Fundamental concepts

- **Life long education:**
  - official, unofficial and informal learning methods
  - improve knowledge, skills or dexterities
  - trainees are of a wide range of ages
  - support can be provided in vivo or from distance

- **Distant education**
  - courses and support are offered using network technologies to distant students
  - supervision and guidance of students in real-time is optional

- **Open education**
  - all learning tools and materials are available to the student
  - syllabus, tasks and targets of a program are loosely defined and can be modified at students’ will
Current needs of education

- **Flexibility:**
  - Training programs are of limited duration
  - Training institutes need more space and specialized trainers to cover all needs
  - Trainees fail to attend all courses

- **Complexity:**
  - Trainees vary in skills, interests and needs
  - Multiple topics, in varying detail, are covered

- **Multitude of sources:**
  - Universities, Training Institutes, Individual educators and trainers

The idea

- Trainees should support each other and be able to monitor training chances
- Educators must collaborate in order to increase their efficiency and provide the best sources into the educatees
- Providers of education should join forces in order to cover all needs
- **A community framework** will allow the collaboration of institutes and management of trainees and training programs and will facilitate the cooperation of educators and trainees
Virtual learning communities

- The common interest of community members is **education**
- Internet is the carrier and network technologies the supporting infrastructure
- Communities support the ‘open’ concept, since anyone interested in education is a potential member of a learning community

The main roles

- Students or trainees
  - attend educational programs and obtain knowledge
- Universities and educational institutes
  - assemble educational modules into targeted programs
  - guide students and trainees to improve skills
  - administrate the community
  - monitor and facilitate members
- Individual educators
  - offer their expertise into the community
  - always under the administrators’ supervision
The anatomy of a learning community

**The main components**

- **Profile base**
  - Stores members’ skills, needs and educational targets
  - Used for the design of new courses or seminars

- **Knowledge base**
  - Contains educational material organized by topic, course scenarios, educational solutions, program evaluation reports, answers to users’ requests etc.

- **Collaboration space**
  - In group activities distant members of a virtual class are forced to communicate, to split composite activities into tasks and work in subgroups
Our prototype

- Build for the postgraduate program, “Virtual Communities Socio-psychological Issues and Applications” held in our University
- Tutors from the three institutions (psychologists, sociologists, and computer scientists) and students with various backgrounds
- All courses are performed at the university place, whereas tutors could be in distant places
- Administrative and coordination tasks were held by the registrar

Community umbrella
Components

- A web site with general information, accessible by anyone
- Weblog umbrella:
  - One weblog for each course with information on everyday activities, news and announcements of interest to the students. Only registered community members are allowed to update or comment
  - One administrative weblog, providing links to courses’ weblogs
- The educational platform: Moodle
- A teleconference room for distant courses

The main web site
www.panteion.gr/gr/tmimata/psycho/dk
The main weblog
http://omega-vc.blogspot.com

The moodle community
Available services

- **Information** services: information on the community activities, sample courses, contact information and a feedback form will allow companies or individuals to offer content and potential students to reach and join the community.

- **Communication** services: for educators to coordinate courses, for students to discuss on assignments and request for help on activities.

- **Collaboration** services: coupled with educational activities. Group projects turns autonomous learning into a collective activity.

Simplicity and Support

Additional issues

- Guarantee the validity of educators’ profiles

- Guarantee the quality of content and training material

- Set up an expansion plan
  - Support the creation of sub-groups
  - Allow new members to enroll
  - Respond to increasing administration and coordination requirements
Conclusions – Benefits

- Students have the ability to exchange empirical knowledge while carrying out learning activities
- Tutors can increase the consultation time through forums, they share their knowledge and contribute to the guidance of members more easily
- Educational institutes cooperate, expand their borders, advertise their programs easier and with minimum cost and increase their potential students

Thank you!

Questions?

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