

Facilitating inclusive spaces for sharing untold stories from diverse perspectives

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STRUCTURED ABSTRACT

Contribution aim

The aim of the contribution is to share how we changed researcher thinking and practice by creating a space to facilitate the telling of untold stories from diverse perspectives.

Contribution value

We share what we learned from the mistakes we made: what works and what does not.

Research context

An aim of the “Embed EDI” project (www.embededi.com) is to create a community to advocate for inclusive usability testing. This important work is often siloed within organisations (e.g. UK Government, 2022), or is limited to a focus on a particular group (e.g. RNIB, 2022).

The fundamental gap is the sharing of experiences: first, between researchers from different areas and, second, between underrepresented groups and researchers. The main challenge in creating a community was to find inclusive ways to facilitate the discussion, ensuring untold stories from different perspectives were heard.

Findings and discussion

Between January and May 2022, we brought over 50 people together from diverse backgrounds across a multi-phase study: individuals with disabilities and/or who identified as LGBTQ+, representatives from user research organisations, and charities.

In phase 1, we mapped the usability testing journey with one of our industry partners. The mapping demonstrated usability testing involves multiple storytellers with different perspectives: clients, organisations, user-researchers and individual participants.

To create a community, it was crucial we heard the voices of potential participants underrepresented (phase 2a). Using object-centred interview methodology (Opiniano, 2021), a participant-centred storyboard was created from the phase 1 mapping. Presenting an accessible, generic story provided a focal point for participant responses during online interviews. It was well received by different participants: “it is a bit like me” and it “makes it look conversational and approachable”. Simultaneously, we held interviews with user-researchers, to hear concerns about embedding equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) into usability testing from the other side of the story (phase 2b). Template analysis was used to generate initial outputs from phases 2a and 2b and these were presented as focus objects for phase 3: the roundtable discussions.

Phase 3 was designed to bring together the different voices to share their stories. The challenges were twofold. As facilitators, we needed to manage the roundtables to engender an equitable, inclusive space. Moreover, we needed to direct the storytelling, without dominating the space. On both counts, we had varying degrees of success.

For example, in phase 2a we learned that many participants prefer to receive information in advance to “prethink things through” and “process” in their own time; therefore, we sent roundtable participants the focus objects in advance. However, this did not work for everyone as some found them “a bit intimidating”. Moreover, to help guide but not dominate the storytelling, we used breakout rooms, mixed with individuals from each of our stakeholder groups to “connect people who work in the area with people with lived experience”. After the first roundtable, we learned some participants thought “a few more pointer questions would help shape the discussion”.

The cycle of making, articulating and addressing errors afforded us the opportunity to learn, in real time, about the complexities of addressing EDI in research. One participant told us, “It’s not your fault. Not many people think in that way or are going in that direction. This study has helped you to think about it.”

Research implications

Although all our individual participants identified as LGBTQ+ and/or disabled, we note that neither of these communities are homogeneous; therefore, our participants cannot represent

their communities as a whole. Despite this, the ongoing development of our outcomes has value in terms of moving forward with embedding EDI in research. The story is not over, and we have made many mistakes, but attendees commented they “felt very empowered”. Creating roundtables “provided a space to share perspectives and gain insight”. In turn, this led to a greater awareness from usability practitioners, not only of “just how much people with lived experience struggle to even be heard” but also “the different types of inclusivity”. Already, several practitioners have reported they will change their practices; we look forward to sharing examples at the conference.

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