

John Wilson: Your question is why do employees resist technology and what are the most common reactions reflecting resistance?

My experience is that resistance often reflects poor management practices. For example, management may fail to explain clearly the purposes of the new technology, or they may provide inadequate support to employees for learning new technologies. And I can cite from my own experience being in workshops where the lecturer went too fast for me and for most of the other persons involved, leading to feelings of frustration and despondency, which made one feel that by 9.30 in the morning one had wasted a day.

But I would like to turn your question round and ask rather, what support enables learners to acquire new technologies, and how do they behave when... how do they learn and develop when such support is provided? And I can illustrate it from a study that we conducted in Australia in the mid-1990s, when the new technologies were just being introduced, and I was working in the field of adult literacy.

We were interested in how adult literacy professionals had used the new technologies, how they acquired skills in using them, and also what effects the new technologies had on the learning of literacy by adults who had limited skills in those areas.

So we surveyed adult literacy teachers across the state and selected ten on nine sites to follow up, and what we were interested in is, of course, how they developed, and we categorised the adult literacy staff in terms of technology as starters, users, and developers, and we were interested in the progression through these levels.

Now, what we found was that motivation wasn't the key factor in acquiring literacy, technology skills, rather it was the kind of institutional support in addition to personal characteristics that they experienced.

In addition to having some background in computing, of course, what was important was how the workplace characteristics of management, such as the provision of computers and the enabling staff to access them for their own purposes, for learning purposes, as well as for teaching purposes, was important, and also the provision of networks of staff to enable them to address issues of access and software.

So the management support was critical from progressing from starter to developer.