

Poster presentation

Project teams go the distance

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This poster presents a case study of the learning materials development process employed by The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand [1]. The Open Polytechnic's online teaching brand, Open Mind Online [2], uses project teams to develop and produce their online courses. These teams include members of faculty, members of the Learning Design Group and members of the Production unit. Each team member has a specialised role, and brings different skills and abilities to the project.

It is our contention that working in teams to develop courses can **create** a 'comfort zone' for those involved by helping to ensure quality and provides a framework and structured process for course development. It can also **extend** the comfort zone by offering a chance for the exchange of ideas, for encouraging academic rigour in materials development, and by offering a chance for professional development for team members. When team development of courses works well, it can achieve these aims without a loss of efficiency. In fact, efficiency gains are usually achieved.

Our poster covers several key areas:

1. What is a project team?
2. Why do we use teams to develop courses?
3. Who are the team members?
4. What is the development process?
5. How do team members feel about the process?
6. What, therefore, are the benefits and drawbacks of the team process? and
7. Where to from here?

We interviewed team members, and asked them for answers to the following questions:

1. What is your place in the team?
2. Describe how the team process affects you in your role at The Open Polytechnic (e.g. How does being part of the team affect you as a Lecturer?) Are the effects positive, negative, or both?
3. Does the team process improve the overall product (materials or courses)?
4. What would you change about the process for the next time you are a member of such a team?
5. Do you think the overall team approach to materials development at The Open Polytechnic will change in the future? If yes, how?

Our results show that there are benefits to using development teams in terms of gains in efficiency, quality and professional development. However, while there are significant benefits to the team approach, there are also potential drawbacks.

1. There is less autonomy for the faculty member teaching the course.
2. While the project approach can lead to efficiencies, it can also, unless well-managed, lead to increased timeframes for the development of a course.
3. Unless roles are clearly stated, understood, and agreed upon by all members of the team, there is a risk of double-ups of task, confusion, and even conflict. Resourcing is complex, and potentially expensive.

Endnotes

1. <http://www.openpolytechnic.ac.nz>
2. <http://www.openmindonline.com/index.html>

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<http://www.ascilite.org.au/conferences/perth04/procs/lockett-poster.html>