable conversations about discipline and program level change
 - Not just course level

We call this the **Connecting through feedback** process

Connecting through feedback process

Based on an action/experiential learning cycle



Connecting through feedback

1. Action

- This is the teaching activity
- Covers weeks 1 through 4

2. Review

- Use the Closing the loop activity already in place to gather feedback
 - Gather data in week 4 and review for key issues

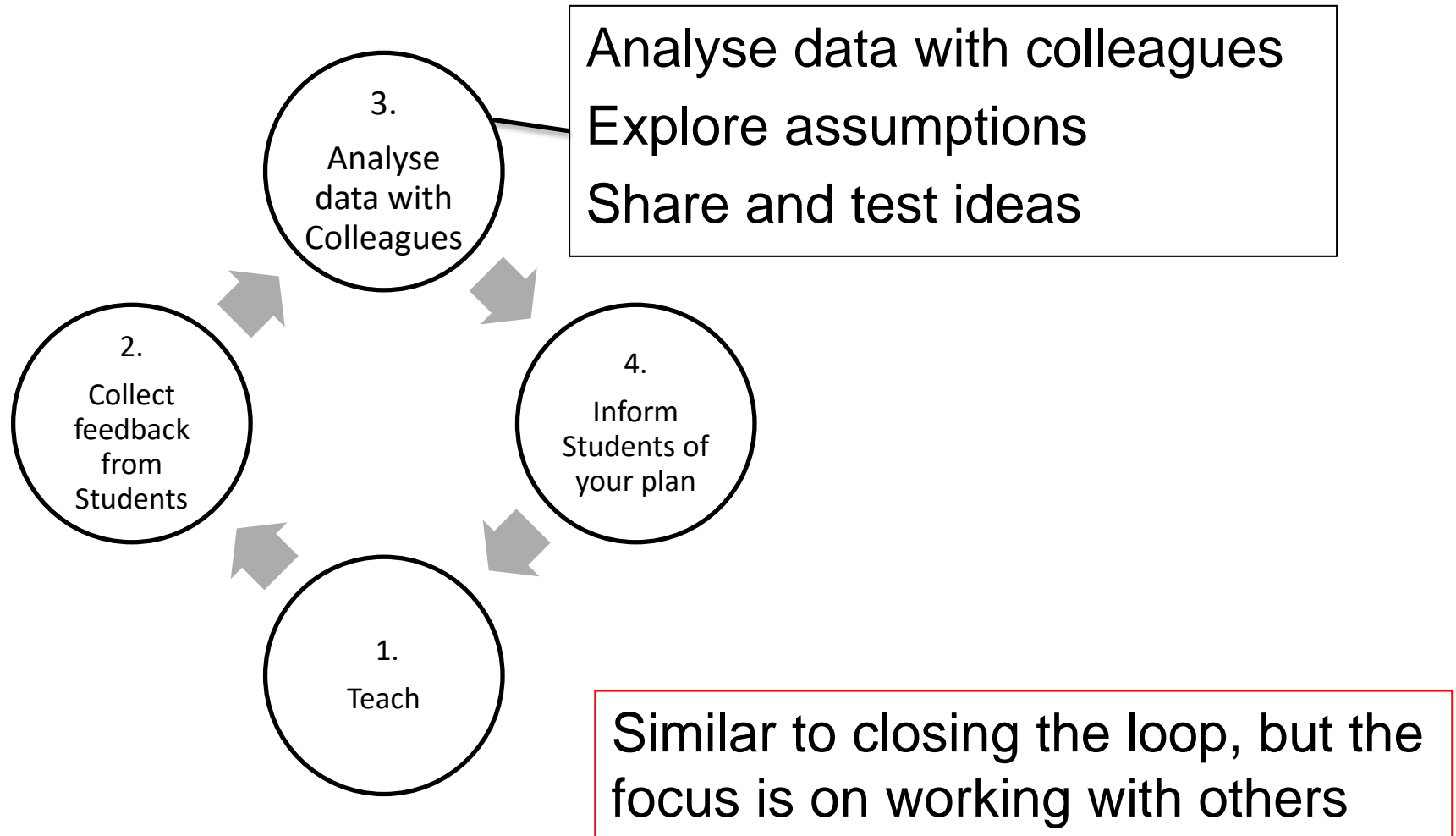
3. Interpret

- Analyse and discuss data with colleagues in a 1 hour session in week 5 or 6 **(this is the key component)**

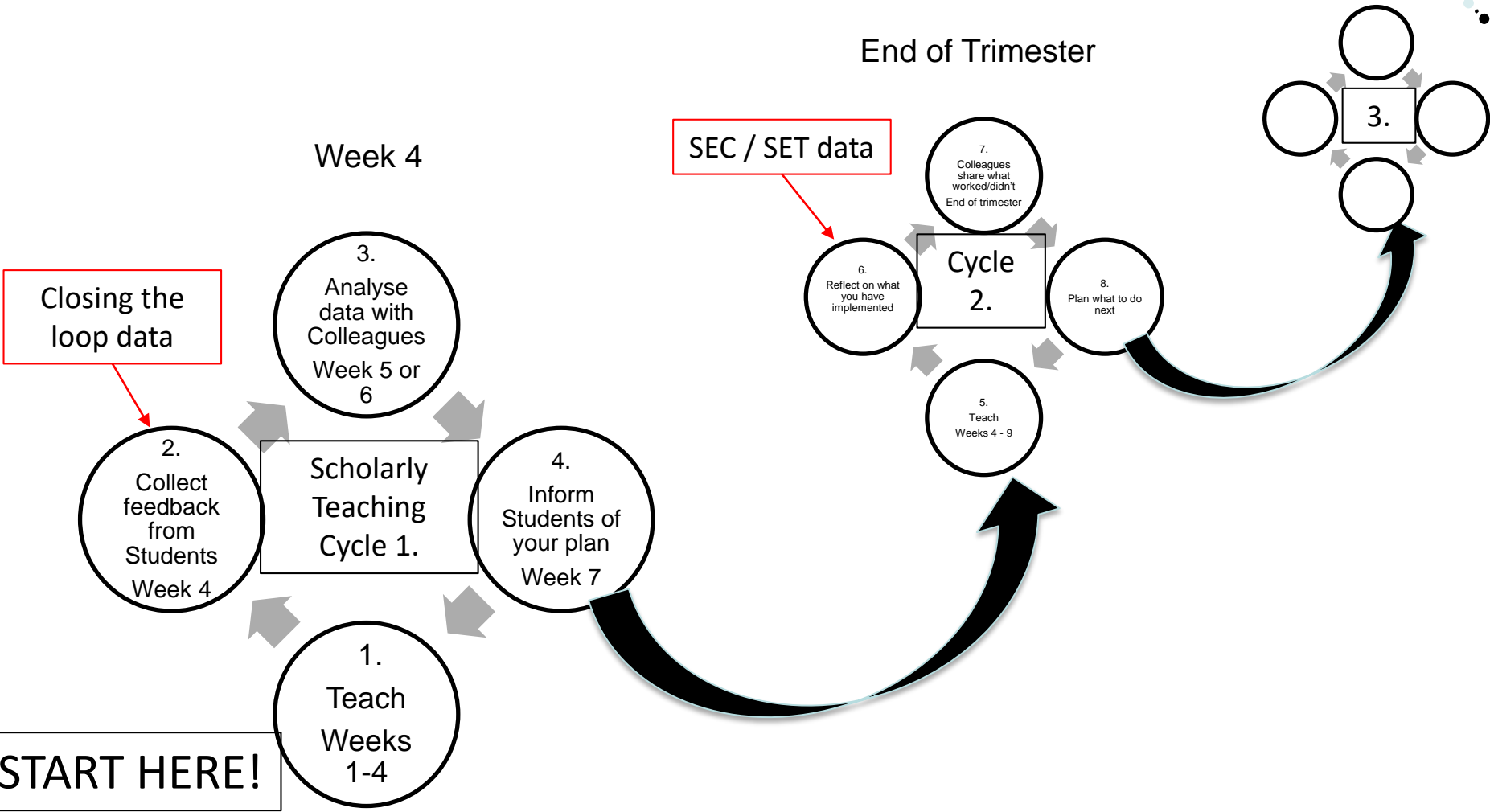
4. Plan

- Develop a plan to implement change
- Disseminate plan to students in week 7 (close the loop)

Connecting through feedback cycle



Connecting through feedback process



Step 3: Analyse data with colleagues

Step 3: What happens in the 1 hour session with all teaching staff

- Teaching staff form groups of 3
- Spend 10 minutes each focusing on each person's data
 - Explore theories and assumptions
- Take turns in analysing the data
- Other two colleagues' role is to ask 'curious questions'
 - Does this feedback fit with your experience of the course?
 - What parts, if any of this feedback are surprising?
 - What is your reaction to the suggestions?
- Avoid jumping to solutions too early

Step 3: Analyse data with colleagues

Once the discussions have completed:

- Everyone is asked to create an action plan
- Asked to commit to 1 or 2 actions that will make the **MOST SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE**
- Asked to prepare to disseminate the plan to students and teaching staff (including sessional staff)

Finally, there is a debrief to highlight the main themes from the discussions

Connecting through Feedback and the 8 accelerators

We discuss how Kotter's 8 stages of change describe what was observed whilst implementing the Connecting through Feedback process over multiple years:

1. Create a **sense of urgency** around a single big opportunity
 - In 2012 staff were advised that low student retention would have budgetary implications
 - A key indicator linked to retention was student experience, and this was targeted for improvement by listening to feedback and addressing issues

Kotter's stages of change

2. Build and maintain a **guiding coalition**

- Our guiding coalition made a significant difference to the outcomes
- The executive engaged an external consultant with change management expertise
- Staff with demonstrated expertise in learning and teaching were appointed as Learning and Teaching Champions
 - Autonomous role
 - Point of contact for Learning and Teaching matters
 - Respected by peers

Kotter's stages of change

3. Formulate a **strategic vision** and develop initiative to capitalise on the big opportunity
 - From 2012 to 2013, the original closing the loop activity was successful in raising course experience outcomes for individual courses
 - Due to the individual nature of the Closing the Loop process, successful strategies were disseminated only on an ad-hoc basis
 - Connecting through Feedback was introduced to leverage the existing Closing the loop process and facilitate academics to discuss feedback, analysis, and plans

Kotter's stages of change

4. **Communicate the vision** and the strategy to **create buy-in** and attract a growing volunteer army

- A formal communication by the Head of School was made to all staff
- Staff were encouraged to contact Learning and Teaching Champions for assistance
- By the second semester of implementation, staff began to see the benefits and value of the process:

“Please attempt to make the session more than 1 hour, it got to a point where we wanted to keep exchanging ideas.” (staff comment)

Kotter's stages of change

5. Accelerate movement towards the vision and the opportunity by ensuring that the network **removes barriers**
 - A potential barrier to running the sessions this way was the lack of expertise of school based academics in running workshops of this kind
 - 88% (n=17) of academics who participated in an anonymous survey agreed that

“It was good to have one of our academics facilitate the session”
 - Academics who were involved in running the sessions (Learning and Teaching Champions) were coached on how to be successful facilitators

Kotter's stages of change

6. **Celebrate** visible significant short-term wins

- Getting positive feedback that the strategy is having results is critical to continued success
- We originally asked staff to discuss their feedback and focus on negative issues (what needs to be fixed)
- Over time, this was adjusted to also include successes and responses to the feedback that had a positive and measurable success
- In this way best practice was shared to all staff and success was publically acknowledged

Kotter's stages of change

7. Never let up. Keep learning from experience. **Don't declare victory too soon**

- In 2016, after two years of Connecting through Feedback, staff were invited to reflect on the process and make recommendations as to how it should evolve
- Some participants did not want to use the workshop time to discuss the evolution

“This feedback process could be done online” (staff comment)

- The lesson for us is that some staff, whilst ready to apply reflective practice to the feedback process, were not yet ready to apply that reflective practice process in a more general fashion

Kotter's stages of change

8. **Institutionalise** the culture

- Connecting through Feedback has run continuously since 2014
- It has shown to be an effective way to help the school meet key performance indicators related to student experience
- It continues to receive strong support from the executive and has garnered interest from other discipline areas who are looking at implementing a similar process
- The process has been valuable to staff and assists in providing evidence of scholarly teaching
- We are doing further research into determining to what extent the culture change has become institutionalised

Outcomes

Has Connecting through feedback been successful since it started in Semester 1, 2014?

- In November 2014, the school reported significant improvement in the targeted Key Performance Indicators.
- The percentage of courses with Student Experience of Course (SEC) results < 3.5 out of 5 **went down from 26.2% (S2 2013) to 6.5% (S2 2014)**
- In 2015, in a nationally benchmarked, "Overall Satisfaction" measure, the school **was ranked number 1 in Australia, up from 35** the previous year.
- Academic staff generally value the 1 hour sessions, and have resisted proposals to reduce the time allocated to discussions
- There is a sense that this activity is important and the only time staff get to have these type of conversations

References

- Anderson, W. A., Banerjee, U., Drennan, C. L., Elgin, S. C. R., Epstein, I. R., Handelsman, J., ... & Warner, I. M. (2011). Changing the culture of science education at research universities. *Educate*, 10, 12.
- Argyris, C., & Schön, D. A. (1974). *Theory in practice: Increasing professional effectiveness*. Jossey-Bass.
- Fullan, M., & Scott, G. (2009). *Turnaround leadership for higher education*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Kotter, J. P. (1995). Leading change: Why transformation efforts fail. *Harvard Business Review*, 73(2), 59–67.
- Kotter, J. P. (1996). *Leading change*. Harvard Business Press.
- Kotter, J. (2012). How the most innovative companies capitalize on today's rapid-fire strategic challenges-and still make their numbers. *Harvard business review*, 90(11), 43-58.
- Kotter, J. P. (2014). *Accelerate: building strategic agility for a faster-moving world*. Harvard Business Review Press.
- Potter, Michael K. and Kustra, Erika D.H. (2011) The Relationship between Scholarly Teaching and SoTL: Models, Distinctions, and Clarifications. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*. 5 (1) Art23 :Available at: <https://doi.org/10.20429/ijstl.2011.050123>
- Wilson, K. (2011), Practicing the scholarship of learning and teaching. Internal Griffith university video seminar, accessed 31/10/2014.