Driving emerging technology evaluation with the STREET process

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INTRODUCTION

Emerging technology discovery and evaluation is often a hype-driven process where emerging technologies are shoehorned into situations where they are not needed or even welcome. Gartner's STREET process (Fenn, 2010) is a framework for evaluating and piloting emerging technologies in a consistent and documented manner, where the outcome is the decision on whether or not to proceed with a particular candidate. STREET is an acronym for the six steps involved:

- Scope – find organisational needs that must be addressed
- Track – discover emerging technologies or innovation candidates that can address the needs
- Rank – quantify advantages and disadvantages of each candidate to determine the most suitable candiate
- Evaluate – pilot the highest-ranking candidate
- Evangelise – extoll the virtues of the candidate to all levels of the organisation
- Transfer – hand the candidate over to those that will implement it in a production environment

The most important thing to remember about the STREET process is that the final outcome is a decision, not a product.
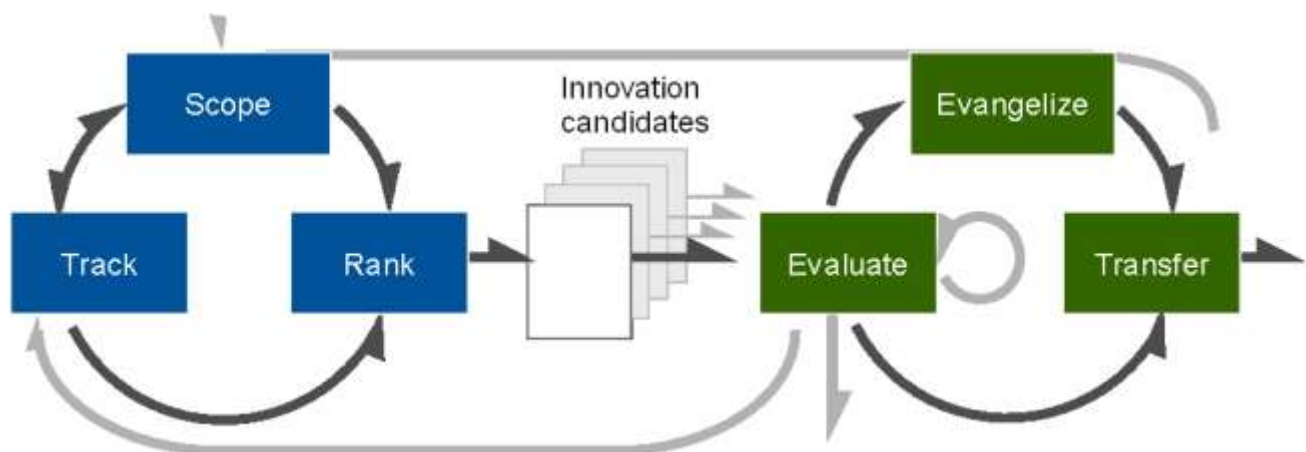

Figure 1: The STREET process (© Gartner)

As illustrated in Figure 1, the STREET process is not linear. Rather, each step can go backwards or forwards as the situation demands. Often, some steps (especially Transfer) occur simultaneously to others, so as to involve stakeholders as much as possible from as early as possible.

Although written with commercial organisations in mind, the STREET process is flexible enough to be implemented in a university environment with minimal change.

MAKE IT SOMEONE'S JOB

The STREET process recommends that the portfolio of emerging technologies is assigned to a single person or group. This does not need to be a dedicated role but can instead be taken up by people already working in other positions and are simply interested in emerging technologies.

At Murdoch University, the Emerging Technologies Specialist is a permanent, full-time position that is jointly funded by the Library and the Office of Information Technology Services (ITS). Originally, the "Emerging Technologies Librarian" and then the "Emerging Technologies Coordinator", the role's scope was changed when the original incumbent moved on. Although day-to-day administration of the position is still handled by the Library, the Emerging Technologies Specialist works with stakeholders from across the University.

A WORTHY PROBLEM

In 2008, the Emerging Technologies Coordinator implemented a self-hosted Wordpress platform. Although it was intended to be a pilot to evaluate campus-wide use, its uptake grew to that of a production-level system without any processes to guide its governance and support. For example, user support is still provided by the Emerging Technologies Specialist rather than ITS. Furthermore, the initial decision for the use of Wordpress was arbitrary, based on a single person's preference. Essentially, it never lost its proverbial Beta status.

THE STREET TRIAL

ITS identified the need for a review of the existing blogging platform. The concern was that what was essentially an orphan was being heavily used but was not considered a production system. If users encountered any issues, there were no adequate support processes. Furthermore, it was unknown whether the existing self-hosted Wordpress pilot was the best candidate for the job, as no methodical evaluation took place.

There was enough use to justify a need for a blogging platform, but that platform also had to be maintained in a sustainable fashion. Therefore, the STREET process is being trialled in order to undertake an appropriate analysis.

Several candidates that could address the need were found:
- The existing, self-hosted Wordpress instance
- An externally-hosted Wordpress solution
- Edublogs.org
- Learning Objects Campus Pack Social Learning Platform
- Live@EDU Wordpress

These candidates were ranked against each other using a number of criteria:
- Flexibility
- Ease of integration with existing University authentication system
- Price
- Ease-of-use

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The entire process to evaluate and decide whether to replace or keep the existing Wordpress installation is still underway. It is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2010.

It is expected that at the conclusion of the evaluation process, enough information will be gathered to make an informed and effective decision on whether to keep the existing blogging platform or change to an alternative solution. That decision will be backed up with strong evidence gathered during the STREET process. Decisions supported by evidence are important for ensuring not only the best possible solution for the problem is chosen, but also resources are allocated in the best possible way.

The new blogging solution will be promoted and evangelised at every available opportunity, so that University staff and students are aware of any potential impact on their activities and understand why the change is necessary. With some luck, stakeholders will welcome any changes as they will be receiving a better service.

The knowledge and responsibility transfer to ITS is expected to result in effective and sustainable support for users of the blogging platform.

The talk presented at CCA-EDUCAUSE Australasia 2011 will focus on comparing the expected outcomes with the actual outcomes.

REFERENCES

Fenn, J. (2010). *Driving the STREET Process for Emerging Technology and Innovation Adoption* (ID Number: G00174060). Retrieved from Gartner: http://www.gartner.com/DisplayDocument?ref=clientFriendlyUrl&id=1331653