

Innovate-Ideagora: **Introducing a New Feature in *Innovate***

by Alan McCord, Denise Easton, and James Shimabukuro

With this issue, *Innovate* embraces Web 2.0 with the launch of *Innovate-Ideagora*, a social and professional networking site designed to enhance professional communication within the *Innovate* community. We can already comment on each *Innovate* article (via the "Discuss" option in our sidebar menu) and participate in [Innovate-Live](#) author webcasts; *Innovate-Ideagora* adds another dynamic component to *Innovate*, providing an exciting new space for communication and collaboration.

Don Tapscott and Anthony Williams coined the term "[ideagora](#)," derived from the Greek word "agora," in their 2006 book, [Wikinomics: How Mass Collaboration Changes Everything](#). In an article published in *Business Week*, they define ideagoras as "places where millions of ideas and solutions change hands in something akin to an eBay for innovation" (Tapscott and Williams [2007](#), "A Community of Ideas," ¶2). An ideagora is at its core a space to share ideas; ideagoras exploit the network effects of having large numbers of people consider individual problems and solutions, with each person offering his or her own unique perspective. We envision *Innovate-Ideagora* as a Web marketplace for the exchange of ideas and reflections about the challenges, trends, and developments around the creative use of information technology to enhance educational processes in academic, commercial, and governmental settings.

Borrowing Tapscott and Williams's words, we see *Innovate-Ideagora* as a vibrant marketplace of connections in which we can leverage each other's talents, ideas, and assets to create change. This new feature represents an important step in our ongoing mission to spotlight the latest innovations in technology and explore their implications for education in all its forms. Membership is open to all and registration is easy and free.

This column will be a guide to the exciting developments in *Innovate-Ideagora*. Each edition of *Innovate-Ideagora* will include a brief summary of the discussions underway in *Innovate-Ideagora*, as well as alerts about plans for the coming months. The *Innovate-Ideagora* team of Alan McCord, Denise Easton, and James Shimabukuro will work with Jim Morrison, the *Innovate* editorial board, and the community to guide the development and growth of the network and nurture dynamic discussions that can lead to implementable solutions.

Social Networks

We all have heard of social networking, which has become the most talked about feature of what is commonly known as Web 2.0. They are the means by which individuals build and participate in virtual communities that span the breadth and depth of their interests. Students use sites such as [Facebook](#), [Friendster](#), and [MySpace](#) as their primary communication vehicles, as well as their sources of information about friends, events, and issues. In the business world, networking sites such as [LinkedIn](#) that provide access to job advertisements, customers, public recommendations, and extensive virtual rolodexes have become must-have tools for success.

Innovate-Ideagora is a social-networking space focused on the rapidly changing landscape at the intersection of information technology and education. The idea of community building is spreading into all aspects of the Web, transforming static sites into dynamic, interactive environments that literally invite the world to participate. Even newspapers have reinvented themselves as social networks, using comment functions and

blogs and forums to invite readers to participate not only as consumers but also as creators of news and information. Blogs and user-run video and photo-sharing sites are expanding our notion of social networking. These allow members to create and post commentary, videos, or photos, comment on them, and, in the case of visual media, determine where they appear in the lineup via ratings and the number of viewings. In short, Web 2.0 is a new dimension, a layer of interactive functions that has transformed the Web from a one-way, static electronic page into an infinitely vast, multidirectional network that not only places the world and all its people on our desktops but also provides the means to communicate with them.

Innovate-Ideagora leverages the possibilities of Web 2.0 to help us all think about the complex challenges around the adoption of technology for educational purposes and, most importantly, propose solutions to those problems. The site uses several Web 2.0 technologies that invite the *Innovate* community to participate. Blogs allow participants to publish their ideas for everyone to read and discuss; readers can engage with bloggers through comments. Forums, where discussions are organized into related threads, offer more-structured opportunities to participate. Participants can also post videos or photos related to a discussion or blog. We hope you will join us in our experiment. Visit <http://innovate-ideagora.ning.com> and establish your profile!

What's New on Innovate-Ideagora

This past summer, *Innovate* authors and board members were invited to participate in a "soft launch" of *Innovate-Ideagora* intended to test the environment and begin to seed the forum. Even before we could stake out the territory for *Innovate's* social networking venture, the soft launch quickly blossomed into a vibrant, dynamic environment with over 150 participants engaging in a rapidly evolving, sometimes controversial set of discussions.

Editor-in-chief Jim Morrison showed the way, hitting a collective nerve with his opening post. As of this writing, the impulses are still reverberating through our new community, generating post after post in the main thread and inspiring a slew of subthreads. Jim asked how we can encourage faculty members to expand their range of instructional strategies and enhance them with creative uses of educational technology. This question, as others quickly pointed out, is based on a number of assumptions that complicate the issue, leaving us to wonder where, exactly, is the point of greatest resistance? Is it faculty members? Organizational culture? Instructional philosophy? Our conceptions of school and learning? The approach to change?

The responses have been articulate, insightful, witty, imaginative, sometimes provocative, and always passionate. Scott McLeod, in the very first reply, jumped on "organizational culture" as a main culprit: "There are rarely institutional incentives, and usually institutional penalties, for technology integration learning by faculty." Later, Susana (no last name) amplified on this thought: "Most successful and prolific authors at my institution avoid computer-mediated instruction and find the new IT tools to be a waste of time." Robert Wood then introduced the intriguing thought that isolating technology solely around instruction may be counterproductive: "Efforts to get faculty members on board using IT might be more successful if they could demonstrate the other advantages of mastering these skills." When faculty members learn to use, feel comfortable with, and find value in technology for reasons other than teaching—for example, in pursuing extracurricular interests—then the carryover into instruction may be more natural. This invites the notion that institutions should encourage instructors to use technology freely for personal, nonacademic purposes. Standard practice at most institutions seems to be exactly the opposite.

Patrick Greene pointed to an irony that many suspect but few have the courage to express: that "leading technology educators" may be among the most formidable obstacles to change ([Exhibit 1](#)). Lynn Zimmerman noted faculty self-perception as a possible impediment to technology-enabled active learning ([Exhibit 2](#)). Bill (no last name) cited the steep learning curve for new technology as a possible barrier to faculty adoption, and on a similar note, Nilay Yajnik suggested that simplifying technology would facilitate adoption by teachers.

Reflecting ideas shared by Steve Eskow, Nils Peterson questioned the wisdom of applying the traditional college-as-campus model to the current reality of exponential growth in information and population: "Scaling Higher Education at an exponential rate to meet this growth using Higher Education's current paradigms seems impractical."

Steve Eskow took on the majority of participants, who, from the minority's perspective, seem determined to keep one foot in the traditional while exploring the virtual with the other. While this hybrid position seems sensible, Steve argued eloquently, and persistently, that this partial embrace of change actually reinforces the traditional system and solidifies resistance ([Exhibit 3](#)).

Finally, Tadeusz LemaDczyk served as a source of enlightened moderation and order throughout the discussion by providing friendly, insightful reminders and comments that kept the discussion on topic. He often pointed out the obvious, which of course is not always very obvious! Arguing that simply using technology doesn't guarantee the end of passive teaching, Tad also was not afraid to place some responsibility on the shoulders of students: "Faculties resist distance learning also because too many students aren't prepared [for] it and because in distance learning students can't be examined properly by their academics."

A number of members started other discussions: Hanan El-Halawany on the cultural resistance to information technologies in the Middle East, Randall Osborne on the impact of classroom technology on students with learning disabilities, Bill (no last name) on the challenges of obtaining and using technology tools in school districts with minimal resources, Tad LemaDczyk on how to use *Innovate* in e-lectures and on the federal consortium for virtual worlds, Roy Jenkins on envisioning the next learning space, and Yvonne Mitchell, who pleaded for a discussion on how to use *Innovate-Ideagora* so that she can be more confident using not only our site, but blogs, wikis, and other Web 2.0 tools in general.

Get Involved!

Our brief summary barely sketches the richness of the actual discussion. There are other conversations developing as we write. We are convinced that you'll get a lot more out of the site if you actually jump in with your thoughts, comments, and observations.

Innovate-Ideagora provides all of us with the opportunity to be part of the evolution of education as we seek to illuminate the problems, issues, and benefits of using information technology tools to enhance learning and the educational process. We hope that you will join us in our experiment by visiting <http://innovate-ideagora.ning.com>, establishing your profile, and joining the discussions!

References

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