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PALETTE

Pedagogically sustained Adaptive LEarning Through the exploitation of Tacit and Explicit knowledge

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Thematic Priority: Technology-enhanced learning

D. EVA. 04. Report on the responses of the PALETTE project to formative evaluation

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Deliverable manager

- Murray Saunders, CSET

List of Contributors

- Murray Saunders, CSET
- Bernadette Charlier, UNIFR
- Alan McCluskey, UNIFR
- Joel Bonamy, GATE - CNRS

List of Evaluators

- Luc Vandenabeel, CRP Henri Tudor
- Alain Giboin, INRIA

Summary

This deliverable brings together the experience of the PALETTE project on formative evaluation and is in the tradition of evaluation as knowledge. In other words it contributes to our understanding of how evaluation is used and understood in a complex project like PALETTE. It details the way the evaluation's provision of 'provisionally stable' scenarios and experiences has been used and by whom.

The deliverable responds to Recommendation 7 of the first Review Report: *“A new deliverable should be added in M24 to report how issues identified in D.EVA.03 have been addressed and how the consortium has reflected on its practices.”*

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1. Introduction

1.1 Structure and content of the report

This report brings together what we know of the use of the output of the formative evaluation of the PALETTE project and how members of the Steering Group perceive and understand the use and processes of the evaluation methodology. Most of the input to this deliverable is drawn from D.EVA.03. The object here is to isolate and highlight the use dimension from that report and add the analysis of the steering group interviews undertaken in December 2007 that focused on the evaluation and its use. It outlines the use of the three data gathering sweeps designed to chart the evolution of the project from the project participant's points of view. It will offer some reflections on this process as a methodology of 'embedded evaluation'. Section 5 draws out broad learning points from the way the evaluation has been used and perceived by the project steering group and section 6 gives a more theoretical overview.

1.2 Audience

The audience for this report is as follows :

- Project participants
- CoP members
- EU officers
- Wider learning community in Europe
- International researchers and developers interested in supporting learning through practices

1.3 Connection with other reports

This report draws on the way four formative reports which have been circulated within the PALETTE project have been used, particularly by the steering group. The reports are:

- Visions of the PALETTE Project (February 2006)
- Emerging issues in the implementation of the PALETTE project (October 2006)
- The evolution of the PALETTE project (June 2007)
- WP6 Summary formative report 4: challenges connections and awareness (October 2007)

These reports were not formal deliverables but had the function of internal learning resources for the project participants' use.

1.4 Purpose

The purpose of this report is fourfold:

- It provides an analytical narrative of the way PALETTE participants have experienced the methodology of the evaluation of the PALETTE project
- It is intended as a formative resource for project members
- It provides a basis on which aspects of the project might be adjusted and developed

- It provides resources for increasing our understanding of how evaluations ‘work’ within complex projects

2 Evaluation framework and approach

2.1 The PALETTE evaluation approach

The PALETTE evaluation approach was presented in the D.EVA.01. In this section, we summarize the main dimensions applied in that first report. The evaluation depicts, analyses and evaluates the way in which the project participants experience the methodology of the PALETTE project. The approach can be said to be formative in that results are used during the project lifetime to help develop the project successfully. D.EVA.01 gives a precise account of three main steps that took place in the first 18 months of the project during which data collection, analyses, feedback and regulation occurred. However, it should be noted that this evaluative process is not meant to be a direct part of the management of the project, but is designed as a resource for all project participants. However, the feedback and resources it produces are intended as a resource for coordinating the work of the project more effectively. In this sense, the approach is *an evaluation for development*, but it can also be understood as *an 'evaluation for knowledge'* in the terms of Eleanor Chelimsky (1997, p100). This means that the evaluative dimension of the project is built into the design of the project and can be justified as evaluative research in which the evaluation was undertaken to obtain ‘a deeper understanding in some specific area or policy field’. In D.EVA.03 the various understandings of the participatory design methodology on the part of participants illustrates this dimension.

The final role of this integrated approach is to consider the evaluation as a provider of *provisional stabilities* (Saunders, Charlier and Bonamy 2005). *That is to say*, that instead of trying to reduce complexity by searching for common solutions or systematised approaches, with the aim of creating a stable framework that tries to harness change, we prefer an evaluation framework that helps participants within a developmental process to create situated provisional stabilities. In this way, the design of evaluation processes and practices will provide resources for ‘sense making’. Formative evaluation can provide the resources for such reflections.

It is clear then, that the work on evaluation in PALETTE was not aimed at holding WPs accountable for results in terms of pre-determined goals or targets, but rather as a resource for all participants to understand, improve on and learn from the processes they were involved in. Focussed more on the project as a whole rather than the work of individual work packages, the evaluation was of particular interest to the project coordination and the Steering Committee.

2.2 Reflections on the evaluation process

In the D.EVA.01 we described the evaluation as inclusive, that is to say, representatives of each WP were to be involved in agreeing on the evaluation framework and making the indicators explicit. We described the following principles as a guide for our actions:

1. *“Involving project team members in identifying and using key questions, indicators or issues (concern with participatory approaches); outlined graphically in empowerment evaluation at a ‘strong’ end of the participatory evaluation continuum (see Fetterman et al 1996 and its critique by Patton 1997)*
2. *Being part of an ethically justifiable process (a concern with evaluation ethics)*

3. *Making sure their experience is faithfully reported even under political pressure (a concern with declamatory platforms)*
4. *Evaluation products entry into a public debate (a concern with evaluation as part of a democratic process and as a way of promoting democratic participation) (Saunders 2006)”*

To be more effective and make better use of the resources of the project, in January 2007 the Steering Committee decided to follow the evaluation report and limit the participants in WP6 to its core team (CSET, UNIFR and GATE-CNRS). However we have tried to continue to apply the first principle mentioned above by involving the SC in the discussion of the evaluation process and results, by giving a complete account of the evaluation results during the plenary events or meeting (Fribourg, June 2006, Nice, December 2006, Lausanne June 2007 and Lyon, December 2007) and by publishing all the evaluation intermediary reports on the BSCW platform.

2.3 Visions of the PALETTE project (on-line questionnaire – February 2006)

This first stage of evaluation of the PALETTE project had three main goals:

- To depict the preliminary vision of all participants at the beginning of the project;
- To encourage project reflection and creativity by the various PALETTE participants;
- To facilitate valuable insight into increased knowledge of the PALETTE project.

2.4 Emerging issues in the implementation of the PALETTE project (phone interviews – October 2006)

This second stage of the evaluation of the PALETTE project had three main goals:

- To depict the evolution of the projects carried out by participants;
- To describe and encourage reflection on partners' working practices;
- To provide data to regulate the project process.

The evaluation had the following foci: the iterative nature of the project ; the process of mediation and integration between project participants; and the alignment between aspirations and professional development on the part of PALETTE partners

The results of this evaluation step were presented and discussed with the partners during the plenary meeting of December in Nice and led to important modifications to the project that were embedded in the IP2 (second workplan of the project).

2.5 The evolution of the PALETTE project (on-line questionnaire – June 2007)

This third stage of evaluation of PALETTE project had similar goals to the previous one - to depict the evolution of the vision and experience of the project from the point of view of all participants, to describe and encourage reflection on partners' working practice and to provide data to regulate the project process. It did however broadened the foci to take into account important aspects related to the R&D research process, in particular the participatory design methodology and the open source culture.

2.6 Summary formative report 4: challenges connections and awareness (October 2007)

During the Palette Crete meeting in September 2007, WP6 undertook five-minute interviews of all the twenty participants to get their opinions about three questions:

1. What is the major challenge at this stage of Palette according to you?
2. What could be done to meet this challenge?
3. What role would you play in addressing this challenge?

This short account was used as a resource for the Palette Steering Committee to support decisions and the orientation of the project.

2.7 The way reports were used formatively within the project

Despite the fact that a lot of participants were optimistic regarding the evolution of PALETTE, they were also concerned by the manner in which the project would evolve in the future. The concrete implementation of the participatory design seemed to be the most important worry. Another source of concern was the integration of the different PALETTE tools.

Grounded on the observations in the evaluation reports mentioned above, the coordination team, in collaboration with the Steering Committee decided to:

- Adopt the participatory design methodology suggested by WP1 ;
- Operationalise that methodology by setting up three teams in which educational science specialists and computer scientists could collaborate with CoPs ;
- Use these teams to better align the visions of the project between educational science specialists and computer scientists;
- Deepen the research on learning in CoPs by carrying out a transversal analysis of the data already collected by WP1.

After discussions on the evaluation with all PALETTE partners during the plenary meeting of December 2006 in Nice, the SC decided to implement important adjustments to orient the revised version of the workplan to be negotiated with the Commission (IP2):

- Change the organisation of work by more clearly defining and making known the role of WP5 and facilitating the collaboration between WPs;
- Clarify the roles and responsibilities by diminishing the number of partners per WP;
- Facilitate communication by setting up a series of guidelines and by revising the mailing lists;
- Restructure the website and establishing an editorial board;
- Reinforce the representativeness of the SC by involving the board of directors in the main discussions.

3 Summary of ‘use’

On the basis of the three sweeps of evaluation mentioned above, we can pinpoint the main uses of evaluation results in the project. It's important to underline that these uses could be focused either on project development or on knowledge building about the project methodology and on learning needs that could guide training initiatives and the production of training resources.

3.1 Changes in coordination and communication

The original project proposal had sought to facilitate collaboration between educational sciences specialists (P) and computer scientists (T), by having each category of partner represented in each WP and by having the responsibility for the WP shared between a leader and a deputy one from each of the two areas. The evaluation pointed to the fact that participants were overloaded by the number of emails and by the complexity of the project. To diminish this complexity and facilitate communication, a number of decisions were made in preparation of the IP2: the number of partners was limited in each WP and the responsibilities more made more precise. However, to maintain collaboration between P and T teams were set up bringing together P, T and CoPs.

3.2 Changes in the structure of work

The design of the work organisation as presented in the Description Of Work (DOW) suggested that WP1 would lead the project. The evaluation pointed to risks and difficulties in this situation. As a result, a number of changes were made in the leadership and the design of the work organisation to produce a better fit with the responsibility of each WP. These changes also pointed to the role of WP5 as coordinating the collaboration between the partners and the CoPs through the teams mentioned above that had been created in September 2006 after the first sweep of evaluation.

3.3 Adjustments in management

The evaluation pointed to a number of concerns about meetings, timing and discussion spaces. As it related to the day-to-day practices of some partners, it was more difficult to handle. However some actions were adopted by the Steering Committee in its June 2007 meeting. These included the addition of a common agenda on the BSCW, the adaptation of the monthly report template and the establishment of an annual planning for the period M19-M30. In addition, the Project coordination was to support the management of communication in the project (management of mailing lists, communication of the profile of each partner,...).

3.4 Consolidating participatory design approaches

The analysis of the evaluation results led to management decisions about aspects of the participatory design methodology including such things as evolving clarity, sharing understanding and the typology of participatory design from participants` perspectives. Sections 5.2.1 and 5.2.2 will be devoted to participatory design.

3.5 Lessons for adopting open source approaches and dissemination

The evaluation results pointed to the fact that, during the first part of the project, insufficient attention had been granted to the Open Source nature of the services provided. For this reason a special task force was created in the context of IP2.

3.6 The work on the generic scenarios

The evaluation results from the feedback obtained in Crete suggested that there was a need to integrate the different tools and services and develop credible scenarios for those who are going to use them. This finding encouraged the formation of teams to work on the construction of 'generic scenarios' to function as an organisational focus for depicting PALETTE tools and services using PDM as a vehicle.

4 Using evaluation for knowledge building: Participatory Design Methodology

The main evaluation results as described in D.EVA.03 can be summarised in three points: (1) the collaborative building of the Participatory Design Method (PDM), (2) the first experiences of its implementation and (3) the main issues that the project had to address and the future strategies proposed. In dealing with the implementation of the PDM, it was necessary to evoke not only the results directly connected to the PDM but also those related to it: the iterative or evolving nature of the project and reflexive processes and the non-sequential/parallel development; the processes of mediation and integration between project participants and the alignment between aspirations (project theory) and practices in the project.

4.1 The building of a PALETTE partners vision of the PDM: it's iterative, interdisciplinary and collaborative nature

It might seem surprising that data first gathered about the partners' visions of the PALETTE project, just before the kick off meeting in March 2006, didn't include any account about the PDM. However at that time the PDM had not yet been built and the partners were more focused on the intended results of the project. For the Pedagogical partners that meant the development of research on the learning of CoPs and for the technological partners, it meant the development of the services.

Six months after the beginning of the PALETTE project, the vision of the objectives of the project as well as the role and tasks of the partners seemed more integrated and shared. The explanation mostly given for this evolution was the PALETTE Summer School held in Fribourg, during the last week of June 2006.

“My vision of the project has evolved slightly owing to the content of the Summer School activities;”

“Summer School was the cement of the work together in the project.”

Taking place, as it did earlier than in other projects, it fell at the appropriate moment.

“It was a very good time to organize this Summer School and to permit to PALETTE people to meet together: it was not a long period of individually work, so the partners have not time to develop something individually. By coming to the Summer School, they can meet and confront their opinions and strengthen the collaboration and the interaction within the project.”

It was also the first occasion for partners from different disciplines to learn from one another - P about PALETTE tools and standards and T about the MOT language and Actor-Network Theory (ANT) - and to make common choices about methodological instruments to use in PDM: ANT and the MOT language. This important step was directly followed by the proposal of a twelve-step methodology that was the first version of the PALETTE PDM and its implementation through the organisation of three interdisciplinary working group collaboratively with the partners in September 2006. The evaluation data gathered about six months later showed how this initiative has been important for the first steps of implementation methodology.

“At the beginning of the project, I had not a clear vision on PALETTE objectives and on PALETTE partners' roles. But, when the teams ABC were created, these two points were lighted! That's the reason why I particularly appreciate the IP2 graphical representation of work packages, with WP5 in the center, teams around, then other WPs: the ideal representation in my opinion, which makes the purposes and priorities of the project very clear”

Despite the fact that a lot of participants were optimistic regarding the PALETTE evolution, they were concerned about the manner in which the project would evolve. The concrete implementation of the participatory design seemed to be the most important concern.

“While knowing that the people can not be forced to participate, how we are going to implement concretely the participatory design?”

“In PALETTE project we find many different interests. Do we manage to harmonize all of them?”

To address this issue different actions were taken by the scientific Coordinators and the WP leaders of WP1 and 5: frequent virtual meetings with the animators of the teams, suggestions of templates for the scenarios and the writing of functional specifications and the invitation of CoP representatives to the Nice plenary meeting on December 2nd. In addition, one important step that had been forgotten at the beginning of the project was carried out through the elaboration of a contract for CoPs to serve as a discussion basis and a support for the involvement of CoPs in the PDM process.

5 PALETTE Steering Committee perceptions of formative evaluation

The following section is based on fourteen interviews with members of the PALETTE Steering Committee carried out during the two and a half days of the plenary meeting in Lyon, December 2007 along with a written contribution from one member who was unable to attend. Each interview lasted between twenty and thirty minutes. A series of five questions¹ about formative evaluation had been prepared and were sent to Steering Committee members prior to the meeting together with a summary of earlier feedback from project participants about formative evaluation.

5.1 On formative evaluation as a lever for change: background issues to this sweep of interviews

5.1.1 Making sense of diversity

In one of the Lyon interviews, an interviewee said he expected there to be very strong alignment between visions of the Steering Committee members when it came to key issues. Another interviewee spoke of the role of the evaluation to help come to terms with the uncertainty inherent in a complex project where differing perspectives cohabited. The report quoted here seeks to provide a faithful echo of the diversity of perceptions and visions and criticisms and demands of the members of the Steering Committee about formative evaluation in PALETTE. This section, however, is not just a collection of points of view or quotations. It structures those visions with a view to giving a clearer picture of the role of formative evaluation within the project and in particular of the relationship between evaluation and decision-making.

Some interviewees criticised the evaluation for watering down evidence from interviews. Others expressed concern about giving too much voice to “vocal minorities”. We attempt to walk a fine line between the two.

¹ The five questions were as follows: 1) Have you experienced a formative evaluation process before Palette? 2) From your experience, please identify ways in which the evaluation process has been used. 3) Has the evaluation contributed to participatory design methodology? If it has, tell us about the way you interpret its role in this respect? 4) In what ways do you think the evaluation process in Palette has been effective? Are there ways in which it might have been improved? 5) Please let us know any other thoughts you may have about the way the evaluation process has been undertaken.

5.1.2 Interviews that contribute to understanding and change

Interviewees said that the interview format and an attentive listener gave them the opportunity to go back over aspects of the project and contribute to an improved understanding that might later have an impact on their work and the project. One interviewee suggested that the project had been more full of tension than he had originally thought. In a small number of interviews it was clear that some things have not gone well for the interviewee and that he or she had had some difficulty “digesting” them fully. This is part of the reality of PALETTE. But it didn’t stop these people saying some useful and interesting things about the project and its workings.

5.1.3 Formative evaluation

The series of questions that Steering Committee members were asked in Lyon concerned formative evaluation within the project and its relationship to the Participative Design Methodology. Judging from some of the responses, evaluation was often taken in a much wider sense to include such evaluative activities as validating software and testing conformance of project outcomes to pre-determined specifications. This situation was further complicated, as there was also a tendency to use the word “evaluation” to refer not only to formative evaluation as well as other forms of evaluation, but also to the work done by WP6. As a result, some of the expectations expressed about the evaluation were in fact expectations of WP6 and some of the demands expressed could not be satisfied by formative evaluation.

5.1.4 Anonymity

In reporting on these interviews, the choice was to ensure the anonymity of interviewees. The chief reason for this was to enable people to speak freely during the interview. It also, to some extent, prevented points of view being dismissed purely because of shared pre-conceived notions about the person presenting them. However, anonymity had a cost: important information contained in the link between the statements and the person’s role in the project was passed over in silence. Discussing these outcomes in the Steering Committee would provide an occasion to partly recuperate this loss as people took up a position in re-negotiating what these ideas meant for them and their fellow Committee members.

5.2 Perceptions of the evaluation

5.2.1 Visions: more than just a mirror

Participants’ visions of formative evaluation in general ranged from an activity that influenced individual perception to one that formed the shared understanding. They also ranged from a passive role of evaluation as observation to a more active one where evaluation intervened in project decision-making.

5.2.2 The mirror and beyond

A number of people saw the role of the evaluation as a “mirror” that provided a better image of the project. Various reasons were given for having such a mirror. These included: allowing all participants to contribute to the management of the project; reflecting the uncertainty of the project given the diversity of perspectives present in its complexity; allowing the project to be seen as a whole. The evaluation as a reflection of individual perspectives is dealt with in more detail below. Some people were not satisfied with evaluation as a “mirror”. They expected evaluation to provide support for understanding. For them, formative evaluation involved recommending solutions and accompanying the decision-making process.

5.2.3 Individual understanding, sharing and discussing

One dominant perception of formative evaluation amongst Steering Committee members was an aid to individual understanding, sharing and discussing key issues. The individual impact of this process was seen in terms of increased personal awareness that could then have an indirect impact bringing about changes due to that increased understanding. The preference expressed by many for the interview format was typical of that perception. That face-to-face discussion itself was seen to enhance

individual understanding. According to these people, making the essence of these discussions available to others helped and enabled sharing points of view about problems that might otherwise not have been expressed openly. By making these points of view public in a less threatening way and allowing people to take a position with respect to them was seen to help understanding evolve.

5.3 Evidence of impact

5.3.1 By their nature, these interviews focussed more on critical aspects of the evaluation rather than on praise of it. However, many people said they saw the evaluation results as interesting and useful to stimulate thought. They also pointed to the fact that the results provided indicators for strategies and ideas for project orientation. Interviewees were positive about the interviews, seeing them as a chance to express ideas and to think about the project in dialogue with someone else and, as a result, that they led to improved understanding and possible changes (although one person said two interviews were enough and wasn't sure people saw any point in them). One person liked the combination of structured interviews, more informal interviews and online questionnaires as they revealed different aspects of the project.

5.3.2 Some people clearly identified evidence that they considered indicated that the evaluation had had a positive impact on the project. The terms in which they remembered that impact varied. For some it was the issue dealt with (difficulties of communication, insufficient participation, too many people involved in WPs), for most it was the action taken (the creation of the teams, changes in the membership of the Steering Committee, preparing IP2, restructuring the WPs and their relationship with each other) and there are those who remembered it through the form of evaluation carried out or how the results were presented (a series of interviews, an online questionnaire, a poster session, a presentation by the WP6 leader). Other people had more difficulty in identifying the steps of the evaluation, although they could point to what they suspected was a result of the evaluation (a more constructive and better organised project, improved understanding of the project). Finally there were those who felt the evaluation had had no impact on the project, especially when they thought in terms of the work of their own WP. When questioned about what indicated the lack of impact, one person said "it doesn't lead to decisions and actions to improve things - things don't get any better". This comment raises the question of the relationship between evaluation and decision-making that is dealt with at more length below.

5.3.3 As a number of people pointed out, it was not always easy to be sure that changes were due to only one factor like the evaluation carried out by WP6. As one person insisted, understanding impact in such a complex situation was difficult. The evaluation was one of several factors contributing to improvements in the project.

5.4 Chronology

5.4.1 One of the striking aspects of people's impressions of the impact of formative evaluation on PALETTE lay in the concentration of this impact in the first half of the project: the discussions around IP2; the setting up of the teams; the restructuring of the WPs; improvement of communication channels; ... This fact raises the question of what changed in the evaluation that made people see it as more effective and presumably more present in the first part of the project. Part of the answer may lie in the different phases of the evaluation. As a member of the evaluation team pointed out, the evaluation had three phases to it: enabling, process and output. During the first year, there was a great deal of formative evaluation designed to reveal expectations and representations of the project. In the subsequent process phase during the second year, according to this person, there was a lot of tension in the project making formative evaluation more difficult to carry out. The same person also mentioned that, at one year from the end of the project, there was suddenly an obligation to converge. Another possible factor in the perceived decrease in impact of the evaluation may have been the slimming down of WP6 after the first year when the representatives of the other WPs no longer participated in WP6.

5.4.2 To what extent did this modification contribute to changes in the impact of the work on evaluation? The review process may also have contributed to these changes. One interviewee pointed out that the evaluation came under heavy fire during the review meeting and clearly hoped that it wouldn't happen again. At the same time, a member of the evaluation team described the review process as short-circuiting the work of formative evaluation, reducing it to a role of observation.

5.5. Anchorage in the project

5.5.1 Although one person felt that WP6 necessarily needed to distance itself from the project to carry out evaluation satisfactorily, the general feeling, expressed in various ways, was that the work of evaluation was not sufficiently anchored in the project. Some people felt that the work of WP6 was too distant and that formative evaluation was not central enough in the project processes. There was a call for the evaluation to be an actor not just a spectator. For a number of people this anchorage ought to take the form of playing a role in the evaluation within the WPs and not just at a project level. More is said below about the relationship between evaluation and decision-making. Several people mentioned the need for more frequent evaluation and more immediately available results, factors that might also contribute to a perception of relative distance on the part of the evaluation.

5.5.2 The feeling that the anchorage of evaluation in the project was too weak may be linked to the observation that the work of the evaluation was not visible enough within the project and that communication was insufficient. One criticism expressed was that there was not enough precise feedback from the evaluation. Several people considered that the evaluation results were watered down, too cautious and not direct enough. They felt that this didn't add to the credibility of the results. In a similar vein, one person criticized the Crete interviews as being less rich because fewer people were questioned and people tended to repeat the same ideas and complaints. The person said that quotes from people were not enough, you also needed a critical picture. As a counter part to the call for directness, a couple of people expressed concern that perturbations could be caused in the project through formative evaluation by giving a voice to particularly "vocal" elements with a minority opinion. To add to the complexity, some people were dissatisfied with the evaluation because it failed to enable them to communicate a message that they personally had otherwise not managed to get across by other means.

5.5.3 For others, part of the difficulty of the evaluation to play a central role lay with the project participants who didn't read the results and didn't grant evaluation the importance it should have. In contrast to the visions of active discussions about the results mentioned above, some felt that the evaluation didn't lead to a participative process. Some said that there was no systematic treatment of the evaluation results, which they attributed to organisational questions: there was no proper "place" for the results of the evaluation to be dealt with.

5.6 Demands on the evaluation

In line both with the visions and the criticisms described above, individual interviewees expressed a number of demands on the evaluation. Some of these demands have been taken up under the heading "5.9 Pointers for possible adjustments" and also evoked in the conclusions (6.2). These demands can be structured around a limited number of points:

5.6.1. Extend communication

- "Push" evaluation results to project participants and provide at least the first steps towards keys for understanding;
- Promote the evaluative process and its results. Better communicate results to everybody. Show people the interest and the value of the work of evaluation.

5.6.2. Ensure systematic treatment of the evaluation results

- Systematically treat evaluation results explicitly with all project participants;

- Grant time during SC to deal with the evaluation reports, point by point. Take into consideration results in SC.

5.6.3. Modify output of the evaluation

- Provide more concrete results of the evaluation, reaching conclusions, providing examples of possible actions to take, producing concrete indicators that can be used by the SC and the project co-ordination;
- Provide a clear evaluation schedule across all WPs and evaluation guidelines.

5.6.4. Further assist project functioning

- Help prepare IP3;
- Assess the functioning and work methods of individual WPs (but “no additional evaluation is need within the WPs”).

5.7 Relationship between the PDM and the evaluation

5.7.1 Amongst PALETTE Steering Committee members, perceptions of the relationship between the Participatory Design Method (PDM) and the evaluation varied enormously, reflecting a large diversity of points of view on the PDM and its role. At one extreme, many were perplexed by the interview question and had a hard time finding a relationship between the PDM and the evaluation. Judging by the reaction of one person, a partial explanation for this situation may lie in a distinction made between the method and the way it functions. From this perspective, changes in the ways of working of the PDM, which people readily attributed to the evaluation, were not seen as being part of the PDM. At the other extreme, the PDM and the evaluation were seen as closely related and involving many of the same actors. One interviewee thought that the evaluation should be seen as part of the PDM. Beyond these seemingly opposing perspectives, there was the relationship between the working of the project itself and the PDM. Some people’s answers pointed to an underlying vision that the PDM applied not just to the development of tools and services for CoPs but also to all the workings of the project.

5.7.2 This was reflected in their vision of the evaluation as part of a participative process driving the whole project. The question of the relationship between the part and the whole was also to be found in the position of those who saw PALETTE as a CoP and regretted that there was not enough reification of individual knowledge within the project. On another level, one person questioned the reality of the PDM, saying it was a utopia, a shared goal that was the motor of the project, but that the reality was more modest. Another person insisted that the PDM didn’t work. When asked to indicate why, the person pointed to the need for generic scenarios as proof and went on to explain that a reason why it didn’t work was the less participative role of those involved in technological aspects of the project. They were not free to take initiatives, the person said, because their position in their respective companies didn’t allow it. A number of people, however, pointed to the impact of the evaluation on the PDM, saying that there was an increased understanding of the PDM amongst project partners and that the evaluation had led to its restructuring and the creation of the teams. From this perspective, clearly the method and its ways of working were not seen as separate.

5.7.3 Finally, one interesting perspective on the relationship between the PDM and evaluation concerned the trans-disciplinary nature of the evaluation in the PDM. Comparing evaluation taking place in most WPs with that in the PDM, the person pointed out that evaluation in most WPs was carried out by people in the same WP or in the same discipline, whereas evaluation in the PDM was necessarily trans-disciplinary and led to an exchange of opinions and ideas that moved things forward.

5.8 Levers for change

Ultimately, formative evaluation is about learning and change. In the interviews, as people talked of the role of formative evaluation, its place in the project and the relationship between the different

project structures and the evaluation, the discourse centred increasingly on the difficulties of leveraging change in PALETTE. As mentioned above, a number of people were dissatisfied with the running of the project because difficulties identified by the evaluation or by others were not dealt with. Some of them attributed this inability to devise and implement satisfactory solutions in certain circumstances to shortcomings in the evaluation. They wanted a more direct intervention on the part of WP6. They imagined WP6 organising working sessions within the Steering Committee about evaluation results, providing keys for analysis and even structures to ensure decisions were taken. It is intriguing to see that people considered that formative evaluation should be a key lever for change and yet, as we will see in what follows, they admitted not granting the time to study its outcomes and integrate them in their decision-making. What are the other potential levers for change within the project? What is their role? And what relationship do they have with the evaluation? This series of interviews was not designed to answer these questions. However, in talking of the role and place of formative evaluation, people's comments pointed to aspects of the roles of the Commission, the project coordination, the Steering Committee and the WPs and their leaders and their relationship to evaluation and change.

5.8.0 The actors

5.8.0.1 The **European Commission** and in particular the review process were seen by some as the ultimate levers of change. One person mentioned, for example, that decisions had been "forced" through because of the need to satisfy the Commission in a forthcoming review. Checking compliance with Commission requirements was seen as the role of WP leaders, the Steering Committee and the scientific co-ordination of the project. It is interesting to note here what one person said about providing deliverables: far too much time was taken producing deliverables and not enough time on doing the work of the project. In terms of evaluation, one person felt that the nature of the review and the efforts it required short-circuited the work of formative evaluation, making it pointless lest it be as a memory of what had happened. This perspective is in sharp contrast with the point of view, expressed by another interviewee that the review and the work on the IPs were a challenge and an encouragement for the work of evaluation.

5.8.0.2 The **project coordination** was praised by one person for achieving a strong feeling of community within the project, but at the same time, was criticised because of the "soft" methods it employed in a sort of "head in the sand" approach to decision-making that consisted of hoping difficult problems would sort themselves out on their own. In contrast, another person, talking of the impact and usefulness of the evaluation, said that the project coordination came to decisions with the help of the evaluation results and then the WP leaders implemented them. This person's perspective on decision-making within the project raises questions about the role of the Steering Committee in such decisions. A further person suggested that the coordination and WP6 agree on how to handle the evaluation results.

5.8.0.3 Some interviewees expressed frustration that things changed too slowly within the project and criticised both the evaluation work and the **Steering Committee** for this. It is interesting to note that they didn't criticise the project coordination for this. They said that the Steering Committee didn't take the time to go over the results of the evaluation and insufficient action was taken on the basis of the evaluation reports. As a consequence, they felt that things that needed changing didn't get changed. Concrete suggestions were made about organising working sessions for the Steering Committee to integrate evaluation reports in decision-making processes and then communicating the results of these discussions to all project participants. When asked who should take responsibility for ensuring that such discussions took place, a number of people pointed to WP6. One interviewee felt that no specific mechanisms were necessary to ensure that such discussions took place. It would suffice, according to this person, to put them on the agenda. Doubts were cast on this by another interviewee who complained that Steering Committee discussions were dominated by administrative questions. In contrast to this critical position about the relationship between the steering committee and the evaluation, the impact mentioned above of evaluation outputs resulting in changes in the project point to a more nuanced perspective.

5.8.0.4 Many of the members of the Steering Committee are both **Work Package leaders** and representatives of one of the partners. This distinction was made by an interviewee who considered that, as a member of the Steering Committee, the feedback from the evaluation was useful, but not as a WP leader. A number of people referred to the work of WP6 as being on a meta-level that didn't concern the WPs. The idea that the formative evaluation results didn't help or concern WP leaders was shared by quite a number of interviewees, although, as mentioned above, certain people felt that as individuals the work of the evaluation affected them and could have an impact indirectly on decisions they took. Several people mentioned that the role of WP leaders was to communicate issues raised in the Steering Committee to the members of their respective teams. For some people, their vision of formative evaluation and participative design required Steering Committee members to relay to their teams and discuss issues raised by the evaluation. However, if the Steering Committee members as WP leaders said they couldn't see the pertinence of the evaluation for their WP, it is difficult to imagine that they would take the time to discuss it with their teams. Perceptions varied about the role of WP6 (not to be confused with that of formative evaluation) in the Work Packages. Some people felt that WP6 should draw up an evaluation schedule, framework and guidelines for all the evaluation work being carried out by the WPs. As a counter part to this perspective, many people took for granted the fact that much evaluation took place within WPs quite independently from WP6. For example, it was suggested that the evaluation related to the functioning of the PDM should take place in WP1. Note that this was adopted by the Steering Committee and is now the case.

5.9 Pointers for possible adjustments

In the interviews a number of people requested that WP6 accompany evaluation results with pointers indicating possible directions that the project could take in the light of the evaluation results. The following three points were suggested and a number of them have subsequently been adopted by the Steering Committee.

5.9.1 Communication and visibility

The impact and effectiveness of the work done on formative evaluation depends very much on the perception and understanding that participants have of that process of evaluation. In order to improve communication about the evaluation, to increase its visibility and develop a better understanding of the use of evaluation, the strategy proposed here is to work on two levels. The first involves the steering committee and the project coordination. A concerted effort should be made to inform steering committee and project coordination members both about the options taken by WP6 and of the results of evaluations. It is suggested that, in addition to the deliverables planned for the Commission, more targeted documents be drafted about specific issues addressed to steering committee and project coordination members. This was done with the results of the Lyon interviews that were presented to the Steering Committee in a specific report². The second level concerns the other project participants. This involves encouraging steering committee members to act as relays of information about the evaluation and the discussion of subjects raised by the evaluation to their teams and WPs.

5.9.2 Levers for change

To be effective, formative evaluation within a project like PALETTE, requires that the actors involved reflect on its results and negotiate suitable solutions amongst themselves. In order to enable this to happen, the steering committee needs to make room in its agenda to discuss the results of the evaluation and to come to meaningful conclusions about actions to be taken or lessons learnt. For this to take place, it may be necessary to reconsider the work done by the steering committee as a whole and its relationship with the scientific coordination and administrative coordination of the project.

5.9.3 Integration in the project

There are a number of ways, some of which are already planned, in which the work of WP6 can respond to demands of steering committee members for the evaluation to be better integrated into the project without this contradicting the work of formative evaluation. One example involves providing

² Report entitled: "On formative evaluation as a lever for change".

an overview of evaluative practices throughout the project, analyzing them using the RUFDATA framework and linking them to decision-making processes in the project. This should help improve understanding of both the diversity of evaluative practices as well as the relationship between evaluation and decision-making. This work would also contribute to D.EVA.05. A second suggestion concerns the improvement of understanding of processes related to the PDM. Instead of carrying out two further sweeps of evaluation, one of these could be replaced by an evaluation of the process of introducing generic scenarios and the restructuring of the teams as part of the work. This work would contribute to preparation of D.EVA.06.

6 Conclusions: Formative Evaluation in complex projects like PALETTE

6.1 This report has provided a narrative account of the way in which the formative evaluation methodology has been used and understood by project members during the lifetime of the project. It is unusual to have an evaluation of this kind embedded within a project and to have such a high level of reflection on evaluative processes. To some extent WP6 has attempted a high degree of ‘transparency’ and ‘exposure’ (prompted by the review) and has enabled project participants a free hand in reflecting on the role of formative evaluation. This process has not always been comfortable but has enabled the evaluation team to develop a very authentic understanding of the variations in experience and understanding and to refine its own approaches to formative evaluation.

6.2 Based on the evidence of the evaluations and the testimony of the participants we are able to make some tentative propositions about the ‘positioning’ of formative evaluation within a project like palette.

The work package structure tends to encourage a ‘silo’ effect in which the immediate concerns of the work-package overwhelm cross-project issues that might be raised by formative evaluation.

The knowledge of and interest in formative evaluation has large variation within the project and is dependent on project role and position. We could say that it diminishes as we move from coordination to WP leaders and members.

The expectations of the formative evaluation and the role of the evaluation work-package become merged. There is an over-expectation of the WP6 to provide internal work-package ‘evaluative services’. The role of evaluation in these circumstances is ambiguous.

The way in which a formative evaluation is used is dependent on the capacity of the project to respond to evaluation feedback. This capacity to respond, what might be called ‘use capacity’, is an interesting concept. Little research has been undertaken on the ‘strategies for engagement’ that might be required in order to maximise evaluation use.

In the case of PALETTE, use of formative feedback by the coordination was facilitated by having members of coordination and the formative evaluation team in common. This enabled deep knowledge of the outputs from the evaluation and a capacity to see how these outputs might inform or imply systemic changes in the project. An unintended outcome of this might have been that this deeper knowledge of the implications of evaluation was not shared evenly across coordination practice.

Systemically however, the capacity of the project to respond to evaluative feedback through the steering group was relatively low.

The use of an evaluation evolves through time and has differentiated effects depending on project requirements. This evolution is uneven.

The feedback from the steering group suggests an ambivalence concerning evaluation use. On the one hand there are high expectations of evaluation; on the other hand, there is a resistance to spending too much time on establishing the implications of evaluative feedback for project processes.

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