

D.12. A COLLABORATIVE PLATFORM

CONTENTS

COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION TOOLS	Page 2
Social Networking	Page 4
CONTENT MANAGEMENT	Page 5
USER GENERATED CONTENT-INVOLVING THE COMMUNITY	Page 6
Moderation of content	Page 10

1. COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION TOOLS

Technology offers new channels of communication among trainees and learning participants of different cultural backgrounds, ability levels and specific areas of expertise. Communication and collaboration tools are of great importance for creating an integrated and coherent vision for the platform in order to optimize the final outcomes for the trainees.

□ Discussion forum

Information and communication technologies offer new possibilities for collaborative knowledge construction. The online discussion forum represents an alternative type of training, and can lead to enhanced learning outcomes for trainees. Communication, rather than individual knowledge acquisition, is important to increase the quality of instruction for all the customs and taxation officials.

Enhanced learning outcomes such as increased motivation and engagement in the learning task, deeper levels of understanding, are a direct result of the adoption of conversational modes of training that is why the introduction of online education may open unprecedented opportunities for training interactivity.

The online discussion forum integrated in within an eTraining solution is a virtual learning environment in which trainees are likely to learn as much from one another as from course materials or trainers.

□ **Chat and instant messaging**

Instant messaging and group chat application applied to geographically distributed workgroups can increase the outcomes of training. A chat focused on training tasks can convey many important pieces of information and fulfil the need of informal talk for the trainees.

Current online chat environments and instant messaging provide new opportunities for communication. The tool proves its utility based on the number of participants in a conversation and the subtle nuances of expression that enrich face to face speech.

□ **Audio/video conferencing**

A conference system enables the participants in training to communicate in real time with other users by utilizing various means of communication, inclusively: audio and video.

The new technologies incorporated in the videoconferencing systems represent a new, innovative communication mode that stands between the telephone call and the face-to-face meeting. The audio-video technology supports a dramatic increase in the amount of multimedia content available for the trainees who can examine large amounts of multimedia content quickly.

The audio/video conferencing system will not only increase the outcomes of training but it will reduce the need to travel as well as the subsequent costs involved in the traditional training process.

□ **Shared content, documents and workspaces**

A significant growth in recent years has been noticed amongst services that facilitate the storage and sharing of content. If people are more and more inclined to use these services in their leisure time, this trend should be applied for business and administrative use. This allows people to sharing applications, desktop, presentations and

documents. One can use the sharing information/ data option with the other participants in the session and include sharing applications, sharing documents, sharing web browser or even the whole Windows Desktop.

Nowadays millions of people participate in the sharing and exchange of various forms of content by producing their own documents, podcasts, videos, photos etc. These outcomes can be of real help as part of a professional interactive training and would represent also a way to motivate trainees to become more involved in the training.

This development has only been made possible through the widespread adoption of high quality, but relatively low cost digital media technology which is available for the majority of users.

2. Social Networking

Professional and social networking services can increase the feeling of community among all the stakeholders involved in the project.

The social networking services will allow users to create a profile for themselves and have a self-description page. They will be able to make friends and groups as well as use the system of recommendations for colleagues with whom they worked in various

projects or participated in trainings. This will help increase the group' s cohesion and affiliation.

Among the benefits of a social networking component we can mention:

- the possibility to meet people, find like minds and socialize with peers -this socialization may include reading the profile pages of other members as well as the possibility to even contact them
- sharing content related to training or any other professional content
- creating and encouraging diversity of ideas- because the Internet gives professionals from all around the world access to the social networking site
- users can be organized based on their geographic features and their attributes
- a recommendation system linked to trust can be integrated in the portal to give more credibility to the professionals from this domain

The social networks will include additional features, such as the ability to create groups that share common interests or affiliations, upload

or stream videos, and hold discussions in forums. By the means of this new tool the stakeholders of the project can benefit of more professional opportunities.

3. CONTENT MANAGEMENT

The quality and quantity of the content is the critical aspect for the success of online communities.

The main roles and processes proposed, related to content management, are:

- **Web-master** (chief editor), responsible for the overall concept and operation of the tool. The web-master is ultimately responsible for all the content.
- **Content manager** – the content manager' s role is to give direction and support.
- **Content editor**, responsible for managing the content: adding, updating, moving, removing, approving/rejecting.
- **Content author** - responsibilities: write and enter content, decide when and how it should appear on the site, submit the content for authorization to the appropriate editor. In the initial stage of the project, due to reduced activity, the role of content authors will be covered by content editors.

4.USER GENERATED CONTENT-INVOLVING THE COMMUNITY

The most important contributor („author“) must be the **community of users**, following the principle of **user-generated content**. The small individual contribution of each of the hundreds or thousands of users increases usually the value and quality (and sometimes it decreases quality!); but it increases exponentially the quantity of the generated content.

A large contributing community must be supported, encouraged and managed.

A functioning online community is much more than “the group of users” . It is a social group, which develops habits, customs, un-written rules. The benefits of managing to create a functioning “online community” are not only increased quantity of user-generated content, but also:

- increased quality;
- more efficient processes for generating collaborative content: content without one single-author, but with multiple authors. The typical example of tool for generating collaborative content is wiki; in the same time, functional

- increased responsiveness(e.g. questions and requests for support from users are very fast answered by the community itself).

What we are aiming at, is creating a **functioning collaborative online learning environment**.

The Moderator

The key role for supporting the community belongs to the moderator, which is a content editor with supplementary privileges and enhanced role.

The moderators should cover specific sections based on their professional knowledge. Their area of intervention must be as limited as possible, so that they may be able to actively control the specific section.

For each section, a profile of the „ideal moderator“ will be established based on previous experience of the consortium.

A general document outlining the rules of behaviour for moderators will be established based on previous experience of the consortium.

The key characteristics of a moderator are ethical and personality traits (technical knowledge is only second as importance). The

moderator must be respected by the community as a person, so that his/her decisions become respected as well. He/she must be a good mediator of conflicts, calm and impartial (not getting involved in any dispute between users or between ideas). He should get involved in a conflict only when absolutely necessary (the rule of minimum intervention). He should encourage the community to participate and contribute as well.

The moderators should be chosen from the community itself. This will allow an increase in the involvement of the community, an increase in the trust/respect for the moderator from the part of the community.

Two perspectives must be considered for the successful coordination of a contributing online community: encouraging the community to contribute (incentives) and controlling the content that the community is generating.

- Involving and supporting the community. The purpose is increase in the quantity of content, and of its relevance. Also, increase in the responsiveness of the community to individual requests for support (questions from one user answer by another user). An online community is still a social group, which can be analyzed from a sociological point of view. Creating the

community and thereafter maintaining and growing it require special tools. The main method is incentives (coercion works poorly in online systems). The incentives are defined considering the users' characteristics. The easiest incentives are virtual contests and prizes, where the jury may be the community itself (through web voting tools).

- For B-Train2, considering the user audience, the main tool proposed is incentives without a (significant) financial value, but with honorific nominations („contributor of the month” , „article of the year”). Additionally, we propose including the most active contributors to the dissemination events and working groups.
- A key incentive is the relevance of the content (and community-support!) itself, for the user' s day-to-day activity, or at least its relevance for particular events such as trainings and certifications.
- Controlling the content. The purpose is to increase or at least maintain the quality of user-generated content. This is done by:
 - Control of access (security credentials);
 - Rules and guidelines;
 - Moderation of content.

Control of access (security credentials)

- At the lowest level, the users that contribute content must be authenticated based on at least username and password. Their identity must be validated against at least a valid email address.
- A system of temporary or non-temporary banning of users, per section or overall, will be implemented, in order to control users that may not be controlled by normal moderation.

Rules and guidelines

Rules and guidelines will be established regarding allowed, prohibited and recommended content, for each type of content. The typical example is the rules and guidelines for ethical behaviour in a public web-based discussion forum and in a synchronous chat session.

- As with all procedures, rules must be kept at a minimum – the more rules we have, the less involvement from the community and the smaller the quantity of generated content. While there must be a balance between quantity and quality, online communities must have a large degree of freedom (at least in specific sections) in order to develop.
- From the implementation point of view, we will enforce 2 types of rules:

1. **Technical, system-built rules.** These enforced by technical means, either encoded in the software system or parameterized. They will allow or restrict specific operations on specific types of content for specific users. E.g. of such rules: non-authenticated users may not post any content; only moderators are allowed to modify another user' s content; files are (or are not) allowed as attachments to events in the shared calendar. These system-built rules do not need dissemination within the community, since the system forces their application by design.
2. **Rules that require human intervention for their implementation:** language, respect of other users, phrasing, grammar, orthography, significance or relevance of content, accuracy of information etc. These rules and guidelines must be disseminated through the community: the rules must be enforced and the guidelines must be encouraged. A good practice for encouraging the application of the rules and guidelines is to allow the community to contribute to writing them, so that the community takes responsibility and ownership on the „rules and guidelines“ .

Moderation of content

We propose to employ 2 types of moderation, reactive and proactive. The decision on which method is employed for each content type/section depends on the frequency of change and the importance of the quality of the specific content.

All content generated by the community must be moderated in some way.

The content published by authorized operators (web-master or editors) does not require moderation, since it already follows a strictly enforced approval/publishing procedure.

- **Strong, proactive moderation:** the content submitted by the community is not published until specifically approved by the moderator. Typical usage: for articles or events, where accuracy of information is important.
- **Weak, reactive moderation:** the submitted content is published immediately; afterwards it may be moderated if needed (modified, removed, moved).

- The typical usage of reactive moderation is in real-time collaboration tools (chat, audio and video conference, application sharing and document sharing) but also in asynchronous communication and collaboration tools with a high rate of content updates - such as a discussion forum.
- The main tool for moderating is in this case the reporting of abuses and, in general, reporting of behaviour which is incompatible with the system's rules and guidelines, coming from the community itself (users reporting to moderators on the behaviour of other users, or on specific pieces of non-conforming content).

The moderator of the section has a specific set of tools for moderation: receiving notifications; approving/rejecting/modifying/moving content (removing content should not be allowed even by moderators in order to insure traceability); banning users from certain operations.