

**The Strategy–Operations Disjunction in Technology-Enabled Learning Spaces: Governance,
Sustainability, and Equity in Caribbean HEIs**

Sub-Theme: Sustainability, Just Transition and Educational Responses, and Educational Equity
and Inclusion

Lisle A. Waldron

Research Overview (56 words)

Technology-enabled learning spaces (e.g., hybrid-capable classrooms, lecture theatres, and their associated support services) are increasingly central to higher-education delivery. In Anglophone Caribbean HEIs, persistent gaps may separate strategic “digital transformation” intent from operational readiness. This study tests how strategy-operations alignment is associated with sustainable and equitable learning-space service outcomes and then explains the mechanisms shaping these patterns.

Purpose

HEIs frequently articulate ambitions for digitally mediated teaching and institutional modernisation, yet the operational arrangements that sustain technology-enabled learning spaces may remain under-specified, under-resourced, or weakly monitored. In resource-constrained settings, this can produce a strategy–operations disjunction, defined here as a persistent misfit between what senior-level strategies require and what operational systems (people, processes, assets, and budgets) can reliably deliver. Drawing on strategy–operations alignment (SOA) theories, this pre-empirical conference paper develops a testable model and outlines a planned empirical test, that advances a resource-constrained rationality hypothesis for discussion and subsequent evaluation: misalignment may be a predictable consequence of fiscal and skills constraints when cost and capacity signals are not sufficiently visible for decision-making, rather than solely a matter of governance indifference.

The paper’s immediate aim is to specify a model in which SOA in learning-space services is operationalised using two measurable upstream conditions:

- (a) Governance specificity/formality: the extent to which decision rights, escalation pathways, service standards, and evaluate–direct–monitor routines are explicit and consistently enacted; and
- (b) Cost transparency: the extent to which lifecycle costs, workload, service-cost drivers, and funding gaps are made visible in forms usable for prioritisation and resource allocation.

The central hypothesis is that higher SOA (proxied by greater governance specificity and higher cost transparency) will be associated with more sustainable and more equitable learning-space service performance. In this paper, sustainability is treated as operational continuity and maintainability (e.g., reliability, timeliness, backlog management, and renewal feasibility), while equity is treated as the consistency and accessibility of service quality across units, campuses, and user groups.

Framed this way, sustainability is not only an efficiency concern but a business continuity condition: the institution’s ability to maintain minimum viable learning-space and platform

services for teaching as recurring subscription costs and lifecycle renewal demands grow, while fiscal headroom may tighten due to shifting public and external financing conditions.

The discussion links these constructs to the conference strand's concerns with just transition, focusing on how digitally dependent operations may redistribute reliability risk and hidden operational labour across campuses and user groups in Caribbean HEIs.

Methods

This conference paper is explicitly pre-empirical: it does not report findings and does not rely on institutional artefact access prior to writing. Instead, it performs two method-aligned tasks to advance a testable strategy–operations alignment (SOA) argument framed through the conference strand's sustainability and equity concerns.

First, it develops the hypothesis and conceptual model by synthesising the thesis's problem framing (and, where useful, the literature review through to research methods), with particular attention to how strategic intent is translated (or fails to translate) into operational routines for learning-space services and the core platforms that enable teaching (e.g., the LMS, video-conferencing, and lecture capture). The synthesis yields a mechanism-explicit model in which governance specificity and cost transparency are theorised as enabling conditions for more defensible trade-offs (service levels, lifecycle renewal timing, subscription renewals, staffing and training investment, and risk acceptance). Sustainability is framed as a business continuity condition: the institution's ability to maintain minimum viable learning-space and platform services for teaching as recurrent subscription costs and lifecycle renewal demands grow, while fiscal headroom may tighten due to shifting public and external financing conditions.

Second, the paper specifies a planned explanatory sequential mixed-methods design intended to test and then explain the model in subsequent thesis work. The quantitative phase is framed as association testing between operationalised measures of governance specificity and cost transparency (as observable indicators of SOA in learning-space services) and a set of feasible service-continuity and service-performance proxies, such as incident and request dynamics, response and resolution timeliness, recurrence, preventable downtime, backlog indicators, cross-unit comparability, and renewal feasibility signals (e.g., patterns of deferral consistent with lifecycle funding gaps). The qualitative phase is framed as mechanism explanation via semi-structured interviews with executive leadership, middle managers, and technical/service staff, focusing on decision-right clarity, budgeting and reprioritisation routines, how cost and capacity signals travel upward (or remain implicit), and how deferral, workaround practices, and hidden labour emerge when "minimum viable" service levels are threatened. Integration is planned via a joint display, culminating in an implementable governance-and-costing framework proposal for learning-space services that is explicitly continuity-oriented and implementation-sensitive.

Results & Discussion

Because findings are not yet available, the “results” presented in this paper are conceptual and design outputs: (a) a clearly scoped hypothesis linking SOA to continuity-relevant outcomes, (b) a mechanism-explicit model, (c) a set of testable propositions, and (d) an implementation-sensitive measurement and enquiry plan suitable for later empirical execution. The paper distinguishes two pathways with different reform implications; each interpreted through sustainability-as-continuity and the conference strand’s “just transition” lens.

Visibility-and-management pathway (proposed): where cost and capacity signals are explicit and governance routines are formalised, enabling transparent trade-offs about service levels, renewal schedules, subscription commitments, and staffing. Under this pathway, sustainability is treated as continuity assurance: institutions are better positioned to define and protect minimum viable learning-space and platform services for teaching, reduce unmanaged deferral and reactive work, and stabilise service quality across units and campuses. Equity is expected to improve insofar as continuity and support timeliness are less contingent on informal workarounds or uneven local capacity.

Opacity-and-distortion pathway (proposed): where lifecycle costs, workload, and service-cost drivers remain under-specified or weakly reported, and where governance ambiguity produces slow, inconsistent prioritisation. Under this pathway, sustainability becomes a continuity risk: recurring platform commitments and renewal pressures accumulate without commensurate visibility or governance traction, increasing the likelihood of deferred renewal, uneven reliability, degraded support timeliness, and service fragility. Equity risks intensify when reliability risk and hidden operational labour (e.g., overtime, informal “heroics”, localised fixes) are redistributed unevenly across campuses, units, and user groups, producing differential exposure to disruption and differential access to timely support.

For Sustainability, Just Transition, Equity, and Inclusion, the paper frames learning-space capability as a transition towards digitally dependent teaching operations in which the core question is not only efficiency, but whether institutions can continuity-plan and continuity-fund minimum viable services in ways that do not externalise disruption risk and hidden labour onto particular campuses or user groups. For Education Policy, Reform, and Evidence-Based Practices, the paper proposes an auditable evidence chain, linking SOA indicators (governance specificity and cost transparency) to continuity-relevant service performance, that can make reform feasibility and trade-offs explicit under fiscal constraint, rather than implicitly managed through deferral and workaround cultures.

Keywords (max 5)

Learning spaces; Technology governance; strategic alignment; HEI sustainability; educational equity