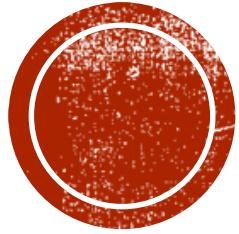


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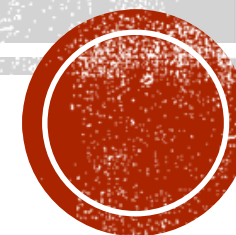


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Decision support

A utilisation focussed and viable systems approach for evaluating technology supported learning

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ABSTRACT

The paper uses a higher education case study to illustrate a participative *theory of change* approach to evaluating technology supported learning. The approach is informed by the Viable Systems Model (VSM) and utilisation-focused evaluation and, falls within the tradition of facilitated modelling approaches to operational research. We argue that this approach worked well in engaging primary evaluation users in a process of collaborative action research to improving an educational development initiative and that the approach helped generate information relevant to answering its primary users' questions, to inform their specific decisions and actions relevant to their quality enhancement responsibilities.

Through a case study, concerning the evaluation of an educational development initiative in a large UK university, we illustrate how the VSM and utilisation-focused evaluation could be used to: (a) conceptualise the connection between strategies and their components at different levels of organisation; (b) to clarify the role and interests of stakeholders in these strategies; and (c) to scope evaluation to be relevant to the initiative.