Lifelong Learning and Virtual Communities in the Public Administration: a case study

Nicola Villa

ICELW New York, 10-12 June 2009
• Course VS Community: the adoption of the virtual community metaphor
• Some key concepts about On Line Communities
• The Lifelong Learning project for the Autonomous Province of Trento: new approaches and services
Our Start: On Line Courses (1998)

- E-Learning application, built for the University of Trento
- Use of the COURSE metaphor
- Based on the paradigm:
  - From 1 teacher to N students
- Association between the e-courses and the real courses (didactical courses)
On Line Courses: some observations

• An e-learning system couldn’t be isolated from the rest of the world

• The course metaphor was inadequate for the **communications** and **cooperation** needs of a didactical institution

• The interaction of the members of a group, typically a community, needs the management of **roles, duties, rights and permissions**.
The needs of the participants are not closed to the physical lesson, and not have only a didactical connotation

ADOPTION OF THE VIRTUAL COMMUNITY METAPHOR
A place where people, the actors of the processes, can increase their relationship level (professors, students, staff, etc)

We have 50 different roles in the system!
The University of Trento

7 Faculties
- Economics
- Engineering
- Humanities and Philosophy
- Law
- Sciences
- Sociology

~16000 Students
~550 Professors & Researchers

Economics
Sciences
Engineering
Humanities

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On Line Communities

- Web platform able to manage virtual communities
- Based on a Collaboration Paradigm
- Organised using modules / services
- Totally developed by the Laboratory of Maieutics of the University of Trento (Department of Computer and Management Sciences)
  - We have ALL the source code
The Key concept: Virtual Community

- The COMMUNITY is very different from the COURSE
  - The community is an aggregation of people, with the possibility to share knowledge and experiences using the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)
- On Line Communities supports the communitarian activities; the e-learning is only a specialisation of these structures, not the only objective
- Examples: class, course, research group, sport association, recreational group, secretary, office, development team, meeting, fair, etc.
- The community needs specific sharing instruments
• Virtual communities metaphor
  – It is independent from the didactical metaphor
  – The community is an aggregation structure for a specific interest / purpose

• The structure of the platform consists of a series of customizable modules, able to be integrated in every information system
  – Not only in the Information system of the University of Trento..
• The platform is a mix of classic e-learning, web 2.0 and e-learning 2.0, using collaborative dynamics
• We use a blended approach, extendible to a fully online approach
• We are not tie to the logic of
  – Social network: like Facebook (too “social”)
  – Moodle and classic LSMs (too tie to the “course” metaphor)
• Closed / Opened communities
• The log in is obligatory
• Each community has an administrator
• The platform consist of a combination of services, people, communities, role, permissions
• The platform is SCORM – compliant
• Hierarchical structure
We can think of an LMS typically as a collection of virtual spaces (courses) where educational activities are carried out.
In university settings, the major part of LMSs reproduces the physic courses path, by creating a virtual space for each course.
Following the *community* metaphor, we can create not only a more linear and natural relationship among different VS, but we can also include VS that have nothing to do with education and training.
With this logic is it possible to model the aggregation/specialization dynamics of the real-world by considering the communities as a *hierarchic structure*.
• On Line Communities implement a series of services, with the objective to support the members activities inside a community

• Each community could have different services

• Each services is customisable for each community
• Up/download of files, newsgroup, forum, notice-board, agenda, community management, whiteboard, calendar, community schedule, community mailing list, sticky notes, syllabus, working areas, web videocasting, distribution list management, questionnaire management, polls, CV management, bookmarks and links management, events management, wiki, blogs, picture galleries, thesis management, community statistics, news, chat with file sharing, SCORM

• We are working on: personal diary, personal space, online presence, RSS feed, Office Communication Server integration, SCORM statistics (map the knowledge path of the single user)
The communities metaphor improve the potential of each service:

- File sharing between different communities
- Event sharing
- Each service works in different levels
  - E.g. the personal blog, the group blog, the community blog
- Merge of services
  - E.g. the wiki, super-wiki, trasversal-wiki
- An user could have different roles in different communities (and also different roles in a single community)
- The roles are completely customisable to the organisation structure
An example: wiki and community
From *Online Community* to *L3* platform

The platform has been chosen by the Autonomous Province of Trento as the new technological infrastructure for Lifelong Learning projects.

**First Phase**: training courses for public employees (*ESPERTO* – E-learning for the development of e-procurement in Trentino)

**Second Phase**: all the courses for our regional public employees (*L3* – Lifelong Learning)
From Online Community to L3 platform

LifeLong Learning Platform

- Primary School Communities
- Secondary School Communities
- On Line Communities
  - University On Line Communities
  - Communities of Practice
- ESPERTEO
  - Training communities

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The first project: Esperto (2008)

https://esperto.provincia.tn.it
• Target: public managers and buyers
• Topic: e-procurement
• Objectives:
  • Help managers to understand opportunities offered by e-procurement
  • Develop e-learning culture
• Learning approach: blended
• Technologies: LMS + video-conference
ESPERTO: multimedial services

Video Cast Stations / Collection Points

Min 2 hours by car

Didactic Main Center
ESPERTO: SCORM

Knowledge – Knowledge Management Systems (Continued)

- **Knowledge creation** or **knowledge acquisition** is the generation of new insights, ideas, or routines.
- **Socialization mode**: conversion of tacit knowledge to new tacit knowledge through social interactions and shared experience.
- **Combination mode**: the creation of new explicit knowledge by merging, categorizing, reclassifying, and synthesizing existing explicit knowledge.
- **Externalization** refers to the process of transforming knowledge from explicit knowledge into new explicit knowledge.
- **Internalization** refers to the process of transforming new explicit knowledge into tacit knowledge in the mind of the individual.

E-learning per lo sviluppo dell’e-procurement del Trentino

Prima Edizione
Aprile – Luglio 2008
A complete project for the all the didactic courses for the Public employees of the Autonomous Province of Trento
L3: Esperto + web 2.0 services + ?

- Build a bridge between Social network services and the typical LMSs services
- make our system more permeable to all experiences that take place in the web, including web 2.0
- keep control (up to a certain level) of the action taken by our users
- The creation of a Personal Learning Space, also for our Public Employees
- Provide web 2.0 services (e.g. wiki, blog)
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First step to L3 Platform

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Conclusions

• The use of community VS course
• The problems with the integration of a e-learning platform in the Public Administration
• Videocast and Virtual Lessons
• Web 2.0 and social networks in the Public Administration? → the virtual community could be a strong motivation
Thanks for your attention!!

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