

Presentation type

Auditorium presentation

Title

Success factors and pitfalls for cooperative projects in the Netherlands

Authors

S. Eggermont, M. Doets, P.M. Bloemendaal

Benefits to participants attending session

In the Netherlands, medical computer based training (CBT) developers have been sharing their work among universities structurally for the last 15 years. Cooperative production of CBT is however still a hazardous occupation. We have been involved in several projects on governmental grants during the past 6 years and would like to share with you our mistakes and successes in joint development of CBT.

Text of the abstract

The Dutch government gives out grants for educational innovation. Partnerships of different compositions of Dutch medical schools have applied for these grants in the past 6 years and several cooperative computer based training (CBT) development projects were carried out.

Each project was monitored closely on behalf of the government by the SURF foundation to ensure the money was spent according to the beforehand settled demands.

The contribution of SURF and our own positive and negative experiences during the projects have led to a list of recommendations for successful effectuation of cooperative CBT development projects:

- **Make a realistic phased planning.**
A project planning should contain different phases with clearly defined activities, and milestones. If the phases are successive and the next phase is dependent on the product of the previous phase, try to plan an independent phase in between to leave room for possible delay. Another solution is to work with cyclic phasing where you proceed to the next phase with a prototype result of the previous phase and improve the prototype later on in the project. If you work with external partners, make sure that part of the phases are parallel and can be carried out independent of the other partners.
- **Organize project meetings.**
Organizing a startup and general meetings for the project participants is essential to get and keep all noses in the same direction. Other kinds of meetings can be as effective, such as discussing by making collective mind maps or active sessions on the workplace to see and learn from each other's approach to the work. If milestones are reached, release the pressure with an occasional diner or social activity, to charge up for the next phase.
- **Keep the internal and external project environment involved.**
Keeping in contact with the directors of your own institution is especially important to get support for a project when the initiative lies at the bottom of the organization. Even a top down assignment for a project is no guarantee for

implementation of the products of the project. Directors should be actively kept involved to make sure the project assignment is interpreted well and to enthuse them for the results.

Also, create support in other institutions by presenting the progress of the project on a regular basis and discuss the results. This will increase chances of continuity of the project.

- Define the result clearly before implementation.
Think of what you would like to accomplish with your product. Remember that sometimes small innovations are larger than you think in terms of organizational implications. Try to get formal approval of your director for the design before implementation
- Make compromises but don't try too hard
All users have different demands. Try to find out which are essential for future use and make compromises for the rest. If demands of different institutions are not compatible, consider manufacturing customized versions because enforcing the middle course leaves all users unsatisfied.
If you make sure the products look like they were built at the own institution, for example different versions with the appropriate logos, you can prevent the “not invented here” syndrome.
- Guarantee application and continuity after the project.
Creating something is just the first step. To make sure CBT products continue to be used, their value should be proved by registering teaching hours and demonstrating the learning effect. Only then you can justify spending personnel and means on maintenance of the products.
Leave the distribution rights, copyrights, version management, hosting and other horrors to the responsibility of the owner of the products. It saves a lot of work to keep it there.

In our presentation we would like to share with you the pitfalls we stepped in and the successes we have booked during the effectuation of our projects.