Chapter 62
Creating a Community of Practice in Learning

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ABSTRACT

Social media plays a huge part in Filipinos' lives. In the area of learning, the proponents observed the emergence of an online community of practice using Facebook groups that has over 350 members. The aim of the chapter is to answer the question: How do online communities of practice engage students to learn and build new knowledge? The objective is to propose a framework that will guide readers to build their own online community of practice based on its learning context. To achieve the objective, the proponents use the inductive approach of grounded theory using action research. Results show that community members used different Facebook features to support their ongoing community of practice. Further studies may also assess the applicability of the framework in other areas of development.

INTRODUCTION

Creating a Facebook group for every new class is becoming a common practice. One of the top reasons for doing so is because the students are already on Facebook regularly. While being inside Facebook, they could be notified of group posts. Posts could include class announcements, lecture/presentation materials, questions/comments from students, links to videos and other resources for the class, etc.

Usually, a new Facebook group is made for every section for every subject. Let's say one

professor is teaching 3 sections of the same subject. He will create 3 separate Facebook groups for each of the sections, even if they're all the same subject.

It makes the groups very focused. The group is applicable for a specific section and will probably be active for only a specific term. After the term ends, the group will become inactive since students are already done with that subject. In addition, the interactions in the group are very section-specific. A question raised in a particular class may not be the same question raised in the other classes.

There is an alternative to the scenario above. Instead of creating a new Facebook group for every section, only one group is created for all the sections of the same subject. And not only is the group active for a specific term only, it will be the same group that would be used for succeeding terms that the subject would be offered. Because of which, an online Community of Practice (CoP) is formed for that particular subject. Students who have already finished the course could still participate and even serve as mentors for the current students.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Communities of Practice

Every year, corporations spend millions of dollars on training and educating their employees. According to the American Society for Training and Development, these corporations spend approximately one thousand dollars per employee per year in 2005. The investment in training and education stems from the current trend that businesses are continuing to stay on the cutting-edge to maintain their competitive advantage over other organizations. Given that knowledge-based organizations will continue to be the driving force of economy, it is essential for organizations to support the knowledge and information needs of their workers (Hara, 2009).

In the past, professional development was discussed within the context of traditional learning. However, traditional learning methods have been criticized for focusing on transmission of explicit knowledge. As a result, administrators have a difficulty in determining the tangible impact of traditional learning methods because of the inherent difficulties of applying knowledge learned in a traditional setting to the work environment (Hara, 2009).

Current research supports the assertion that learning must take place within an organiza-tional context for it to be considered useful. Consequently, a shift from traditional methods to a system of learning founded on collaboration and experience should be considered. Such learning can best be supported through communities of practice (COPs) (Hara, 2009).

Concept of Communities of Practice

Communities of Practice (COPs) are "collaborative, informal networks that support professional practitioners in their efforts to develop shared understandings and engage in work-relevant knowledge building" (Hara, 2009). In other words, these are groups of people who share a common goal, problems or passions about a given topic and want to deepen their knowledge and expertise in one area on an ongoing basis (Clark, 2006).

The ability of COPs to foster a friendly environment for discussing common subject matters and concerns encourages the creation and transfer of new knowledge. It also assists in connecting experts and practitioners with a common professional interest and similar experiences and expertise. COPs use face to face meetings, workspaces, maps and networks to promote peer interaction and address the various needs in all levels of an organization (Clarke, 2006).

Background on Communities of Practice

The term, communities of practice, originated from Lave and Wenger in 1991. Their original definition emphasized "legitimate peripheral participation", a form of apprenticeship which allows newcomers to participate while learning the lingo and develop a shared identity of the community. The end result of the process is the assimilation into the community for the newcomer (Hara, 2009).

The following is the original definition of communities of practice as defined by Lave and Wenger (2006):

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