

Evaluation plan:

A needs assessment evaluation of the suitability of eLearning options in teaching hotel management

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April 2009



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1. Introduction:

In the following evaluation plan there is a description of the background and purpose for a needs assessment evaluation of the suitability of flexible learning options to be introduced into teaching hotel management papers within a degree programme. Further on in the plan, the primary audience of the evaluation plan is introduced and the main decision making processes of evaluation are highlighted. As part of the plan the evaluator will also outline the key questions that will be addressed, and the method of data collection that will be used. The logistics of carrying out the evaluation plan and described along with a necessary timeline and budget. This final evaluation plan has utilised valuable feedback from an educational expert.

2. Background:

The Bachelor of Applied Management degree programme has been offered in its current format since 2007, after its initial development in 2006, further to an amalgamation of the Bachelor of Hospitality and Tourism Management degree. At present students may study the degree programme on a full or part time basis at the Dunedin campus (face to face). Further to some more changes to the degree programme which have been driven by collaboration with Christchurch Polytechnic (CPIT) there are internal strategic plans from the Otago Polytechnic to further engage with students using more flexible delivery methods.

One of the majors of the Bachelor of Applied Management is hotel management. As part of this major there are three compulsory hotel management papers which include Rooms Division Operations Management (Level 6, second year paper), Facilities Management (Level 6, second year paper) and Contemporary Issues in the Hotel Industry (Level 7, third year paper). The second year papers, especially the Rooms Division Operations Management paper have applied (practical) components as part of the learning objectives of the paper. As well as this, students are also taken on visits to local hotels and related industries as part of the paper.

Students studying on the degree programme at present tend to be school leavers or returning to study after having been in the workforce for a short time. There are also some mature students who are re-training. There are a number of students who have been assessed through the Otago Polytechnic 's Centre of Assessment of Prior Learning (CAPL) and have been awarded the first two years of the degree programme based on recognition of their prior learning; they are now completing their final year of the degree programme.

The Dunedin campus is the sole campus offering the Hotel management paper which gives us an advantage if students from Christchurch want to take the hotel management major then they will study through our campus, and therefore it is prudent to look at being able to offer these papers flexibly. By being able to explore these options, this will also give the flexibility for students who may want to study the Graduate Certificate in Hotel Management the opportunity to be able to do this in a more flexible manner as well.

3. Purpose and Questions

The overarching purpose of the evaluation is to determine: **How existing hotel management papers can be re-developed using e-learning methods which will best meet the needs of the target audience and lecturers.**

The outcome of the evaluation will give clarity to the following chosen e-learning guidelines (Milne & Dimock, 2006).

- TD1 Is the use of e-learning the most appropriate way to achieve the intended learning outcomes?
- TD10 Is good e-learning practice available to staff in a way they can adopt and adapt in their own work?

To ensure that the e-learning guidelines are answered through the needs assessment, careful planning of questions is required. A sub-set of questions has been formed to enable each of the e-learning guidelines to be researched adequately.

- TD1 Is the use of e-learning the most appropriate way to achieve the intended learning outcomes?
 - What are the most appropriate options available to transfer a face to face course to an online (flexible) course?
 - What are the most appropriate learning methods for delivering a course on line?
 - How can you ensure that learning objectives are met through on line methods?
 - How do students prefer to learn?

- TD10 Is good e-learning practice available to staff in a way they can adopt and adapt in their own work?
 - What institutional support is available to staff to engage in e-learning?
 - How can staff engage in e-learning practice?
 - What e-learning training or professional development is available for academic staff?
 - What on-going support is available for people new to eLearning?

4. Audiences:

The primary audience for the report will be the researcher, the degree Programme manager and other degree lecturers that may not be involved in e-learning. Other audiences will be participants in the evaluation.

5. Decisions:

The information from the evaluation will be used to inform the department about the scope of the re-development required. The report will directly influence the future decisions of taking this face to face course on line (in some form) as it will detail

processes for programme re-development. It will help determine the best support mechanisms for both myself as a lecturer of the hotel management papers and also other degree lecturers and future hotel management students.

6. Methods:

The following paragraph will outline the chosen method that will be used to carry out the evaluation.

6.1 Needs assessment

The evaluation plan will be based on a needs assessment which Rossett (1995, as cited in Reeves & Hedberg, 2003) explains is a way to gather information to assist professionals in making recommendations about how to solve a problem or introduce new technology. By carrying out a needs assessment it will enable the researcher to evaluate the viability of the project and explore a variety of possibilities. Due to research time limits a needs assessment is seen as the most appropriate choice, as a formative evaluation would require development of online materials. A needs assessment can save time and money during development as it will ensure only approaches which suit the intended audience are used and money will not be wasted on something which is either unsuitable or not relevant. Gosper, Woo, Muir, Dudley and Nakazawa, 2007 fully supported the use of a needs assessment as it allows the evaluator to be able to fully engage in all aspects of curriculum design and the need to be able to analyse educational needs and requirements before exploring the software solutions, innovation and development requirements. (Gosper, Woo, Muir, Dudley, & Nakazawa, 2007).

6.2 Eclectic-mixed methods pragmatic paradigm

As part of this evaluation, the researcher will make use of the evaluation framework, called the 'eclectic-mixed methods-pragmatic paradigm' (EMMPP), which is a theoretical framework that allows for a flexible approach to the design, delivery and evaluation of interactive learning systems (Reeves & Hedberg, 2003). The EMMPP allows

researchers to adopt different perspectives and theoretical approaches depending on the practical needs of a project and allows for measurement of different variables. This framework recognises that multiple perspectives are necessary to “triangulate information and conclusions regarding complex phenomena” (Reeves & Hedberg, 2003, p. 35). Different philosophical perspectives engender particular pedagogical approaches which, in turn, influence the roles and expectations of teachers and students (Gillani, 2003)

7. Sample:

As part of the triangulation of the chosen method, the evaluator will be carrying out the following research:

7.1 Interview of expert and lecturers

As part of the evaluation plan, interviews will be carried out to gain the perspective of e-learning methods that may be suitable for implementation with the hotel management papers. The first interview will be carried out with an educational expert who is involved with Otago Polytechnic in creating flexible education and will be able to guide the research in the educational design aspect.

The evaluator will also interview three staff members that are involved with e-learning. One staff member uses Wiki educator as part of their course, another member of staff will be able to discuss the use of on-line discussions and another staff member will be able to discuss their perspective of on-line learning from a novice perspective.

7.2 Documentation

A review of documentation will allow the researcher to understand the strategic importance behind moving towards to a more flexible delivery method and using different e-learning technology.

7.3 Student survey

The final method that has been chosen is a survey of current students of the Bachelor of Applied Management. A survey tool would be used to gather information from current students on how they like to learn and their preferences of on-line learning and flexible delivery methods. As part of this survey students would be shown samples so they would have a clear understanding of the questions being asked of them. At this stage of the evaluation plan, this will not be carried out, due to the short timeframe.

8. Instrumentation:

The interviews will be semi-structured interviews which will allow the interviewee some scope to be able to describe their perspective of e-learning and allows flexibility (Miller & Crabtree, 1999). Interviewee's will be asked if the interviews can be recorded so it will allow the evaluator to listen to the interviews and be able to draw out the main themes of each. By participating in the interview, the evaluator will take that as informed consent of participation in the research.

The following questions show a sample of the questions that will be used, a full set of interview questions for the educational expert can be found at Appendix 1 and questions for the interviewees engaged with elearning at Appendix 2.

- What are the most appropriate e-learning methods for an on-line hotel management course, such as Rooms Division Operations Management?
- How can the lecturer ensure that the learners are still gaining the same quality of learning on-line as they do face to face?
- What are the most appropriate methods to interact with students when delivering a paper flexibly?

A copy of the documentation reviewed will be available as part of the final project.

9 Limitations:

The main limitation of this evaluation is time allowance as this evaluation project is part of an assessment that is being completed for the paper Evaluation of eLearning for Best Practice, part of the Graduate Certificate in eLearning programme which has a finite time frame. Also the evaluator works full time and therefore is required to work around their full time commitments.

The information to be gathered as part of the needs assessment will be obtained by the most efficient means possible and therefore for the purpose of the current needs assessment, only two of the three methods of data collection will be carried out. At this stage, interviews of a leading e-learning expert and interviews with staff members engaged in e-learning will be carried out and the review of relevant strategic documentation. Student feedback via questionnaires will be carried out at a later stage.

As the evaluator is conducting this research within her own teaching domain and context, this could be seen as a threat to the validity of the research due to researcher bias. Lincoln and Guba (1985 as cited in (Robson, 2002) state that this bias refers to when the researcher brings their own assumptions and preconceptions to the research. This may affect the way in which they behave in the research setting, the choice of participants of the selection of date for reporting and analysis. However, it is in the best possible interest of the evaluator to ensure that there is no threat to the research and also as the evaluator will also be reporting to managers and colleagues this will help prevent bias and ensure a neutral perspective throughout the evaluation

10 Logistics:

The needs assessment will be carried out by one person, who is the lecturer involved with the hotel management paper. Therefore it is imperative that the researcher remain on track with the time limits imposed and also ensures she remains impartial to the information being received.

11. Time Line:

The following table presents a timeline for the completion of the evaluation plan

Dates	Information
Week 11 May – 15 May	Compile questions for interviews (both educational expert & lecturers involved in flexible learning) Organise dates and times for interviews Gather appropriate documentation to review as part of research
Week 18 May – 22 May	Conduct Interview with educational expert Conduct three interviews with lecturers Review strategic documentation
Week 25 May – 26 May	Continue with interviews Review strategic documentation
Week 1 June – 5 June	Analyse evaluation results
Week 8 June – 12 June	Analyse evaluation results
Week 22 June – 26 June	Write up results and evaluation report
Week 29 June – 3 July	Write up results and evaluation report
No later than Friday 10 July	Final hand in of evaluation report

12. Budget

It is very hard at this stage to be able to suggest an actual budget and therefore the proposed budget for the evaluation plan is based on a charge out fee of \$35 per hour for the completion of the evaluation. Based on this figure the budget would be as follows

Preparation and Presentation of Evaluation Plan 12 hours @ \$35 = \$420.00

Interviews 4 hours @ \$35 = \$140

Review of Documentation 1 hour @ \$35 = \$35

Analysis of evaluation material 4 hours @ \$35 = \$140

Final evaluation report 8 hours @ \$35 = \$280

Printing charges \$5

Coffee for interviewers \$16

Total budget for evaluation plan \$1036.00

14 References:

Gillani, B. B. (2003). *Learning theories and the design of e-learning environments* Lanham, MD, University Press of America.

Gosper, M., Woo, K., Muir, H., Dudley, C., & Nakazawa, K. (2007). Selecting ICT based solutions for quality learning and sustainable practice. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, 23(2), 227-247.

Miller, W. L., & Crabtree, B. J. (1999). Depth interviewing. In B. F. Crabtree & W. L. Miller (Eds.), *Doing Qualitative Research* (2 ed.). Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage.

Milne, J., & Dimock, E. (2006). eLearning Guidelines. Guidelines for the support of e-learning in New Zealand Retrieved 8 March, 2009, from <http://elg.massey.ac.nz/Guidelines-questions.pdf>

Reeves, T. C., & Hedberg, J. C. (2003). *Interactive Learning Systems Evaluation*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Educational Technology Publications.

Robson, C. (2002). *Real World Research* (2 ed.). Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing.

15 Appendix 1

Interview questions for educational expert

1. What would you consider are the most appropriate options available to transfer a face to face course to an on online (flexible course)?
2. What aspects of the course would you change to start with?
3. What are the most appropriate learning methods for delivering a hotel management course on line?
4. How can you ensure that learning objectives are met through on line methods, especially when there are practical components of a course?
5. How can the lecturer ensure that the learners are still gaining the same quality of learning on-line as they do face to face?
6. What are students preferred methods of elearning tools?
7. What are the most appropriate methods to interact with students when delivering a paper flexibly?

16 Appendix 2

Interview questions for elearning users

1. Are the courses you teach on fully online or flexible options?
2. Why did you start to use elearning options within your teaching?
3. What institutional support was available to you when you started using e-learning teaching methods?
4. What e-learning training or professional development would benefit staff that are not familiar with elearning?
5. What on-going support is available for your elearning teaching?
6. What elearning options do you use within your teaching?
7. How did you choose the most appropriate elearning methods?
8. Would you consider some elearning methods more beneficial than others?
9. What elearning methods are preferred by students?