Editorial

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Biographical notes: Piet Kommers is an Associate Professor at the University of Twente. His specialties are advanced learning tools such as concept mapping, virtual reality and mobile learning. His research and teaching stretch from teacher education via the European joint research projects to international projects under the auspices of UNESCO. His recent publications are on learners' preconceptions and representations that express pre-intuitive ideas before the actual learning may start: *Cognitive Support for Learning and Imagining the Unknown*. He is the Editor of several research journals and organises conferences in mobile learning, e-society and web-based communities.

Margriet Simmerling is a Peer Consultant/Senior Manager in R&D projects in the area of e-society and web-based communities. She participates in the Advisory Board for the Dutch Ministry of Economical Affairs and is active as an Expert and Reviewer for the European Commission. She designs and moderates e-learning modules and workshops in the domain of education technology and psychology at the PhD level.

As it became quite hard to imagine any longer any field of society where web-based communities did not penetrate yet, it is most urgent now to focus on its economical impact and its side effects. The sudden economical tremble has awoken a fresh alert on how to find new economical mechanisms in order to ignite customers' courage and lust. Already we have seen that the new gathering and acting via the web offers unexpected fast penetrations and growth of new services. This special issue, however, addresses the more tangible prospects for enterprises to transform from traditional product-market combinations into web-based networks that leave behind the pain of costly urban penetrations like needed before.

In order to have a better feeling for the speed and the magnitude of the web-based social structuring among which the web communities are evolving, we consider it as helpful to rephrase the longer line from web-information, via web grouping until self-organising interweaving of human expertise via the web in the next decade.

Web-based communities can be seen as the vital element in social software or the Web 2.0 nowadays.

1   Information-based: Still the most obvious element in social software is the information that can be exchanged and shared on the basis of mutual needs manifestation of individual existence. Typical is the 1:9:90 rule; it means that 90% of all users are consumers of information. Of the remaining 10%, there is another 9% that 'build upon' the information. Finally, 1% of the total number of users can be seen as creators. A similar fractional awareness can be seen in the ratio between the total amount of information and its vitality. About 90% of the information on the web is common, trivial or even obsolete; it was novel and innovative once, but lost its 'presence' as more cutting-edge facts were introduced. Typically, this common information is the reference resource for those who want to know 'about' facts somewhere else and bound to historical events. Again, the remaining 9% concerns potentially useful information, however, its ubiquity tells that there is no need to protect it. Typically, it is the information that went through a long refinery process like the books for education or professional training. Its correctness is vital for technical, economical and behavioural reasons. The final 1% is the information that is crucial and exclusive to the targeted receiver. Information in itself is an abstraction from the context it functions in. Genres like stories, novels, letters and documentaries have developed in situations of human interplay, be it asynchronous or based upon the technology to copy and spread it to large extends. Plato's vigorous revolt against handing over ideas through written text solely has faded away through the excitement of multiplying the book. As now in the era of the web, information access is no longer critical and the essence of human expressions has been recognised as total and thus multimodal. Information without a social contract is again seen as abstract and even obsolete.

2   Collaboration-based: The growing notion is that both information and communication are incapable to achieve significant social and societal effects. Collaboration has emerged as the default envelope for channelling human exchange. As soon as the idea breaks through that collaboration cannot sustain without its complete social reality: The notion of community-based social participation has entered.

3   Web-based communities emerged as the wide communication potential needed a new criterion; not only the support of one-to-one partnerships, but a gradually-growing awareness that it is the social integration in larger networks that need to be supported.

4   As web-based communities become more close equivalents to face-to-face connections, it also awakes our need for more sophisticated ways to scout, elicit, consolidate and integrate expertise via the most advanced algorithms that we have developed so far. The first step into it is the further undertaking of conceptual representations that allow community members to excavate and reuse prior expertise from the past. Secondly, we face new methods for inducing association templates that superimpose collective understanding upon persons' intuitive estimations and planning. Bayesian learning will reconcile traditional learning with aggregating social opinions like we meet in journalistic and parliamentary processes all the time. In case of 'collective intelligence' and 'shared cognition' as we meet up to nowadays, it is a matter of social dominance and rhetoric between humans only. We

may expect that web-based support will intervene in these processes in the coming years as well.

Writing the editorial, we experience a serious drawback in the economic growth. The traditional industries are in serious trouble. All industries seem to suffer except telecom- and ecological industries mainly. In the western world, the intense use of the phone, internet and mobile phone is a fact. Until recently, little attention was given to the economic aspect of web-based communities. Now, it is in the middle of the road.

Enterprises and collective services like care and education, they need a wider view on the value chain. New visions on the economy by Chan Kim and Yochai Benkler indicate that web-based communities will increasingly become a player in the way businesses and markets work. This is important news for managers, who face the challenge to include the behaviour of new-generation customers in consumers' motives and incentives and will hence promote completely new business strategies.

Improvements of how web-based communities function within a business environment become worthwhile to investing in: Can 'virtual community management' contribute to the success of a web-based community? Christoph Rosenkranz and Christoph Feddersen did research about a model for controlling and managing the framework of interaction of a VC management team.

In the article 'Managing viable virtual communities: an exploratory case study and explanatory model' the viable system model (VSM) is presented as a suitable theory. Generalising and abstracting from the case study findings, the authors relate the details of the findings to the VSM. Based on this real case scenario, they introduce the organisation of a VC management team. Design principles for VC management are presented in such a way the other researchers and practitioners can directly benefit. Future research is proposed.

Important news for brand managers; L.V. Casaló, C. Flavián and M. Guinalíu, suggest a more effective way to attract new customers and therefore they give advise how to rethink spending the advertising budgets. The article 'Some antecedents and effects of participation in Spanish virtual brand communities' presents ways to increase the loyalty to a brand, thanks to the development of virtual communities. The article discusses managerial implications and future research.

According to Chan Kim and Mauborgne (2005), companies should look for a blue ocean to expand their business. One example in this book is a company producing a medicine. They decide to connect with the users instead of with the medical doctors and from that moment on, they start the development, many improvements around the usage of their product and became the market leader.

Connecting the business strategy with communities like the 'Self-supportive virtual communities' is discussed in the article of Iraklis Varlamis and Ioannis Apostolakis. It is a way to discover the blue ocean in the healthcare market. The article includes an action plan to develop the community. As an example, the development of a platform for deaf persons is described.

It is a well-known fact that developing a platform is a start but not a guarantee that the users will commit themselves to provide input. Two specific situations are addressed in the following two articles: the computer graphics community and a city community.

In the article 'Refereed digital publication to support online communities', Frederico Figueiredo, Joaquim Jorge, Frank Hanisch and Colleen Case describe the measures that

we are taking to stimulate the input of material for educational purposes Only few experts take the time and effort to contribute. The measures improve the situation. The approach forms a guideline for organisations and communities in similar situations.

Licia Calvi and Greet Jans describe how new broadband technology might stimulate users to become active content contributors. The A4MC demonstrator is outlined, the test results have been translated into general principles and future work is outlined.

To have a successful community, users should feel welcome and at ease to participate. In the next article, Patrice Caire investigates in a literature review how conviviality as a concept and as an instrument could be used in a digital city environment as a condition for social interactions and as an instrument for the internal regulation of social systems.

The author addresses also the negative results when it becomes the instrument of power relations.

It is obvious that the number of learning communities is growing. These changes to way personal knowledge is created. In the article 'A practical approach for using the knowledge chains exchange to improve the application of learning theories in learning communities', Juliana Lucas de Rezende and Jano Moreira de Souza supply computational support to the education area that can be used in problem-based as well as in project-based learning. Different scenarios are presented and follow up research is indicated.

In response to the changing needs of the students, universities are looking for blended learning activities. It is the view of K. Liotsios and S. Demetriadis that blended learning has enormous potential. Their view is supported by research done in a university setting. They describe the pilot setting, collect data and develop a blended learning model.

This issue intent to contribute to the success of web-based communities. Articles written by 18 authors coming from seven different countries broaden our view on web-based communities. They are waiting to be exposed to you. We wish you a great time taking its messages.

References

Chan Kim, W. and Mauborgne, R. (2005) *Blue Ocean Strategy*, Harvard Business School Publishing Corporation.

Benkler, Y. (2006) *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London.