

Title: **How do academic developers make an impact – and how do they know they have done?**

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Abstract:

Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates should be able to plan academic development ventures of many kinds in such a way that it will be possible to know and to show what the venture has achieved in relation to both intended and unintended outcomes (outcomes in this context being taken to be synonymous with impact). They should be able to produce an appropriate for evaluation strategy.

Session Outline

Key issues to be addressed are:

- The identification and negotiation of evaluable outcomes for academic development ventures, whether the academic developer is leading, supporting or just evaluating the venture;
- Reluctance to define evaluable outcomes, and approaches to addressing this reluctance;
- Productive relationships among the intended outcomes of a venture and the activities and products of the venture;
- Renegotiation of outcomes, activities and products in light of experience and of changes to contexts, policies and priorities;
- Identifying unintended outcomes;
- Some relationships between the management and the evaluation of academic development ventures; and
- Other issues raised by participants.

The presenter has some 20 years experience of evaluating academic development ventures, of many different scales and natures. Over this time, the presenter's enthusiasm for and confidence in the value of the evaluation process have waxed and waned, several times. Currently, he sees evaluation as something to be built into an academic development venture rather than bolted on afterwards; accepting that the role of an external evaluator can usefully include external support for and validation of the vitally important self- and peer-evaluation processes integral to good project management.

He values formative evaluation much more than summative evaluation; accepting that the summative evaluation of one academic development venture can – indeed, should be written with an express purpose to – inform future such ventures.

And he is increasingly persuaded of the importance of a development venture being explicit about what it intends to achieve; accepting that, the more precise a venture's statement of intended outcomes, the clearer it will be if the project fails to achieve them. Clear outcomes are a tough sell for development ventures, just as clear intended learning outcomes can be a tough sell to teachers and students – and probably for some of the same reasons.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

Participants' recent and current experiences of (a) planning and (b) evaluating educational development ventures will be sought, along with participants' major current questions and issues in these areas.

A simple case study will be used as the core of the workshop. Around this case study, key activities including identification and negotiation of intended outcomes, planning of project activities and products, evaluation planning, project self and peer evaluation, and final summative evaluation will be simulated by and with participants. Throughout this process, participants will be encouraged and supported to make and share connections in both directions between the case and their own current experiences, questions and issues about goal-setting and evaluation.

Participants should thus take away a clearer account of project outcomes and an outline evaluation plan for academic development venture in which they have an interest.

References

Baume, D. (2008). A toolkit for evaluating educational development ventures. Educational Developments. **9**: 1-7, and sources referenced therein.