Editorial

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Biographical notes: Judith Molka-Danielsen is an Associate Professor with the Department of Economics, Informatics and Social Science at Molde University College in Norway. Her PhD (in Information Sciences in 1998) is from the University of Pittsburgh, USA. She presently teaches in the Information Management Program courses in 'User Support & Education', 'E-Business' and 'Knowledge Networks'. Molka-Danielsen leads an evaluation team in the international collaboration 'Kamimo Project' which began in 2007 to examine life-long educational opportunities within virtual societies. The project is using Second Life.

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Virtual learning is an emerging strategy for many universities and learning organisations. Universities receive pressure from competitive business environments to ensure their graduates have the right skills to prepare them for work in the modern workplace. Depending on the students background many skills can be difficult to acquire through traditional classroom experiences. What elements of the learning environment are associated with motivation and achievement? Novel approaches in teaching methods and use of Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) associated with tools can offer opportunities to support learning in social contexts as they can support social networks and transfer of knowledge.

The first article of this special issue examines the changing role of educators that mitigate their approaches to behave more like a coach in conveying the discipline of Information Technology to students. The authors of 'Learning from achievement: scaffolding student projects in software engineering' evaluate the use of scaffolding in a problem-based learning pedagogic approach. Data for their study are collected over a period of five years with 1400 Bachelor students in a software engineering program at the Norwegian School of IT in Norway.

The second article, 'Empathy in virtual learning environments' offers an exploratory study of the role of empathy as a motivating factor in learning and further shows how this may be evaluated in VLEs. The study begins with reviews a variety of teaching methodologies. An evaluation framework is introduced for exploration of teaching methodologies to uncover their potential for support of empathic factors in the teacher and learner relationship. The study attempts to identify factors that may impact learning, and is a first step in a study that explores how artefacts within specific VLEs support educators.

The third article, 'The web learning system of "Virtual eBMS": a tool supporting unstructured and just-in-time learning' gives us insight as to how learning systems can support concepts of just-in-time knowledge sharing that require support of learning processes that are increasingly customised, on-demand and unstructured. In particular the authors' reports on a new web learning component of 'Virtual eBMS', a web-based system designed and implemented at the e-Business Management Section of the Scuola Superiore ISUFI – University of Salento in Italy. They highlight content-oriented perspective and the service-oriented perspective of the studied system, in comparison to a traditional web learning system.

The second part of this special issue focuses on knowledge sharing. Knowledge sharing in organisations and communities has become a critical factor to group success. In particular, among the 'right skills' demanded of workers, are social and interactive skills. These are based on the ever increasing challenges on individual cognitive skills and that often the work necessitates team based collaborations to achieve goals. Conditions on workers can be additive as they are faced with increasing time pressure to acquire new skills and to learn about new technologies. Yet another confounding factor may be that knowledge sharing must be implemented among members that are mobile or geographically dispersed. Given these complex factors, modern organisations are challenged with the task of tracking how knowledge is created, who knows what, and how to capture personal tacit knowledge of the individual and to transfer it more effectively to their communities or organisations.

In introduction to the fourth article, 'Transfer of knowledge in multinational enterprises: a resource-based view' we will use the authors own words to relate the relevancy of this research to our special issue theme. "The cross-border transfer of knowledge is a key ingredient for the success of Multinational Enterprises (MNEs). Few studies have investigated how ICTs can support the cross-border transfer of knowledge in cross-cultural contexts and still fewer have advanced a theoretical perspective on culture effects. This article sets the context for the need and value of knowledge sharing in the present world of business. Using resource-based view as grounding this study offers a theoretical framework that explains the potential benefits of ICTs to multinational enterprise practices in dissimilar cultural contexts by explicitly examining the role of technology, demographic dissimilarity, and a firm's ability to transfer knowledge. It also presents a set of propositions distilled from empirical evidence and theoretical considerations to guide future research in this area. This contribution is unique in the sense that it proposes a model of specific relationships among three key resource-related constructs to explain knowledge transfer in multinational enterprises."

The fifth article, 'An Indian logic-based knowledge sharing architecture for virtual knowledge communities' introduces a protocol to explain knowledge sharing in a community. It examines inclusion/exclusion of volunteers and regulation of discussion in autonomous knowledge-sharing scenario among a collection of volunteers. The study uses the context of the initial predicates of world knowledge ontology represented in Indianised logics. The study groups volunteers according to a degree of trust, based on which the proposed knowledge is accepted or rejected. The protocol uses this rationality for exchanges in debate, knowledge exploration, and a definite conclusion is reached at the end of discussion irrespective of the winning/losing of the individual arguments. In this study, the volunteers gain new and valid knowledge, which they may put to use in the future decisions and arrive at new conclusions.

The final article, 'Interaction quality within communities of practice: contextual factors of utilising different communication media' reports on an empirical investigation of communications between 22 Communities of Practice (CoPs) composed of 191 members of a multinational company. The study with great research rigour explores how the utilisation of different communication media, face-to-face, synchronous (virtual) communication and asynchronous (virtual) communication, add to the quality of interaction. This research supports the proposition that quality of communication is a success-driving factor.

Virtual learning and knowledge sharing are in essence a related strategy. Virtual learning will open new opportunities for knowledge creation and sharing. Though information technologies virtual learning can be integrated into organisational and community learning strategies.

The topics of this special issue amazingly give reflection on a large range of issues:

- virtual learning technologies applied in business and CoPs
- new teaching methodologies including the use of virtual learning in education and academic development
- knowledge sharing strategies and organisational structures supported through IT for network building

- case studies of learning organisations methods and technologies in use
- scaffolding learning through virtual environments
- assessment of virtual learning in education, business and CoPs
- personalised strategies for knowledge tracking and transfer in organisations.

Through this special issue we address some of the critical issues concerning virtual learning and knowledge sharing; clearly this is only a selection rather than a comprehensive coverage of all major areas but we do hope this special issue will encourage further research and foster new learning techniques.