

Promoting Institutional GenAI-in-Assessment Reform through the Lens of Kotter's Change Model

Dawn LO ¹, Julia CHEN ¹, Wing Yuk Leo CHON ¹

¹ Educational Development Centre, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong, China

Abstract

The rapid emergence of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) tools, such as ChatGPT, presents both opportunities and challenges for higher education, particularly regarding assessment practices. This paper examines a university's initiative in Hong Kong to redesign assessment in response to GenAI, utilising Kotter's eight-step Change Model as an analytical framework. The study reviews the university's actions in establishing urgency, forming a guiding coalition, creating a strategic vision, communicating that vision, empowering others, achieving short-term wins, consolidating improvements, and institutionalising new approaches. It identifies both strengths and areas for improvement in the implementation of GenAI integration. The analysis reveals the importance of clear communication and iterative improvement strategies, offering practical implications for other institutions navigating similar technological shifts in education.

Keywords: Generative AI; Assessment Redesign; Kotter's Model; Institutional Change

Introduction

The emergence of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) tools, such as ChatGPT, has significantly impacted higher education (HE), challenging traditional teaching and assessment methods. While GenAI may enhance learning, it raises plagiarism concerns, prompting educators to reconsider assessment purposes and evidence gathering (Chen, 2023). This paper applies Kotter's eight-step change model (1996) to evaluate an assessment redesign initiative at a Hong Kong university, identifying strengths and offering insights for similar institutions.

Literature Review

Kotter's Change Model (1996) is a prominent framework for managing change in complex organisations (Wentworth et al., 2018). It comprises eight steps—spanning urgency, coalition-building, vision, communication, empow-

erment, short-term wins, consolidation, and institutionalisation—and has successfully guided higher education changes, including assessment systems, organisational culture, and faculty development (Guzman et al., 2011; Springer et al., 2012; Steinert et al., 2007). Appelbaum et al. (2012), in particular, reviewed fifteen years of research to determine the effectiveness of Kotter's model in organisational change efforts. Although lacking quantitative empirical data, Appelbaum et al. (2012) recommend the model over alternatives. Wentworth et al. (2018) also found Kotter's model well-suited for practical use in higher education. The studies of Kang et al. (2022) and Potter et al. (2023) demonstrate that Kotter's change model can be used for the analysis of change efforts at a faculty/department level and at a university level, respectively.

Methodology

This paper adopts a case study approach to examine the institutional change process of a university in embracing GenAI through assessment redesign. Multiple data sources were drawn upon, including staff surveys related to GenAI use in teaching and assessment, institutional documents (such as GenAI guidelines, committee minutes, policy drafts, funding calls, and assessment exemplars), and participant observations. Data were analysed through thematic mapping against Kotter's change model. Evidence from different sources was iteratively compared to identify convergence, divergence, and gaps across stages of the change process. Rather than aiming for statistical generalisability, the analysis focused on examining how and why particular change strategies were enacted, their limitations, and generating insights that may be transferrable to similar institutional contexts.

All three authors were directly involved in initiating and supporting the change and therefore adopted a participant-observer stance. While this positioning provided rich, insider insight into institutional decision-making and implementation processes, it also required careful attention to potential bias. To mitigate potential bias, methodological triangulation was employed by substantiating observations with evidence from multiple independent data sources and by grounding interpretations in documented institutional records rather than the authors' personal opinions. In addition, interpretations of key change milestones were discussed and cross-checked among the authors to reduce individual subjectivity and to ensure that claims were grounded in verifiable evidence.

Institutional Context

The case study university is one of Hong Kong's eight government-funded institutions. It enrolls approximately 28,000 students with over 1,200 faculty members. The University aspires to be an innovative world-class university that

pursues excellence in education, research, and knowledge transfer. With ten faculties/schools of diverse disciplines, the University ranks among the top 100 universities worldwide.

Results

This section presents the findings from the case study, using Kotter's eight-step Change Model as an analytical framework. Each subsection corresponds to one stage of the model and explains how the University undertook the GenAI-in-assessment reform.

Step 1: Establishing a Sense of Urgency

The November 2022 emergence of ChatGPT and the subsequent proliferation of GenAI tools precipitated a significant sense of urgency within the educational sector. It sparked intense academic discussions, particularly concerning their potential implications for learning processes, assessment methodologies, and academic integrity. To raise staff awareness of the need to change, the Educational Development Centre (EDC) at the case study university organised Hong Kong's first university staff workshop on ChatGPT in February 2023, followed by student sharing sessions, to highlight impacts on academic integrity and assessment validity.

Step 2: Forming a Powerful Guiding Coalition

The second step in Kotter's model involves assembling a strategic transformation team with the necessary knowledge, skills, and influence to lead the change effort effectively. The Director of EDC formed a dedicated team and, recognising the need for senior support, secured backing from the President and senior management to embrace GenAI-in-education via discussions and meetings held by university committees, including the University Senate and the Learning and Teaching Committees (LTC).

Step 3: Forming a Strategic Vision

Kotter's third step involves creating a clear picture of the desired future state and establishing a plan for achieving that vision (Kotter, 1996). The University established its vision through drafting ethical guidelines, followed by consultation and final approval by the LTC. The process refined the vision and strategy, established a common goal, and ensured alignment across the University.

Step 4: Communicating the Vision

In Kotter's fourth step, organisations must communicate the vision and

plan efficiently and effectively. Major change is successful only when people buy-in and drive in the same direction (Besterfield-Sacre et al., 2014). To ensure clear and effective communication of the University's stance on the ethical use of GenAI, GenAI guidelines for all teachers and students were disseminated via email by the LTC on 28 April 2023. The EDC followed up with faculty outreach and departmental consultations to clarify the vision and strategies. In addition, the Director of EDC penned two articles (in July 2023 and April 2024) and shared content on a podcast (in August 2024) on *THE Campus* regarding assessment redesign in the age of GenAI (Chen, 2023), the future of higher education (Chen, 2024), and the University's attempts at managing AI respectively.

Step 5: Empowering Others to Act on the Vision

Kotter advocates expanding change implementation by delegating responsibilities more broadly to increase organisational buy-in and commitment to the transformation. The case study university encountered three key challenges: ensuring equitable access to GenAI tools, developing AI literacy and competence among teachers, and securing funding and resources for innovative practices.

To address the first challenge, the EDC established an 'AI Playground' in March 2023, providing students and teachers with free access to a curated selection of GenAI tools. To foster AI literacy and competence among teachers, the EDC offered professional development opportunities through workshops, consultations, and sharing sessions, covering introductory GenAI concepts and their potential educational impact, as well as more advanced sessions focused on developing teachers' technical skills and pedagogical approaches for using GenAI.

As another key initiative, in July and December 2023, the EDC conducted two rounds of 'Collection of and Consultation on Assessment Tasks to Accommodate the Use of GenAI'. All academic departments and teaching centres were invited to submit two or three redesigned, GenAI-ready assessment tasks. An assessment consultant reviewed the submitted tasks and provided feedback to teachers. Following each collection round, the EDC identified and disseminated good practices of effective assessment redesign through faculty outreach meetings, sharing sessions, and workshops (Chen et al., 2024).

To address the final challenge, the University established Seed Funds for Promoting AI Literacy and Use of GenAI for Authentic Learning and Assessment. Departments could use the fund to develop initiatives, create supporting resources, and/or evaluate the redesign of learning, teaching, and assessment (LTA) strategies and the development of AI literacy among their students and staff.

Step 6: Creating Short-Term Wins

Creating and celebrating short-term wins provides emotional rewards and builds momentum for change (Appelbaum et al., 2012; Kotter, 1996). In the University, short-term wins were embedded within the assessment redesign timeline as departments were expected to complete assessment redesigns before the 2023/24 academic year. The EDC reviewed the collected redesigned assessment tasks and identified teachers who had effectively integrated GenAI. These teachers were invited to share their insights and experiences through various channels. Showcasing good practices and successful case studies not only acknowledges teachers' innovative work in LTA, providing them with a sense of accomplishment, but also motivates other teachers to adopt similar changes.

Step 7: Consolidating Improvements

Kotter (1996) argues that success fosters further success. He also emphasised the importance of reinforcing changes with new systems and policies. The EDC updated the Honour Declaration Form for Submitting Assignments in June 2023 to facilitate GenAI usage declaration. The form was further enhanced in June 2024 to reinforce academic integrity. Another example is the regular review of teacher guidelines to reflect rapid technological advancements, such as the use of GenAI in providing feedback.

Step 8: Institutionalising New Approaches

Anchoring changes involves normalising the new culture and approaches (Kotter, 1996). GenAI became the 2023/24 university's strategic pedagogic development focus. The LTC revised departmental guidelines to include teaching innovation as a KPI. Updating and expanding the student declaration form on the use of GenAI in assessment (mentioned in Step 7) is another example. The University's new strategic plan for 2025–31, approved in June 2024, further demonstrates its commitment to these changes. One strategic goal specifically aims to "Develop the technical acumen of both students and staff and promote the use of generative AI and other advanced technologies to support student learning". These measures aim to ensure the successful integration of GenAI into education and assessment over the next five years.

Discussion and Implications

Through the lens of Kotter's change model, the University has effectively created urgency, formed a vision, and empowered staff to take actions. This effectiveness could be attributed to the timely institutional responses following the emergence of ChatGPT in late 2022, including the establishment of the university stance and guidelines, early professional development, seed funding

schemes, and assessment support structures, which helped lower barriers to staff participation in assessment redesign.

Retrospective analysis reveals the need for an earlier, interdisciplinary working group. While the EDC responded promptly, a broader coalition of an interdisciplinary working group could have provided more timely and effective support across the institution. A second area for improvement lies in communicating the vision. While the need for assessment redesign in the age of GenAI was conveyed to teachers through teacher GenAI guidelines and promoted through various channels, adoption was inconsistent across the university. For example, despite availability since June 2023, some teachers remained unaware of the updated Honour Declaration Form in late 2024, highlighting critical communication gaps. This suggests that future efforts could build on existing communication approaches by complementing dissemination with more iterative and dialogic engagement, so as to support ongoing sense-making and foster more consistent uptake across the institution.

Finally, regarding anchoring changes in the university culture, while GenAI integration into assessment has begun, it is not yet clear that these changes are fully embedded across the university. A shift in focus from initial implementation to long-term impact is needed. This entails actively tracking student outcomes and the effectiveness of assessment changes to demonstrate the benefits and positive impact of GenAI-enabled assessment reforms on both the institution and student learning.

Conclusion

As a single-institution case study, this paper provides a rich and context-specific account of institutional change processes, offering practical insights for other universities navigating GenAI-related assessment reform. Kotter's model proved effective for analysing the University's GenAI assessment reform, highlighting how initiatives established urgency, coalitions, and vision while revealing areas for sustaining long-term change. Our analysis revealed the strengths and areas for further development to sustain assessment reform. Kotter's change model can serve as a common analytical framework for comparative studies of different universities' efforts to address GenAI challenges. Results from such studies can shed light on best practices, common challenges, and effective strategies for addressing GenAI challenges, which in turn can inform and enhance GenAI integration in diverse educational contexts.

Generative AI Policy

The author(s) used Gemini 3 Pro and Microsoft Copilot during the prepa-

ration of this work to refine and enhance the language quality. After utilising the tool, the author(s) thoroughly reviewed and edited the content as necessary and assumed full responsibility for the publication's content.

References

- Appelbaum, S. H., Habashy, S., Malo, J.-L., & Shafiq, H. (2012). Back to the Future: Revisiting Kotter's 1996 Change Model. *Journal of Management Development*, 31(8), 764–782. <https://doi.org/10.1108/02621711211253231>
- Besterfield-Sacre, M., Cox, M. F., Borrego, M., Beddoes, K., & Zhu, J. (2014). Changing engineering education: Views of US faculty, chairs, and deans. *Journal of Engineering Education*, 103(2), 193-219. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jee.20043>
- Chen, J. (2023, July 21). Four directions for assessment redesign in the age of generative AI. *THE Campus*. <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/campus/four-directions-assessment-redesign-age-generative-ai>
- Chen, J. (2024, April 18). The three questions that will define the future of higher education. *THE Campus*. <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/campus/three-questions-will-define-future-higher-education>
- Chen, J., Lo, F.Y., & Chon, L. (2024). Redesigning and implementing GenAI-expected assessment: Strategies developed, features implemented, good practices and teacher development. Presentation at the Digital Learning Week 2024 of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Paris, France.
- Guzman, W. Z., Gely, M. I., Crespo, K., Matos, J. R., Sanchez, N., & Guerrero, L. M. (2011). Transformation of a Dental School's Clinical Assessment System through Kotter's Eight-Step Change Process. *Journal of Dental Education*, 7(4), 485–495.
- Kang, S. P., Chen, Y., Svihla, V., Gallup, A., Ferris, K., & Datye, A. K. (2022). Guiding change in higher education: An emergent, iterative application of Kotter's change model. *Studies in Higher Education*, 47(2), 270-289.
- Kotter, J. P. (1996). *Leading change*. Harvard Business School Press.
- Potter, J., Welsh, K., & Milne, L. (2023). Evaluating an institutional response to generative artificial intelligence (GenAI): Applying Kotter's change model and sharing lessons learned for educational development. *Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice*, 11(3). <https://doi.org/10.56433/jpaap.v11i3.582>
- Springer, P. J., Clark, C. M., Strohfus, P., & Belcheir, M. (2012). Using Transformational Change to Improve Organizational Culture and Climate in a School of Nursing. *Journal of Nursing Education*, 51(2), 81–88. <https://doi.org/10.3928/01484834-20111230-02>

- Steinert, Y., Cruess, R. L., Cruess, S. R., Boudreau, J. D., & Fuks, A. (2007). Faculty Development as an Instrument of Change: A Case Study on Teaching Professionalism. *Academic Medicine*, 82(11), 1057–1064. <https://doi.org/10.1097/01>
- Wentworth, D., Behson, S. J., & Kelley, C. L. (2018). Implementing a new student evaluation of teaching system using the Kotter change model. *Studies in Higher Education*, 45(3), 511-523. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2018.1542434>