Focus Group – Structure

Introduction

Hi guys, and welcome to the session. Thank you for taking the time out to talk today about the Computer Science degree programme. My name is Charlotte Doherty. I'm a third year IS student. For my final year project I am "Building a Taxonomy of Learning Outcomes for the Computer Science degree program". The idea behind this is that for each module you study there are a set of Learning Outcomes associated with the module. These are what you as students are expected to be able to do once you have completed the module. For my project, I'm interested in looking at the overall learning path for the CS degree programme. What each module expects students to learn, how these complement each other and in some cases overlap with other modules within a year or between years. I'm also looking at how each year builds upon the previous one.

What I want to find out from you today is your opinions on these learning outcomes and how these relate to what you believe you are learning. Whether there are any gaps you feel should be addressed; and whether there is overlap between modules learning outcomes.

I'm conducting several sessions this week, talking to students from all 3 years to see what the overall opinion and consensus is.

You were invited to participate in this study because you are currently studying the CS degree programme and therefore are familiar with the majority of modules within this degree.

There are no wrong answers but rather differing points of view. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what others have said. While you may not all agree with each other, I do ask that you listen respectfully to others. Keep in mind that I'm just as interested in all comments you have to say positive or negative.

I'm going to hand out a consent form now for you each to sign. If you just take a few minutes to read it, sign and date it and then pass them back to me. This just explains fully what I will be using the data collected from the focus sessions for and what your rights as a participant are.

I will be recording the session. I'm tape recording the session because I don't want to miss any of your comments. People often say very helpful things in these discussions and I can't write fast enough to get them all down. I won't however be using any names in the project. You may be assured of complete confidentiality. The transcripts I will make from these sessions will be used within my interim report (submitted December 14th) and the comments will be used to help modify my taxonomy for my Final report (submitted After Easter).

My role as the moderator is to help guide this session. There are 5 questions in total that I will be asking you; some will simply require each of you to answer separately while others may involve or spark discussion amongst yourselves. I encourage that if you do wish to discuss or talk amongst yourselves that you do so. At times I may ask further questions just to clarify comments made or to gain further insight.

Well, let's begin. I'm sure some of you already know each other but to start let's go round the table and everyone tell us your name.

Module selection: Which will be discussed?

- In each session 2 modules from the current year of study will be discussed. For 2nd and 3rd years there will also be a question or two at the end about previously studied modules
- 1st Years: I will randomly pick the 2 modules for discussion from the 3 options available at this time
- 2nd Years: I will randomly pick the 2 modules for discussion from the 5 options available at this time
- 3rd Years: I have got a previous list of modules each student studies, place students studying similar modules in a group together and then randomly pick 2 modules for discussion

Questions

Questions below will also be used for asking students questions about modules they have previously studied – the tense will obviously change for these then and I will be asking students to reflect as well as relate their answers to how this has affected their study now.

1) Explain to me in your own words what you believe you are learning from module X
   a. How do you all feel about each other's definitions?
   b. Is there anything someone else has said that you agree or disagree with?
2) How do you think this module fits in within the Computer Science degree programme?
   a. On a scale of 1-10 how relevant do you believe the module is for the degree programme? Where 1 is very irrelevant and 10 is very relevant.
   b. Are there specific skills (Communication, Team Work, Programming etc.) you are learning that are important in your opinion for a CS student to know?
   c. Are there any previously studied modules that you believe complement or have helped in your study of this module?
   d. Would you change when the module was taught? (i.e. year/semester)
   e. Is there any overlap between this module and any others you are studying or have studied previously?
      i. How does it overlap?
      ii. What impact does it have? Is it justifiable? Or merely repetitive?
      iii. Do you think the content is more appropriate in this module or the other one?
3) Now have a look at the list of Learning Outcomes for module X I am passing around. Take a minute to read through these; and then let me know what your initial reactions are towards these?
   a. How do these fit with your previous definition?
   b. Do you think these all sound right for the module?
      i. Would you get rid of any?
         1. Which one and why?
   c. Do any of these surprises you?
   d. Do you understand all of them?
      i. What don't you understand?
   e. Would you add anything to this list?
   f. Which ones, if any, do you think you have successfully covered at this stage in the module? (Not to ask if student is talking about a previously completed module)
   g. Which learning outcomes do you think is the most important for this module?
      i. Why?
4) Do you think the learning outcomes are all fairly similar or are they asking different things of you?
   a. Which ones would you say are similar and which ones are different?

i. What makes them similar?

ii. What makes them different?

b. Do you feel that it's a good idea to have learning outcomes that expect different things from you?

i. How do you think it helps/doesn't help you and your learning?

5) Having looked at these learning outcomes do you think these are all achievable?

a. To what extent do you feel you need previous knowledge (i.e. previously studied modules) of the area to successfully fulfil all learning requirements?

b. Do you feel you can satisfy them all?

i. What previous knowledge or experience of the area have you had?

Conclusion

That concludes the session. Is there anything anyone would like to add? Either about what we have talked about, or any comments about other modules you are/have taken?

As previously mentioned the purpose of this session was to gather student's opinions and comments on the learning undertaken within modules and across the whole of the Computer Science degree programme. These comments will help with the analysis of the University defined learning outcomes and affect the structure of Learning Outcome taxonomy I will produce. Ultimately they can have an effect on the final suggestions I make with regards to the Learning occurring on the Computer Science degree programme in my Final Report.

Thank you all for coming and taking part. I would ask that if you know anyone else who is taking part in the study at a later date that you do not discuss the session with them until after they have completed it. You are now free to leave.