

Chapter 16

Opportunistic (L)earning in the Mobile Knowledge Society

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the concept of opportunistic collaboration within the emerging mobile knowledge society. The paper illustrates how opportunistic collaboration can be applied to the areas of learning and earning by demonstrating how to transform a traditional unemployment agency into an Opportunistic Collaboration Agency based on an entrepreneurial supply-support network structured in the form of a prosumer manifold. The OCA pattern provides ways to capture the dynamics of entrepreneurial work-relations in the emerging 'work-portfolio society', increase the transparency of the entire value chain of economic activities, and create prosumer value loops that can support multi-dimensional bartering and increase the opportunities for marginalized groups of people to create value together. The paper ends by demonstrating how to use the OCA pattern to transform a traditional educational institution into an Opportunistic Learning Activity Broker that could help to bridge the gap between formal and informal learning.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

This paper deals with opportunistic collaboration¹ within the context of *learning and earning*, which are increasingly important and interconnected activities in modern life. Unplanned opportuni-

ties for collaboration arise naturally in our present mobile knowledge society, where increasing mobility brings both people and ideas into contact faster than ever before. In this context, 'mobile knowledge' has at least two different meanings: (i) knowledge that moves (= disseminates), and (ii) knowledge that is created and communicated by mobile agents. In the mobile knowledge society,

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knowledge is disseminated at an ever-increasing rate, and more and more mobile knowledge agents are coming into play.

The effects on learning, introduced by this type of mobility, is a matter of intense research. The approach of the London Mobile Learning Group (Pachler, 2009; Pachler, Bachmair, & Cook, 2010) is based on a mobile complex that operates within a socio-cultural ecology. This ecology consists of agents, who interact with each other within different structures, and who behave according to various cultural practices. Learning is viewed as culturally situated meaning-making, where each learner forms her own personal learning habitus, largely driven by the normalization of mobile devices in everyday life.

A key aspect of the socio-cultural ecological approach to education is the increasing individualization of risk-taking. In education, the responsibility for meaning-making is being transferred from the state to the individual, who is reflected in the shift in educational rhetoric from 'teaching' to 'learning.' It is also related to the ongoing fragmentation of mass communication, driven by the emergence of social media.² A key aspect of the "mobile complex" (Pachler, Bachmair, & Cook, 2010; Pachler, 2009) is the increasing interrelation of internet services with user activities around mobile device use. All these characteristics of mobile learning promote opportunistic collaboration in a multitude of different ways (Bruns, 2009b). In fact, young people constantly make use of social media on mobile devices to collaborate opportunistically. "Who will join whom at what party" is an example of a frequently recurring problem domain for such collaboration.

The advantages of the opportunistic collaboration patterns that are made possible by using mobile devices in social interactions are being exploited in many different ways. Calling your partner on his/her way home from work and asking him/her to pick up something that you suddenly found missing for your dinner is a familiar example from family life. Within traditional (=

broadcast-oriented) media, many big news sites have areas where anyone can upload material that could be interesting for the "news makers" to broadcast.³ The big news networks know that they cannot control who will be standing next to an interesting news item of today — with access to a camera to document it. They also know that the number of potential eyewitnesses with documenting capabilities has increased beyond the wildest expectations of anyone from 20 years ago, and today covers almost half the population on this planet. The type of spontaneous "media swarming" that is made possible by mobile and web-enabled technologies is well known, and mostly feared, by celebrities who are intensely monitored by our present "mobile-little-brother society". Whenever a celebrity shows herself in public, little brother sees her and immediately uploads the documentation to prove it.⁴ This type of opportunistic media swarming is also justly feared by politicians that have an opposition to oppress, a fact that was recently demonstrated by the efficient use of Twitter in the orchestration of election protests in Iran.

Another interesting example that involves a synchronous form of opportunistic collaboration is CITIHAIQ, a system for opportunistic car-ride sharing that is being developed in Sweden, and which is planned to be launched during 2010. By sending an SMS to a server, person A can announce that she is going to drive from A to B and that she is willing to take passengers. At the same time person B can inform the server that they are looking for a ride from C to D. Based on location information and declared intentions, the server can then figure out opportunistic matches between the set of drivers and the set of potential passengers—and inform the corresponding people about suitable meeting points to take advantage of the ride-sharing opportunities that happen to be available.

Synchronous communication depends on finding a time slot "that works" for everybody. In our time-poor 'busyness'-driven society, where we

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