Chapter XVIII
Design Guidelines for Collaboration and Participation with Examples from the LN4LD (Learning Network for Learning Design)

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents some design guidelines for collaboration and participation in blended learning networks. As an exemplary network, we describe LN4LD (Learning Network for Learning Design), which was designed to promote learning and discussion about IMS-Learning Design. 'Lessons learned' from pilot implementations of this network over a period of five years are phrased as guidelines for future

learning network implementations. The chapter focuses on the positive influence of incentive mechanisms and face-to-face meetings on active participation. These successful interventions are explained from theories about self-organization, social exchange, and social affordances. Repeated measurements show the levels of both passive (accessing and reading information) and active participation (posting, replying, and rating) to significantly increase as a result of both interventions. Both the use of incentive mechanisms and face-to-face meetings can therefore be considered as valuable elements for future models for collaboration in learning networks and for establishing an international community of "learning designers."

INTRODUCTION

Today's lifelong learner is in a constant need to update knowledge and competences, given certain personal or employment-related motives (Aspin & Chapman, 2000; Field, 2001). Online, distributed lifelong facilities can be designed that cater for these needs at various levels of competence development. However, merely introducing such facilities will not suffice. Potential learners should also be motivated to actually use and actively contribute (Fisher & Ostwald, 2002). So called 'free-riding' or lurking' is one of the main problems in online learning (Olson, 1965). Our work aims to derive design guidelines for these facilities to foster collaboration and dissemination.

The factors and mechanisms that motivate people to codify and share knowledge for the benefit of others have been identified as a priority area for individual companies (Smith and Farquhar, 2000). They represent the most commonly discussed topic among practitioners and academics at conferences on knowledge management (Prusak, 1999). To some, the encouragement of employees to contribute knowledge and collaborate is even more important than the more technical (interoperability) issues related to its capture, storage, and dissemination (Boisot & Griffiths, 1999). What might then motivate an individual to collaborate and participate actively in a learning network to respond to others' questions, contribute content, complete activities, and carry out assessments?

This chapter will address some critical design issues in setting up lifelong learning networks and will focus on the (successful) introduction of two mechanisms to increase (active) participation in such learning networks (i.e., reward systems and complementary face-to-face meetings). For this purpose, we use an exemplary lifelong learning network on the topic of learning design representation. The field of learning technology can be characterized as internationally oriented, highly specialized and fragmented, and developing rapidly. The rather heterogeneous community involved and interested in this field is in need of online, distributed facilities that cater for lifelong competence development.

Our main experiences over five years with setting up such facilities for learning about and discussing IMS-Learning Design (IMS-LD, 2003) will be presented, a learning technology specification currently considered as the worldwide default standard for representing (more complex) learning designs. We will distinguish three phases (initial experiences, introducing incentive mechanisms, and introducing face-to-face meetings). The chapter continues by describing some preliminary experiences (period: 2001–2004) in setting up facilities to promote learning in the area of educational modeling languages (Initial Experiences section). Self-organization and social exchange will be introduced as theories that provide us with guidelines on how to increase active participation. The following sections

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