Part A: Topic planning:

The inverted triangle

You have already identified some broad areas of interest that could be explored within a presentation for the Professional Staff Conference. You now need to start to identify specific questions that will anchor this presentation.

The inverted triangle exercise will help you define a topic so that you can move beyond broad issues to specific questions or actions that you can explore, and then clearly define, within an abstract. Select one of these broad issues and apply it to the triangle below to drill down to a couple of specific questions that have an analytical focus. Use one sheet per broad idea and choose just one idea for this workshop. If you wish to repeat the process after the workshop, take some blank planning sheets with you.

Consider the inverted triangle as a funnel and answer the questions below to focus your topic into something that is both ‘edgy’ and do-able.

1. What is the broad topic area that you wish to explore?

2. List as many issues that you can think of that could be explored through the broad topic

3. From the list generated above, select one (or two at most) issues that you would like to explore in your presentation. List some key questions that would need to be explored in order to address these issues.
Part B: Drafting your Abstract

The following questions will help you refine your topic and draft your abstract.

1. Describe your topic in several sentences.

2. Why have you selected this project topic?

3. What is the key question that you will explore and answer through this presentation?
   Try to frame the question in a way that leads to analysis or evaluation (i.e. “what is the impact of …”; “what advantage does this technology/service offer to ….”) What are the key issues that an organization must address before ….”?

4. Context
   How does your topic relate to the conference theme? Is it relevant to a larger theme or debate in tertiary education management? Why is this topic important to you, your peers or the University? Can you find support for your idea in the wider literature?
5. Relevance
Why will this topic be of interest to other professional staff? What will attract people to attend this conference session?

6. Method
Have you done research into this topic? Are you presenting a case study? What other steps have you taken to explore, investigate and test your ideas?

7. Analysis
Provide a succinct statement of your likely conclusions and/or reflections. What did you learn from your investigations or experiences? What has changed as a result? What should (or could) happen next? Are there actions or ideas your audience could take away and use?