Editorial

Margriet Simmerling*

Helix5
Mendelssohnlaan 12
7522 KP Enschede, The Netherlands
E-mail: simmerling@helix5.nl
*Corresponding author

Piet Kommers

University of Twente
P.O. Box 217
7500 AE Enschede, The Netherlands
E-mail: Kommers@edte.utwente.nl

Biographical notes: Margriet Simmerling is 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 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.

Dr. Piet Kommers is Associate Professor at the University of Twente and part-time Lector at the Fontys Academy in The Netherlands. His specialties are advanced learning tools like Concept Mapping, Virtual Reality and Mobile Learning. His research and teaching stretches from teacher education via European Joint Research Projects to international projects under the auspices of UNESCO.
    His recent publications are on learner's preconceptions and representations that express pre-intuitive ideas before the actual learning may start: *Cognitive Support for Learning* and *Imagining the Unknown*. He is editor in several research journals and organises conferences in mobile learning, e-society and web-based communities.

After years of experimentation and pioneering, we enter a new era: web-based communities do exist. Its technical aspects are not the main focus any more. It is now time to investigate and explain its social and societal effects.

In this issue we present analyses and evaluations that focus on the most important question: how do we make a Web-Based Community (WBC) work?

It may seem a trivial question. However, we have seen in the past that there are many WBCs that do not work the way its architects and its technical developers had in mind when constructing the platform.

The authors in this issue, mainly educated in the discipline of computer science, take up the challenge to investigate non-technical issues that play an important role when checking if the users of the WBC feel at home, and look forward to integrate the use of the web-based community in everyday life.

In the articles, qualitative and quantitative analyses are acquired in real-life situations. Since some networks have been existing for more than ten years, it is possible to do research over a longer period of time.

The Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning (CSCL) Community is an example of a WBC that has been existing for more than ten years now. Kiele and Wessner conduct an analysis on the continuity of the CSCL community as well as on its internal connections. The derived design principles are interesting, and act as guidance to further research on this aspect.

Students use more and more WBCs as a context for e-learning. An important issue is to what extent and in what way teachers initiate, intervene and maintain Networked Learning Communities (NLC). De Laat *et al.* apply three different angles to do the investigation: social network analysis to visualise the social structure of the NLCs, content analysis to identify the learning and teaching process and context analysis to study students' personal experiences and intentions.

How can the knowledge chain approach like in 'Communities of Practice' form the basis of a new system that supports learning and increases learning skills? Lucas de Rezende *et al.* propose a system architecture and experimental results are presented.

Within the web-based support system 'iPAL', Harrer *et al.* undertake a mixed-method design to evaluate communication processes and interaction patterns. They describe the result of qualitative methods, statistic analyses and Social Network Analysis (SNA) and come up with suggestions for new research and directions in which to go.

McHarg and McLachlan address the question, Can orchestrating a virtual learning community facilitate learning on a face-to-face basis? They used a variety of methods in order to enable triangular validated information, thus giving the research greater reliability.

A vital question that is addressed by Finck and Janneck is, "What measures can be taken to transform a technical platform into a well-frequented and 'hospitable' place?" Their research results show that the process of identity building among members is a crucial factor for successful usage of technology in self-organised communities.

The common factor in all the articles above is the assumption that having an atmosphere of harmony and trust is the common situation between users of web-based communities.

Fletcher *et al.* examined the social interactions within an online community centred around a shared mutual interest in the Australian Stock Exchange. Their paper concludes that conflict is a fertile ubiquitous aspect of life in general, and that conflict is needed to produce change anywhere.

Let us conclude in this editorial that all aspects of human nature should be considered when addressing issues around web-based communities. It is our sincere hope that this issue of the *International Journal of Web Based Communities* will again contribute to a lively debate. We hope contrasting opinions will arrive and instigate unconventional theoretical perspectives. History has shown that unconventional approaches have removed conceptual fixation and helped real-life practices as well.