Chapter 30
eTTCampus:
Innovative Approaches to Process Evaluation

David E. Gray
University of Surrey, UK

Malcolm Ryan
University of Greenwich, UK

ABSTRACT

This chapter critically examines innovative approaches to the evaluation of a European funded project involving nine countries in the development of a virtual campus to provide training opportunities in ICT for teachers and trainers across Europe. It explores project management processes and decision-making and the impact on outcomes as well as relationships between project team members. It concludes with recommendations for the more effective use of a range of these approaches, asserting that a critical analysis of the processes of engagement is as important as the outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

The eTTCampus projects set out to design and collaboratively build a virtual campus of tools and resources for the trainers of teachers and trainers in Europe. As part of its innovative approach, the project used open source software. At a time when many post-16 educational institutions across Europe were investing considerable sums of money on expensive, licensed virtual learning environments, the value of open source software was seen as being worthy of serious exploration. The evaluation process within the project sought to gather data on:

- The eTTCampus itself through end-user evaluations of pilot Learning Events, triangulated with the views of Learning Event Developers.
- The management, leadership and issues arising from collaboratively designing and using Virtual Learning Environments (VLE) by geographically dispersed transnational teams.

- The feasibility of employing open source software for the development of virtual environments and resources.

The purpose of this chapter is not to provide data or analysis of these issues, but to illustrate and discuss four innovative approaches used as part of the evaluation process, namely: the use of evaluation templates, critical friends, blogging, and benchmarking. Two of these evaluation processes were successful in stimulating debate between the project partners and in providing feedback that helped towards changes in strategic direction. One of the processes was unsuccessful. This chapter describes what happened and offers some thoughts on the uses of these novel evaluation techniques within online development projects.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

The central aim of the eTTCampus project was to set up, develop and consolidate a European Virtual Campus for teachers and trainers. This virtual agora and learning space was seen as a means for developing teachers' and trainers' knowledge, skills and understanding of the pedagogic, critical and responsible use of ICT for the purposes of learning, teaching and training. The main outputs of the project were planned as:

- Development of a resources based, integrated, and collaborative learning platform.
- Involvement of more than 500 teachers and trainers from across Europe in pilot learning initiatives.
- Establishment and validation of services to teachers and trainers.
- Operationalisation of eTTCampus on a sustainable basis.
- Establishment and maintenance of a users' and clients' portfolio (a database of clients).

- Recommendations on the establishment of a European competences certification scheme for teachers and trainers, active in the use of ICT.

The background to the project is that, in spite of substantial investment in computers and connectivity of European schools and training organisations, the level of actual implementation of eLearning was considered to be far below what was expected by the European Commission. Among other factors of importance, the skills and motivation of teachers and trainers to apply ICT in their daily teaching activity was considered inadequate. Despite many successful but mostly small-scale experiences of the pedagogical use of ICT, many do not reach a sufficient level of diffusion to the relevant population of teachers and trainers who could benefit from analysing, discussing, and adopting effective practices from elsewhere. The aim of the eTTCampus project then, was to create a Trans European virtual campus in which to directly compare experiences on the issue of the pedagogic use of ICT and learn through context-based project work.

SETTING THE STAGE

At the start of the project, a number of Working Groups were established to conduct the core activities of the project.

Project working groups:

1. **WG1:** Campus Development Planning
2. **WG2:** Resource Development
3. **WG3:** Recruitment and Dissemination
4. **WG4:** Collaborative Learning Initiatives
5. **WG5:** Qualifications and Certification
6. **WG6:** Sustainability
7. **WG7:** Evaluation
8. **WG8:** Project Management

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