

Title: **Ethnographic Futures Research as an approach for learning needs analyses**

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Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

- Understand the principles of Ethnographic Futures Research (EFR)
- Experience the use of three scenarios (optimistic, pessimistic and probable) to explore digital practices in their university
- Reflect on the use of scenario-based research to conduct learning needs analyses
- Appreciate the value of using EFR in learning needs analysis initiatives

Session Outline

Key issues to be addressed are:

- Overview of Ethnographic Futures Research (EFR)
- Practical experience of using future-oriented scenarios to gather qualitative data for learning needs analyses
- Potential of EFR for academic development

Lecturers play a pivotal role in developing students' ability to thrive in the network society. Academic developers must therefore understand their requirements, aspirations and concerns regarding the pedagogical use of technology, to support their development as 'digital practitioners' (Bennett 2014). To explore these issues at the University of East Anglia in a SEDA funded project, we use Ethnographic Futures Research (EFR). A methodology little used in academic development, EFR is a qualitative ethnographic approach that has been used to explore potential socio-technical scenarios regarding the future (Dator 2002). It may seem like an unusual approach in academic development but it could be of value in academic development since "stories we tell about the future are powerful resources for shaping our sense of possibilities and readings to fight for change" (Facer 2011).

As an approach to needs analysis, EFR aims to uncover both individual and institutional factors that underpin and influence excellence in the use of educational technologies. It can help academic developers gain a better understanding of how learning environments and institutional contexts affect teaching practice - an essential step in providing events or services that enhance lecturers' digital literacies. Participants are considered to be informants in their cultural settings (discipline, faculty, university, UK HE sector). Their perceptions of future developments in technology-enhanced learning are elicited in semi-structured interviews aiming to shape three scenarios of digital practice: optimistic, pessimistic and probable. As

both education and technology use are future-facing domains, adopting EFR to gather information for an institution-wide learning needs analysis seems promising. Following a brief overview of EFR, participants will use the three scenarios themselves to map out the possible futures of digital practice in their own institutions. These practicals will be followed by a discussion on the potential of the method for gathering information in learning needs analysis.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

Timings	Activity
0 - 5 min	Workshop overview, background (SEDA-funded project) and objectives
5 - 15	EFR overview
15 - 30	Practical 1: developing an optimistic scenario for the future of digital practice in your university <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • individual task • group flipchart
30 - 45	Practical 2: developing a pessimistic scenario <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (as above)
45 - 60	Practical 3: developing a probable scenario <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (as above)
60 - 70	Walk-around to look at participants' flipcharts
70 - 80	Participant reflections: benefits and issues
80 - 90	Conclusion

References

Bennett, L., 2014. Learning from the early adopters: developing the digital practitioner. *Research in Learning Technology*, 22 (July), 1-11.

Dator, J.A., 2002. *Advancing Futures: Futures Studies in Higher Education*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group.

Facer, K., 2011. *Learning Futures: Education, Technology and Social Change*. Abingdon: Routledge.