BEYOND PARTICIPATION:
UNDERSTANDING WHEN
AND HOW TO INVOLVE
USERS

A Joint Research Program of the
Business Schools of USC and UT
Austin
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Purpose of Talk

• Describe our Research Program
• Solicit industry interest in participation
Current State of Knowledge on User Participation

- It’s believed to be good because it:
  - increases user commitment
  - enhances the business value of the IS

But User Participation is Increasingly Complicated:

- Multiple Stakeholders with different interests
- IS’s that demand continuous evolution so requirements become quickly obsolete
- Users developing their own applications calling into question value-added of IS developers
- A company’s competitive position rests on the ability to identify creative synergies between IS & business capabilities
- Limited user time to participate
We believe that this environment creates the need for new ways of thinking about user participation

From focusing on:
- User
- Soliciting inputs
- Transfer of knowledge between IS and business
- Needs & Requirements

To focusing on:
- Stakeholders
- Joint Learning Activities
- Specialists jointly creating new knowledge
- Negotiation & Alternatives
Research Hypotheses

More successful IS development efforts will be those that foster:

-- jointly creating rules of thumb about how business and technology support each other (e.g., not, "what data is needed," but "what drives the need for data")

-- stakeholders learning about their own and each others’ preferences and alternatives

-- use of active learning events

Example Active Learning Events

- Hands-on practice with prototypes
- Joint development of data flow diagrams
- Negotiations about development process
- Project dictionary understandable by all stakeholders
- Mid-course lessons learned sessions
- Interactions focused on conflict resolution
Sample Implications for Industry Action if Research Supports Hypotheses

- Involving users in reviewing screen layouts is insufficient ('cause not active)
- Only active experiences that are structured to create jointly developed rules of thumb will succeed
- Stakeholders may need training to turn conflict into healthy rather than destructive experience.

Research Design

- Stage I: Pilot-test on student IS projects to refine research
- Stage II: Test hypotheses on Industry projects

WE ARE READY TO BEGIN STAGE II AND WOULD LIKE TO SOLICIT YOUR INTEREST

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Stage I: Pilot Test

- Collected Pre-, Weekly, and Post-project questionnaires from 80 students and 18 clients involved in Fall99 CS577a
- In process of analyzing data

Sample Findings from Pilot

- Some Findings Underscored Limitations on Research of using a Student Population
  - Students experienced much more frustrations within their teams than with client
  - True product evaluations were not available since only prototypes built; so assessed realism of prototype
Sample Pilot Findings (cont)

- Some Findings Related to Hypotheses
  - Project Success as measured by client, by student, and by teacher were not highly correlated.
  - Client’s Assessment of Prototype Realism was correlated with client’s ownership & amount of new knowledge learned; NOT with amount of time spent in participation; thus participation is not sufficient.
  - Client’s ease-of-use assessment correlated with amount students learned.
  - Multiconstituency success is correlated with students participating in project initiation, and effective client-team interaction, not quality of within-team coordination.

These Preliminary Results Suggest:

- Focus not on participation but on the active involvement in participation is correct.
- Multiconstituency measure of success is a viable outcome measure.
- What contributes to active learning needs more attention.
For Stage II, We Need Industry Participation Either In:

- **Retrospective Analysis**
  - Recently completed IS development efforts in which a sample of stakeholders can be identified and surveyed about their process, learning, and negotiations

- **In-Process Data Collection**
  - IS development efforts which are just beginning, expected to last 6-9 months, with an identifiable stakeholder group, which can be briefly surveyed (via web survey) on a regular basis

Return on Investment for Company Participation

- Learn how to efficiently stimulate stakeholder learning by sharing experiences with other companies
- Specific recommendations on ways your firm can enhance your learning and negotiation processes from the research team.
Please contact us:
Send me an email: majchrza@usc.edu or call me at 213-740-4023

ADDITIONAL REQUEST
20 Information Systems Design (ISD) projects in Industry. MBA Student teams will apply class principles and prepare management recommendations for improving the firm’s ISD process (for Fall 2000 class)