

**The diffusion of policy in contexts of practice:  
Informal networks and innovative practice**

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Significant changes have occurred over the last decade within the Australian Vocational Educational and Training (VET) system. Not least amongst these has been a shift from a predominantly traditional face-to-face classroom model of program delivery to more flexible models informed by the needs of clients. To lead this revolution, in 1991 the Australian Government and State Ministers for Training established the *Flexible Delivery Working Party*. A series of reports followed that sought to develop a policy framework, including a definition of flexible delivery and its principles and characteristics. Despite these efforts, project funding and national staff development initiatives, several difficulties have been experienced in the 'take-up' of flexible delivery; problems that we argue are related to how the dissemination of innovative practice is conceived. Specifically, the literature and research on the diffusion of innovations points to the efficacy of informal social networks in which individuals adopt the new idea as a result of talking with other individuals who have already adopted it (Valente, 1994, p.ix). Following a discussion of these issues, the paper concludes by arguing the need for research of innovative practice transfer within VET in Australia, using qualitative case study in order to develop an in-depth and rich description of the process and facilitate greater understanding of how it works in practice.

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