Language Technologies for Lifelong Learning

LTfLL -2008-212578

Project Deliverable Report

WP8 – Additional Dissemination Planning

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1. Introduction

In the project review at the end of Year 1, the reviewers requested an additional planning document from WP8 to be submitted, covering:

- planning of a one-package approach to dissemination and training
- building of an on-line community

One package approach to dissemination and training: extraction of the reviewer's comments:

The inclusion of training in this area is an admission of the probable complexity of the tools and this is likely to be an obstacle to uptake and sustainability. Approaches could be considered that include the bundling of dissemination actions (raising awareness etc) with training actions to ensure potential users and recommenders are not just aware of but have a working knowledge of the tools as soon as possible after hearing of them. On-line training activities may play an important role here.

Building an on-line community: extraction of the reviewer's comments:

*There is a danger of fragmentation where the basic message gets lost among the range of different actions…. It may be useful also to **consider the development of a fully-fledged online community**, perhaps focused on the pedagogical and institutional problems that the tools aim to solve rather than just the tools themselves, that provides a nexus for the dissemination and exploitation actions…. So the reviewers suggest that the consortium discuss the idea of developing an on-line community around the problems it is aiming to solve with technical solutions. There are likely to be other approaches to the problems that could emerge in this community and shed light on the work being done and even complement it. The existence of a community of this kind would also be of value through the valorisation process.*

This report extends the dissemination strategy described in the WP8 deliverables from Year 1 to plan the approach of combining training and dissemination in one package. We also cover here the concepts the project team will use to build up an on-line community and to be in contact with this community to improve the project, our scenarios and services.

It is important for the quality of the project to involve people from different learning perspectives to get additional input and feedback from potential user communities. Through this approach, we expect to establish discussions around the scenarios produced by the project and especially additional points of view for the solution scenarios. This supports the objective of the LTfLL project to provide services and tools, which can be used in many different initial learning situations and learning contexts.

The dissemination strategy is designed to raise attention in additional domains and other learning sectors to adjust the design and usability of our services and tools to a wide-spread area of different situations of lifelong learning.

Even though the project in its limited timescale will not be able to adjust or add all the scenarios and services for every possible requirement, we strive to create solution services and tools, which are open and extensible. External input and suggestions will be taken into account to avoid unnecessary limitations for future use.

A further goal for using the approach of combining dissemination and training and of online communities is to identify additional stakeholders and lead user to engage with the project.

2: Planning for the one-package approach to dissemination and training

Integrated dissemination / training plan

The output of the project will comprise a set of online applications and tools which require an initial learning curve in order to best benefit from it, both individually and tools working in combination with each other. The training component, therefore, is intended to lower this entry threshold and help new users and adopters of the LTfLL products to familiarize themselves with them.

The dissemination/training strategy is guided by four components that provide a path to lead stakeholders from first learning about the project to adopting its outputs, as follows:

1. Awareness raising
– Publicizing the use of Language Technologies for Lifelong Learning, to the world at large.

2. Engaging interested parties
– Promoting application of individual services to enhance specific aspects of learning in different contexts (discussion and demonstration)

3. Providing 'next steps' (facilitate trials)
– So potential users are able to experiment with the services themselves and see the value that the services add to online learning environments. (sandbox, case studies)

4. Providing a clear route to implementation
– Provision of packaged components and supporting infrastructure (community website, FAQ, etc) in a manner consistent with other established Open Source learning platforms

– Provision of promotional materials to aid institutional decision making and subsequent resource allocation

– Provision of a core set of training materials and suggested activities for stakeholder groups.

In deriving the integrated dissemination/training strategy, we first allocated proposed activities to the headings 'awareness raising', 'engaging interested parties', 'providing next steps' and 'providing a clear route to implementation' and mapped the activities to groups of stakeholders (see Annex 1):

- educational practitioners*
- commercial e-learning companies*
- the TEL research community*
- the TEL developer community*
- lead users, derived from the above (*) groups
- the general public, including current and potential learners
- national and international policy makers (e.g. government bodies)

* The stakeholder groups marked with an asterisk are expected to include potential lead users.

Training

The Consortium acknowledges that the software must be intuitive to use. By making the software intuitive and user friendly, we will reduce the extent of user training required. To achieve this, we will include contextual help embedded within the software and will pay attention to ensuring that potential users find the software easy to use. We have already made provision for validating the usability of the software, and the round 2 validation will inform improvement of the final software. Nevertheless, the planned training and support mechanisms, e.g. via hands-on experiences, will further ease the adoption of the LTfLL products.

We focus our efforts in this report on (1) training that is part of awareness / engagement, as this is crucial for converting interested stakeholders into lead users, and (2) on-going support available to lead users in the early stages of adoption.

Training that is part of awareness / engagement

Our initial challenge is making contact with people to begin the process of awareness raising. Our primary means of contacting people are:

1. via **press releases** resulting in articles in the media – these will include the link to the LTfLL website;
2. through postings on **existing on-line discussions**, which should include the link to the LTfLL website;
3. through attendance at **workshops** providing an introduction to the benefits of the project and hands-on training. The link to the LTfLL website and LTfLL flyers

will be available as takeaways. We plan to run workshops internal to partner institutions and attached to conferences aimed at educational practitioners, researchers and developers;

4. through **validation activities** (eg focus groups) in partner institutions;
5. through **targeting potential lead users** and maintain direct contact with them.

For points (1) and (2), stakeholders are directed towards the LTfLL website, where on-line training will be available. This will comprise of short videos explaining the purpose of the software through demonstrating the services in action (targeted at people with a general interest and those just starting to use the software). Visitors to the website will be able to access videos showing the software from the end-user perspective; for example, a learner will be able to see a set of learner-specific videos for the integrated services being used in different contexts.

For point (3), we will organise and run hands-on workshops at prominent conference locations. Workshops will include an introductory presentation and a discussion at the end. Hands-on activities will be supported by worksheets leading attendees through a sequence of activities demonstrating the services. Where hands-on facilities are not available, a video presentation may be used instead, and attendees will receive a copy of the worksheets and encouragement to trial the software after the event.

Validation activities in point (4) are of two types: those directed at validating the scenario and those validating the software. The latter undertake training as part of the validation activity. When validating the scenarios, we routinely included demonstrations and visualisations. This will be rounded up by collecting feedback and evaluation methods. We will also encourage participants to visit the LTfLL website to watch the training videos. This activity will be supported by the creation and maintenance of online communities.

The lead users identified under point (5) will be supported in a more direct and personal dialogue, in order to enable them to function as multipliers within their respective communities.

On-going support available to lead users in the early stages of implementation.

Continued support will be provided to nurture people on the road to becoming lead users, so that they are able to keep up to date with the developments of the project and new versions as they become available. The following measures are planned, several of which are social, with the view of promoting an LTfLL Community of Practice of lead users. In addition, specific training materials and support will be available.

Social contact
- We will run a series of web seminars and less formal on-line roundtable talk sessions for stakeholders in the latter part of the project following the release of the Version 1 software;

- We will undertake a series of postings on the dedicated LTfLL on-line forum and in online communities in order to provide a stimulus for lead user discussions;
- Email responses to specific questions;
- For partner institutions, further meetings and workshops may take place as required locally.

Support materials

- Frequently asked questions (FAQs);
- Technical documentation;
- Plans and materials for trainers external to the Consortium to run their own training sessions.

3: Development of an on-line community

Introduction

One major aspect for the LTfLL dissemination strategy is to raise awareness: To ensure that as many people as possible become familiar with the concepts and results of the LTfLL project. Therefore the project is using a combination of direct and on-line approaches.

Using the direct approach offers the best efficiency of communication of the project results and benefits, but on the other hand the number of people reached is quite limited. We will use direct approaches to target existing communities regarding the learning technology aspects, in particular by means of potential lead users. However, to increase the effectiveness of dissemination, the project needs to reach more people than is possible with direct approaches.

The LTfLL project is potentially of interest to communities within the learning, research and learning technology areas. Early adopters within these communities can be expected to be interested in innovation projects. All of the target groups are used to finding information on-line. The LTfLL project is therefore setting up a virtual on-line community. This provides advantages to the project, as we can undertake validation and obtain feedback from sources external to partner organisations concerning our proposed services and the likelihood of their adoption.

There are a number of factors to consider when establishing and interacting with on-line communities:

- who the proposed audiences are
- how the audiences can best be reached and engaged
- what the components of our on-line community will be
- how we manage the audiences and maintain their engagement

Proposed audiences for the on-line community

The proposed audiences have been identified in the LTfLL dissemination/training plan as primarily educational practitioners, TEL researchers and TEL developers. As most on-line communities are open access, it is likely that some members of other stakeholder groups are also active in these communities, such as members of commercial e-learning organisations and members of the general public.

How the audiences can best be reached

The number of on-line communities on the Web is growing at a phenomenal rate, and many people receive frequent requests to join communities in which they may never be very active, if they join at all. We considered setting up a dedicated on-line community managed by the Consortium, but felt that it would be difficult to reach our intended audience with a new group. For this reason, we intend LTfLL to be primarily disseminated on-line through already established groups in existing social networks with large numbers of members.

We plan to identify a selection of existing high profile communities, which Consortium members will seed periodically with discussion threads. Consortium members will facilitate the discussion threads and collect qualitative validation data concerning the likely effectiveness of the services. They will also record the number of contributors to the discussions from outside the Consortium.

In addition we have set up a dedicated LTfLL on-line forum for those with a special interest in the project, as this can provide a news channel as well as an area for public consultation / discussion.

On-line community activities

The following constitute the parts of our on-line community strategy:

Component	Rationale
Existing on-line communities	Ready-made audience with well-defined interest, e.g. LinkedIn, Stellarnet, Facebook Group
Existing bulletin boards / mailing lists	Ready-made audience with well-defined interest, e.g. JISCmail, Wookie Developer list
LTfLL dedicated forum	Specialist community, probably limited in numbers, providing a news channel and an area for public consultation / discussion
Supporting websites:	
LTfLL website	Repository for information about the project, resources and training materials
SourceForge	Software repository & OS developer community

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One example of an existing community is the Facebook community 'e-learning professionals' (4805 members on 25 September 2009; administered by staff from information gathering organisations: the BBC and Thomson Reuters). Activities in this

online forum are reaching a high number of 'potential users' for the LTfLL results and services.

In addition to fully fledged communities, we will also consider dissemination through bulletin boards such as the JISC and SURF mailing lists. Dissemination through these means will concern the functionality of the services and seek views on the likely adoption of such services.

We have set up a dedicated 'Language Technologies for Lifelong Learning' group on Facebook, on which we plan to disseminate more specific information about the project.

WP8 will continuously monitor the activities and interactions as well as growth of the membership in these online communities and investigate if further reach and improvements can be achieved.

How we manage the audiences and maintain their engagement

When posting on-line, some threads die almost immediately and others, through their innate interest or by careful facilitation, run to many tens or hundreds of postings. The LTfLL on-line presence needs to be actively managed, with a commitment from all partners to undertake regular postings and facilitation of the threads they start.

In connection with deliverables, scenarios or forthcoming services the involved partners shall identify on-line communities, that might be interested in these results, based on an established and categorized list of on-line communities.

This approach enables the LTfLL project members to reach the required level of frequency for postings by also avoid sliding to provide boring information to communities, which would decrease the attention for future postings.

To track the activities in the used communities, moderated by each WP, WP task or consortium member all the activities are also consolidated under the leadership of WP8.

WP8 will be responsible for the collection of all the done postings and to alert the partners in case of too little activity on a specific on-line forum.

Therefore, all the distributed postings are collected to a single store and provided internal to all the partners, to ensure that the tracking of activities is accessible for all partners, as they need the information for planning their future postings in on-line communities.

On a quarterly basis, the activities will be summarized and evaluated, which will inform the planning of the next quarter, thus leading to cyclic maintenance of this dissemination space.

The first step after the identification of appropriate existing on-line communities is to kick off the interest of members in advantages that language technologies could provide to the lifelong learning. This will be followed by new contributions in regular intervals.

Responsibilities of Consortium members concerning the on-line community

Posting on existing or dedicated on-line forums requires that the LTfLL partners respond within a sufficient reaction time to the activities in the online forum.

To ensure to have always dedicated partner, who is responsible to react on postings in the different forums, the WP8 Lead will delegate topic or forum moderation to other WPs and partners.

To ensure that every partner is informed of the actual responsibility for the activities in the used on-line communities WP8 provides a tracking system of the activities.

Conclusion

The above described approach using the online communities strengthens further the dissemination strategy (D8.2) to provide better awareness for language technologies for lifelong learning and supports the process for engaging stakeholders, practitioners and lead users.

In addition, online communities provide extended perspectives on different learning and technology communities and their stakeholders. Harvesting the collective knowledge and enthusiasm present in such communities will greatly enhance our understanding.

The one-package-approach of dissemination and training will ensure that potential future users will not only be able to follow the developments of the project, but also that they can explore and experiment our services themselves.

Both, the one-package approach and the creation of online communities are strongly linked to our multi-mode strategy to bring LTfLL project results to the users.

Annex 1
Mapping of activities and stakeholders to dissemination purposes

Stakeholder Key:

A Educational practitioners

B Potential lead users

C General public, current and potential learners

D Learners in partner institutions

E TEL research community

F TEL developer community

G Policy makers, decision makers

Phase	Activity	Stakeholders						
		A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1 Awareness raising	**Phased press releases** printed in newspapers/journals addressing the main stakeholder groups, or published on popular public web sites (e.g. BBC, ORF websites)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	LTfLL website provide supplementary details for the interested community, including short video sequences	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Postings on existing on-line forums to outline the vision and results of the LTfLL project to awaken interest .	X				X	X	
	Short presentations at conferences and workshops e.g. events in partner institutions, scientific conferences, information events for education companies	X				X		
	Scientific publications in journals to achieve attention in the research area					X		
	Direct contact with targeted individuals or groups e.g. decision makers in education companies, national/international policy makers		X					X
	Taking part in validation activities in partner institutions	X			X			
2. Engaging	**Postings on existing on-line forums**	X				X	X	

Phase	Activity	Stakeholders						
		A	B	C	D	E	F	G
interested parties	to outline the vision and results of the LTfLL project to awaken interest, provide a medium for discussion							
	Postings on LTfLL dedicated forum on Facebook Specialist forum for those with a particular interest in the project	X				X		
	Web-based seminars and table talk meetings	X				X	X	
	Targeted workshops for specific audiences in partner institutions to promote awareness of the services under development and their value to learning.	X						
	Lead user meetings guiding potential lead users through the first steps of implementing and using the tools and discuss 'What it means to be a LTfLL Lead User'	X	X			X	X	
3. Providing 'next steps'	See 'next steps' column in Dissemination Strategy							
4. Providing a 'clear route to implementation' for lead users	**Download of the services** provide free download of the services, to enable the practitioners to test the usability, functionality and results (Sourceforge)	X	X			X	X	
	Access to web-based training Series of short web-based training materials for the offered services (about 5 minutes)	X	X			X	X	
	E-Mail support for implementation supporting the practitioners during the installation and configuration of the service environments	X	X			X	X	
	Provide technical documentation and FAQs	X	X			X	X	
	Web-based seminars and table talk meetings	X	X			X	X	
	Meetings/training with project personnel This may extend beyond the end of the project under consultancy agreements	X	X			X	X	