

Securing Lecturers' Involvement in the Evaluation of Learning Technology

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This talk is based on the work of EASEIT-Eng

Talk Overview

- About EASEIT-Eng
- Why involvement is essential
- Steps taken to secure involvement
- Key points

About EASEIT-Eng

- TLTP-3 funded project
- **Evaluative** and Advisory Support to Encourage Innovative Teaching – Engineering
- From the mission statement
...enable an academic tutor to make an informed choice from a range of evaluated computer based materials...

Say something about:

- For “Innovative Teaching” read “Computer-based Learning, or Learning Technology” (EASE-IT was thought to sound better than EASE-CBL or EASE-LT)
- Computer materials with declared pedagogic intent
- Give an idea of what stage the project is at: 1 year development, 2nd year was trialing methodology, and then third year was rolling-out evaluations, nearly 50 so far. Have another year ahead to do more of the roll out and to expand subjects covered.

Why we Need to Involve Lecturers

- Lecturers value the opinion of other lecturers.
- Engineers value the opinion of other engineers.
- Believe that evaluations have to be evaluations of learning technology in use in “live” courses

Expand on the first pair of points:

- HEFCE report on CTI and TLTSN “Virtually all respondents believe that academic staff identify most readily with their subject and that, to be successful, implementation and integration of ICT have to be tackled from a subject perspective.

Example of this is Peer review of academic resources.

- Larry Cuban’s ideas on how why technology has not been used in US schools (Teachers and Machines: The Classroom Use of Technology Since 1920 , ISBN 080772792X): when technology is imposed from above without the involvement of teachers it is frequently used to solve the wrong problem and hence not adopted. We need to make sure that we are addressing the right problem.

Second point is a matter of enhancing validity of the evaluation by looking at resource in context, but a consequence of this is that we need a lecturers to host evaluations.

How Much Involvement?

- Time for them to explain to us what they are doing.
- Effort in getting students to return questionnaires.
- Intrusion into their teaching.
- The risk of publicising failure.

Steps Taken to Secure Involvement

Developing the Procedure

- Project instigated by engineering lecturers and learning technologists working together.
- Lecturers' input:
 - project team do the work not the evaluation hosts
 - methodology is thorough and efficient
 - outputs are concise

Some of the specific input that came as a result of this involvement:

- While each evaluation takes ca. 10 days of the evaluators time, the lecturer is only involved for about 3 hours (and not all in one go)--
- We avoided sending questionnaires to academics since we felt these would sit on a desk for too long, and the replies might not always give the information we need: instead we use interviews where we can keep the lecturer on track and immediately clarify points where necessary.
- We were told that to be useful, the case study report should be no more than two sides of A4

Usage Survey

- Aimed to show level of uptake of learning technology across UK HE Engineering departments
- Meant we were in contact with every relevant department at an early stage
- Identified software to evaluate *and keen users*.

Responses were incentivised by charity donation.

Gave us as complete a knowledge of what was going on as anyone else had — BUT this was only scraping the surface.

Publicising the Benefits of Involvement

- Through newsletters, talks, papers etc...
- Benefits are:
 - recognition
 - networking opportunities
 - support
 - confidence (external validation)

Many of the benefits were identified from a focus group we held after the first set of evaluations—so this list is itself generated by involving lecturers in the project.

How We Identified Hosts

- Networking / “usual suspects”
- Baseline survey respondents
- Returns from newsletters
- Letter to Heads of Department
- via departmental computing officer
- via learning technology / staff development units

Networking: Firstly within our own institutions, but also most people involved in the project had been involved in learning technology project before and had contacts who they could call on

Baseline survey: as mentioned above; Newsletters:we did an annual newsletter which included a form which could be returned if people wanted to get involved. Wasn't used a great deal.

Letters to Heads of Department often didn't reach the people who we needed to, though where a HoD did nominate someone, then that was useful.

Should note here that newsletters and contact with HoDs were important in raising the general awareness of the project and that this in turn would help when we did get in contact with staff.

Working on the theory that the person who has to install a department's software knows exactly who has asked for what we asked the departmental computing officers. They are not used to being asked for help/advice from academics at other Universities, we found them useful, and think they may have been flattered in a way that department heads certainly aren't. We benefited from having this idea first!

Some numbers

- Where we can trace a “first contact”
 - 7 were personal contacts
 - 7 from usage survey
 - 14 came from Dept. Comp. Officer
 - 3 from emails to JISC mail lists
 - 4 referred by a colleague with whom we had contact

Point is not the absolute numbers, but the relative success of going through DCOs

Securing Involvement

- On the whole, we did this by email not phone - allowed "cooling off"
- Clear information about what is involved.
- 30-50% of promising contacts came through with evaluations.
- Be persistent.
- Employ admin. help

It's not easy getting some people on the phone, whereas most of them will read their email. Email gave people time to consider what was involved rather than just try to deal with a phone call at an inconvenient time. It also meant that people who might be too polite to say no on the phone had the option of not replying.

We were pleased how often people who we contacted felt that we were helping them, not imposing on them. Shows that the message that evaluation is important *is* getting through, at least to those lecturers think enough about teaching and learning to adopt computer based resources. Also, the input from practicing engineering lectures helped in informing how to achieve this.

We provide concise, written information on what we expect lecturers to do, and how long it should take (which has been validated by feedback from hosts). This may put some people off, but better to put them off now than get halfway through an evaluation before they pull out.

We pay £150.

Securing Involvement

- Being engineers talking to engineers helped
- “I think we can help you here and in so doing help ourselves”
- £150

Summary

- Lecturers and learning technologists working together from the start.
- Remember the support staff will know who they support.
- If you value something, be prepared to pay for it.