Lessons Learned from Deploying a Video-Based Web 2.0 Platform in an Executive Education Context

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Abstract. Although IT has been very successful in enabling distributed, collaborative learning and knowledge creation in open-source communities, its promise in other contexts is still an open question. In this paper, we describe the deployment of a video-based Web2.0 platform in an executive education context. The platform, which we developed, makes extensive use of video, profiling, game dynamics, agents and network visualizations in order to capture the attention and involvement of the learning community members. Our goal was to provide executive education participants with an attractive, interactive platform for extending their learning and networking beyond the classroom. This experience has allowed us to identify three main barriers to Web2.0 inter-organizational learning and collaboration in executive education: technological barriers, motivational barriers and the inter-organizational aspect itself.

Keywords: collaboration, executive education, inter-organizational, knowledge management, learning, video, Web2.0.

1 Introduction

While the concept of inter-organizational learning and collaboration is not new, what is new is the increasing predominance of virtual versus real interaction. More and more information technology is being used to facilitate learning in networks whose members are globally dispersed. However, this poses significant challenges in terms of issues such as "direct touch," building trust, capturing member's attention, and sustaining learning [1]. While IT has been very successful in enabling new forms of distributed, collaborative learning and knowledge creation in the software development realm (e.g. open-source communities), its promise in contexts other than software development is still an open question [2][3][4].

In order to address this issue, we developed a video-based online environment which supports knowledge exchange, learning and collaboration and which can be adapted to various domains such as competence development [5], innovation [6], and management training [7]. It has the key features of a typical Web2.0 system according to the McAfee's SLATES paradigm [8][6], making extensive use of video, profiling, game dynamics, agents and network visualizations in order to capture the attention and involvement of the learning community members by generating three different types of user value: connection value, actionable learning value, as well as entertainment and

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instant gratification value [7]. It includes a Video Exchange Channel where members can very easily view, search, comment, rate and submit videos; a Network Visualization and Navigation Tool which helps members visualize and browse through the links between people, between people and videos, and between videos; a Profiles Space which encourages members to access information about other members, their interests, competences and networks; and a Game which proactively encourages users to access videos and connects users to each other. An important key concept underlying its design is that it also generates the necessary data (log files) to allow researchers to assess platform usage and to evaluate system benefits along the three user value dimensions.

In this paper, we describe a pilot study in which we deployed this Web2.0 platform in an executive education context. Our deployment goal was to provide executive education participants with an attractive, interactive platform for extending their learning and networking beyond the classroom experience, and in particular to:

1. Increase the proficiency level of their management competence and experience during and after the executive development programme.
2. Nurture and strengthen the cross-cultural cross-functional professional network developed while on campus.
3. Make it fun and simple for them to share their experiences of implementing ideas from courses in their company, keep up-to-date with new developments in relevant managerial topics, and keep in touch with each other.

2 Learning Community Deployment Context

The user group was the participants of the General Management Programme (GMP) at CEDEP– the European Centre for Executive Development. The objective of the GMP is to groom tomorrow's top leaders. Participants are executives with 8 to 10 years of management experience and with international and general management responsibilities. Learning focuses on understanding the strategic issues at stake, their business implications and how to optimise policy choices to capitalise business opportunities and meet the needs of various conflicting stakeholders. After the GMP experience executives should be better able to adapt company strategy, processes and organisational structure to an ambiguous and evolving environment.

The GMP is a six week on-site course given over the period of one year in three two-week modules P1, P2 and P3. We deployed our Web2.0 platform during P2. This is because during the six months between P2 and P3 participants are expected to devote some time to group projects while back in the office.

The 56 GMP participants had prior experience in a wide variety of business domains including change, communication, control, finance, general management, human resources, information technology, legal, logistics, marketing, production/operations, purchasing, quality, R&D, and sales. They were mainly men (80%). They ranged in age from 33 to 55 with an average age of 42. Twenty-two different nationalities were represented albeit with a large French and Belgian contingent (34%). Participants worked for 21 different companies and were located all over the world.

3 Deployment Design

We worked closely with the GMP Director to adapt our Web2.0 platform to the needs of the GMP participants. We called this adaptation GMPTube. Its main learning objective was to stimulate participants to continue cross-company collaborative learning while back in the office between modules P2 and P3. For example, by sharing experiences about putting the theory learned at CEDEP into practice, by providing input to one of the group project themes, or by participating in the EagleRacing collaboration simulation [9].

The three channels of GMPTube are: Subjects & Themes (about GMP Courses and Group Project Themes), Experiences (from participants about their experiences putting theory into practice in their companies) and Us (about people). We had professors make short videos about their courses for the Subjects & Themes Channel. In addition, we made a short place-holder video about each project theme for the Subjects & Themes Channel. INSEAD researchers and the GMP Director made videos about themselves and their role in the project for the Us Channel.

Fig. 1. GMPTube Channel Space

As the social aspect of GMPTube is crucial, we populated GMPTube with photos and profile information about all of the GMP community members: INSEAD researchers, CEDEP staff and GMP participants. CEDEP provided a file with the information about GMP participants which we were able to upload directly into GMPTube. Thus all participants were pre-registered in GMPTube and could log in and begin using it immediately. In addition, we also made initial "knows" relationships between members (i.e. all the INSEAD and CEDEP staff know each other, the participants all know the GMP Director, the GMP Coordinator, and the other members of their section (E1 or E2)). We also identified the business competences covered by GMP courses to modify the competences area of the profile.

We introduced GMPTube to the participants during a 2 hour workshop as a new way of experiencing collaboration online, adding value to group projects, exchanging experiences and trying out Web 2.0 trends, and gave examples of how similar platforms are being used to stimulate innovation in organizations as well as within virtual teams and communities. We spoke about the collaboration between CEDEP and INSEAD which is focused on learning innovations in inter-organizational contexts and elaborated on the value that GMPTube could add to the General Management Programme. We then demonstrated GMPTube. The last 45 minutes of the workshop was allocated for group work and included hands-on experience with GMPTube.

For the group work, participants were split into 10 groups based on their choice of Project Theme. Each group was asked to make a video explaining why their group is interested in the theme, which type of relevant input they would like to get from others, and why others should be motivated to do this. They were asked to spend the first 30 minutes preparing to make their video, and then go to the meeting rooms to produce their video during the last 15 minutes.

After the group work, participants returned to the amphitheatre to watch each other's videos. At the end of the session participants were given the following tasks to accomplish during the 6 month break between modules 2 and 3:

- Log into GMPTube briefly at least once every two weeks.
- Participate in the EagleRacing simulation by submitting a decision video in the next month.
- Submit at least 2 Experience Videos during the first 2 months, one related to your group's Theme, and one related to another group's Theme.

4 Discussion of Evaluation Results

The GMPTube evaluation plan is summarized in Table 1. Results from the GMPTube pre-workshop survey showed that the participants were very open to sharing experiences and giving feedback. However, they were not all avid users of IT. Many did not use social networking websites or even visit websites for pure relaxation purposes. Furthermore, many did not feel at ease in front of a camera and a show of hands in the GMPTube workshop indicated that none of the participants owned a webcam.

During the GMPTube demonstration, some participants pointed out that their company's firewalls would probably not allow them to access GMPTube from work. Some participants also noticed that there was a guest login. They did not like this and did not want unknown people or professors accessing GMPTube. They only felt comfortable sharing with other participants. In response to this, we immediately removed the guest login. One observer noted "I question whether the GMP is the right demographic? It seems like these guys may be a generation too old…They saw all of the hurdles right away and less of the opportunities".

The GMP Director collected feedback from the participants during an evaluation session at the end of Module 2. Overall, they found the presentation and concept interesting, but felt that holding the session in the evening was bad as people were tired. Only one video was filmed and submitted to GMPTube while the participants

Table 1. GMPTube Evaluation Plan

Evaluation Target	Source	Type of data	Timing
Context	CEDEP – interviews, documentation	Qualitative description of the CEDEP learning environment.	Before launch
Participants characteristics	CEDEP – Excel file	Quantitative and qualitative (age, nationality, job title, company, etc.)	Before launch
Participant information sharing and technology habits	Survey	Quantitative – 10 questions.	Before launch
Participant first impressions of GMPTube	Participant Module 2 evaluation (GMP Director)	Qualitative – participant comments about first GMPTube workshop	Just after launch.
Pilot management	Pilot implementers	Record of observations during pilot	From launch until pilot end.
Participant's use of GMPTube	Log files	Quantitative usage data	From launch until pilot end.
Quality/relevance of participant's contributions.	Videos, Comments and Discussion threads	Subjective assessment of videos and textual data by pilot implementers	From launch until pilot end.
Reasons underlying participant's GMPTube usage	Email, Interviews	Qualitative	From launch until pilot end.
Participant final impressions of GMPTube	ThinkTank (Workshop) & Participant Module 3 evaluation (GMP Director)	Qualitative – participant comments about GMPTube experience	Pilot end.

were still on campus - an amusing video of participant's singing in the bar filmed with someone's phone entitled "musical collaboration". In addition, one funny (to Westerners) musical cartoon video was uploaded - "Experience Saudi Arabia".

The professor sent an activation email one week after the workshop, when they had returned home, reminding participants about GMPTube and inviting them to participate in the EagleRacing simulation. Although one participant immediately logged into GMPTube and had a short online chat there with the professor, no participants were interested in playing the EagleRacing simulation online once back at the office. Not one participant submitted an Experience video between P2 and P3.

Analysis of the GMPTube log files showed that once participants left CEDEP and went back in their companies, very few participants watched and rated videos, and no participants shared experiences (e.g. submitted videos, documents and links) or engaged in social exchanges such as commenting and discussions.

Two months after the workshop, about midway between P2 and P3, we sent them an email to collect their feedback. In particular, we asked them (1) if they had

encountered any barriers preventing them to access GMPTube, (2) the main reasons why they are not bigger users, and (3) the main reason why they had never submitted a video. In answer to these questions they mentioned a number of technical and non-technical barriers. Technical barriers included the company firewall, Acrobat Flash Player not allowed on company desktops, incompatible software and lack of a webcam. Non-Technical barriers included no time, no good reason to use yet as there was a lack of a defined group project, the group project was just starting, and no new input from classmates, lack of experience with technology, lack of interest in networking tools, and a dislike of being filmed.

Once they were back on campus for P3, the executive education participants were not interested in pursuing the GMPTube experience. Improving their learning experience was not a compelling enough business objective; instead they requested that the professor speak about emerging technologies and their impact on business. Therefore, we did not hold a final ThinkTank session to collect their opinions as planned.

5 Conclusions

This experience has allowed us to identify three main barriers to Web2.0 inter-organizational learning and collaboration in executive education: technological barriers, motivational barriers and the inter-organizational aspect itself. First of all, many executives were unable to access the platform from their companies. This is a major barrier. Organizations can't expect to profit from Web2.0 tools if they forbid access to them, and we cannot expect managers to spend time doing something which is not rewarded. The fact that our platform is video-driven posed a problem both with company firewalls, and with the need for managers to use webcams to share experiences as most participants did not have one.

Motivation is key. If they were motivated, participants could have bought a webcam and accessed the platform from home. However, there are many more pressing demands on the participants' time once they have left the campus and are back in their companies and families, and our platform was not "fun and simple" enough. There are easier alternative ways to collaborate and keep in contact with classmates such as email and LinkedIn that are not video-driven. In addition, the participants' very short experience of the platform in class was as a place to exchange knowledge about group projects; however, as these were disbanded, participants' saw no good reason to use it for that purpose either.

Finally, the inter-organizational aspect is a barrier because of confidentiality issues. It is one thing to share an experience in class, and quite another thing to have some lasting proof that you said something about your company that you should not have. How much can you safely say about your experience implementing ideas from executive training in your company to people in other organizations? Even people used to face-to-face inter-organizational exchanges hesitate to extend this to an online environment.

Interestingly, although the short exposure to GMPTube did not trigger the desired learning-orientated motivation, executives from three large companies in the biopharma, media and industrial sectors have expressed interest in applying it internally in their companies as a way to connect marketing people, creative people and IT professionals respectively, rather than using it to exchange knowledge with classmates.

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