Catalyst Collaboration Final Report from Loomio

Background

Loomio was contracted to help test the Catalyst collective intelligence tools, processes and methodologies. We brought to this project our experience both in facilitating large online groups and in developing software for collective intelligence.

The two tools were Assembl and Litemap. Both of these tools allow users to pool, structure and visualise online deliberation in a manner that highlights the areas of agreement and disagreement, "contested collective intelligence". It is proposed that these capabilities allow participants to more effectively solve complex problems [1].

What happened

We announced the project on Facebook (seen by 11,644 people), resulting in 1,193 visits to the Loomio blog post explaining how to get involved in the test. As a result, 108 people signed up to participate in the study.

In the setup phase we surveyed participants on their anticipated level of participation, through their selection of one of three options:

- I will read discussions and occasionally comment
- I will read discussions and actively participate
- I will actively harvest content and map

Half of the participants were assigned to Assembl and half to Litemap with an equal mix of commitment levels in each group.

Study sub-groups for each tool were created within the large "Loomio Community" Loomio group to facilitate communication amongst the participants and the researchers, and enable more participants to discover the studies as they progressed.

Participants were provided with instructions via email and the participants' Loomio group.

Assembl
The Assembl Study Group completed a discussion in Loomio which was imported into Assembl through the atom feed. Participants gave feedback on Assembl in Loomio and answered a survey about their experience.

Litemap

Litemap attempted two approaches to testing their tool. In the first approach, the Litemap participants were further split into two separate groups and invited to map two distinct Loomio discussions. In the end, the group failed to activate as it never reached a critical mass of participants.

In the second approach, Litemap imported several discussions directly into Litemap via the atom feed as Assembl had done. These discussion were mapped by the Litemap team

Conclusions and Recommendations

Onboarding and Instructions
The "onboarding experience" must be as streamlined as possible to minimise the drop-off rate. People drop off at every point along the process (e.g. a post with 11k views on Facebook, converts to 1k views on our blog post, converts to 108 people signing up, converts to a smaller number actively participating). 90% drop-offs at each step is not unusual. The more steps that the prospective participant is required to take the less ultimate participation in a study.

Timing is critical. Communications went out before the Litemap test was actually ready to start, so momentum was lost in the interim.

Responsiveness matters. The app loading time for Litemap was particularly poor in several countries, so they culled the list down to 34 people.

Conclusion
This project highlighted the importance of user experience and engagement design in testing online collective intelligence tools. These lessons are discussed in more detail in a [summary blog post](#).