



Implementing informal learning and using social media based environments within SMEs for companies

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Introductory aspects

- Many European companies particularly small and medium ones (SMEs) have difficulties in facing today's challenges.
- Informal learning accounts for over 75% of the learning taking place in organizations today.
- Social media based on Web 2.0 offer the premises for a fast knowledge acquisition and support transforming learning in a continuous „lifelong process”.
- Communities based on social media like CoPs are proper environments for learning.

Informal learning and communities

Social media for the development of innovative communities for SMEs

Social media based on Web 2.0 services:

- offer the premises for a fast knowledge acquisition and support transforming learning in a continuous „life long process”
also within the communities.
- can take many different forms, including Internet forums, weblogs, social blogs, micro blogging, wikis, podcasts, photographs or pictures, video, rating and social bookmarking.
- require low technical skills to use them.

– can be used to develop Communities of Practice

TikiWiki:

- is a CMS Groupware, originally and more commonly known as TikiWiki or simply Tiki, is a free and open source wiki-based, content management system written primarily in PHP and distributed under the GNU Lesser General Public License (LGPL) license.
- has been actively developed since 2002, making it a very mature open source Wiki-CMS-Groupware solution.
- has more than 200 people who have contributed source so it is one of the largest open source teams in the world.
- has four major categories of components: content creation and management tools, content organization tools and navigation aids, communication tools, and configuration and administration tools.
- components enable administrators and users to create and manage content, as well as letting them communicate to

Content Module 1 advanced

1. Needs and reasons to use for Informal learning in companies

Companies can use informal learning to:

Increase sales by making product knowledge instantly searchable

- **Improve knowledge worker productivity**
- **Transform an organization from near-bankruptcy to record profits**
- **Generate fresh ideas and increase innovation**
- **Reduce stress, absenteeism, and health care costs**
- **Invest development resources where they will have impact**
- **Increase professionalism and professional growth**
- **Cut costs and improve responsiveness with self-service learning**

2. Building a LLL strategy including informal learning

Starting company situation
and need analysis



Concept



Planning



Implementation



Evaluation

When a company plans to introduce new methods for learning, it can decide to follow one of these ways:

- Minimal change* A) The way of *minimal change*: the introduction of new media and learning concepts should involve only minimal changes in the old learning strategy of the company, structures and processes of the company. Through a latent implementation, the acceptance of the new media and methods by managers and trainers will be assured and the staff will be automatically introduced to the new tools and learning methods.
- Active change* B) In contrast *active change* includes a review of the old company learning strategy or building a new one reviewing the organization, its infra-structure, learning culture and business strategy as appropriate to the new learning objectives, concepts and methods resulting in a global change.

The way B is most efficient, but A is often more acceptable. When first introducing new methods the way of minimal change as a pilot example is preferred.

Scenarios

- are different from forecasts in that they provide a tool that helps SMEs to explore the many complex business environments in which they work and learn and the factors that drive changes and developments in those environments.
- include "narrative descriptions of assumptions, risks and environmental factors and how they may affect operations.
- attempt to explore the effect of changing several variables at once with objective analysis and subjective interpretations.
- within a company, provide a common vocabulary and an effective basis for communicating conditions and options.
- can help SMEs to be innovative by: Identifying white spaces between old and new economies, Engaging and inspiring the SME`s stakeholders to make the changes for transformation and to articulate the future of a city, region, etc., Sparking innovation and new forms of value creation (new products and services replacing traditional ones).
- are used by a number of organisations like the GBN (Global Business Network – <http://www.gbn.com>) , Shell that has been producing Global Scenarios for more than 30 years (<http://www.shell.com/>).

3. Assessing Informal Learning

Some objectives to be assessed could be:

Personal objectives:

Degree of achievement of learning objective – The informal learning should help the staff to solve the problem at hand and/or do their job better, and basically helped to meet own learning objective.

Degree of satisfaction – The degree of satisfaction depends on the quality of learning that happened or the quality of the solution by using an informal learning intervention. The degree of satisfaction depends on many other factors such as how quick, effective, complete, and useful the solution has been.

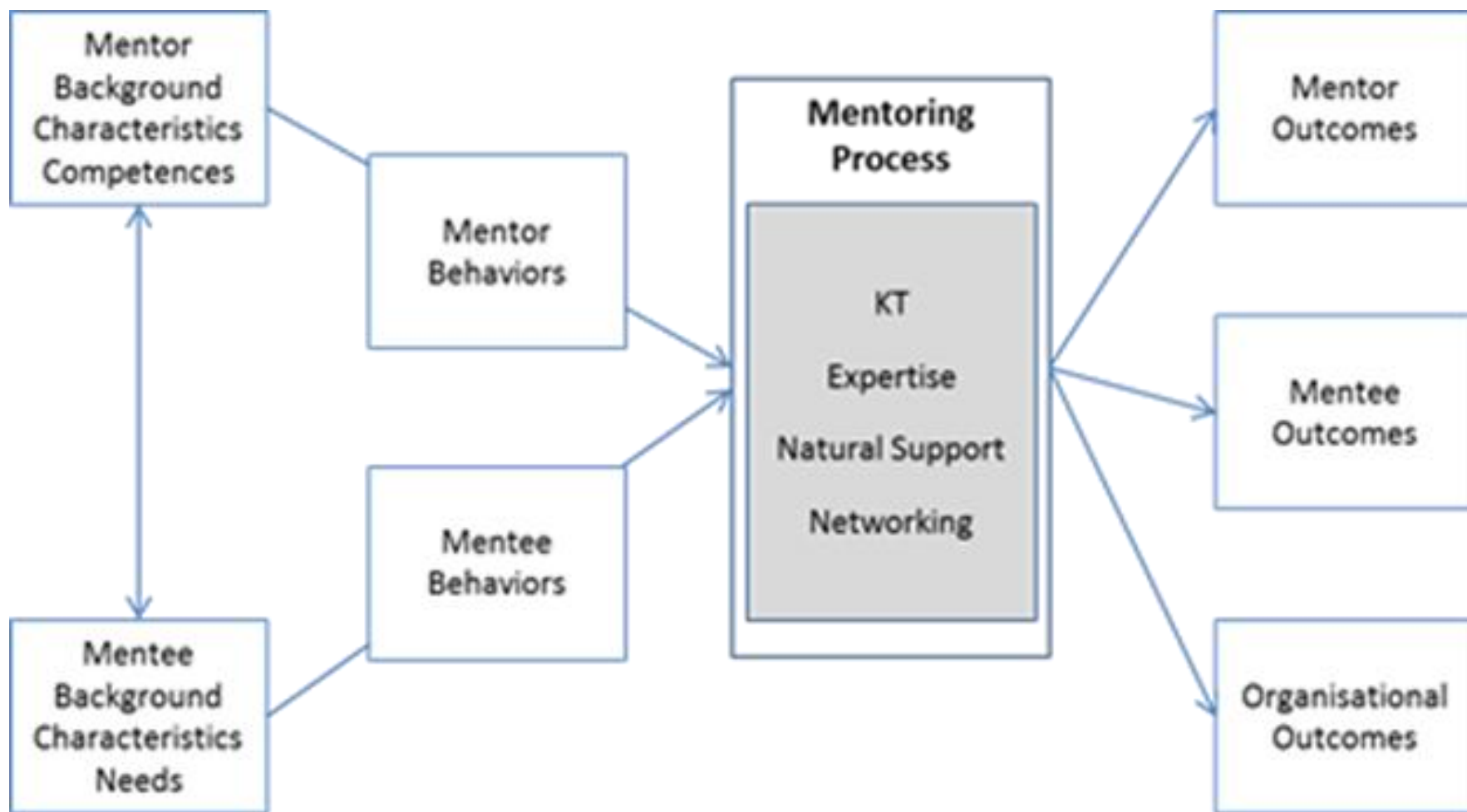
Degree of impact on others – What was learned in an informal way should be utilized and applied to solve own problems and problems posed by others.

Organizational focus

Moving to an organizational platform the employees spend time and effort in informal learning. Therefore, it is equally important for an organization to analyze how effective these efforts really are.

Mentoring

- **Mentoring is a human resources development (HR) processes often used to induct, introduce and guide staff into places of employment.**
- **Organisations should develop approaches for HR which promote knowledge transfer (KT), support staff retention and integration of people with special needs into work.**
- **Mentoring on the job under consideration of diversity can be organised to address these aspects.**
- **Organisations establish mentorships for staff then new ones are hired or as a part of leadership development. Often individuals seek mentors to help them in their career.**
- **Mentoring describe a KT and guided (informal) learning process in which an existing member of staff, or an external one, guides newcomers or less-experienced people in a task to develop professional skills, attitudes and competencies.**
- **Mentoring is a process for the informal transmission of social capital.**



Company benefits from mentoring:

- **a quick introduction of the mentee into formal and informal company structures and demands, facilitating a deliberate, systematic and smooth transfer of technical or internal knowledge,**
- **opportunities to shape the workforce of the future,**
- **deliberate way to meet company strategic goals and objectives,**
- **training of social competence of the mentee and the mentor.**

Informal mentoring aspects:

- **Goals of the relationship are not completely specified**
- **Outcomes cannot be measured in total**
- **The process of KT cannot be explicitly described and it is based on the ability and willing for this process**
- **Access is limited and can be exclusive**
- **Mentors and mentees are often selected on the basis of personal chemistry, which means an initial connection or attraction between them**
- **Mentoring lasts a long time**
- **The organisation benefits indirectly, as the focus is exclusively on the mentee.**

Formal mentoring aspects:

- **Goals are established from the beginning by the organisation, mentors and mentees**
- **Outcomes are measured**
- **Knowledge which has to be transferred is known at the beginning**
- **Access is open to all who meet the criteria established by the organisation**
for the corresponding mentoring program
- **Mentors and mentees are paired based on compatibility**
- **Organisation and employees can benefit directly.**

Web-based supported mentoring (WBSM) has a number of benefits:

- **provision of a 24 hour access of saved knowledge, for training material and communication**
- **accessible anywhere with internet availability**
- **provision of a platform even if face-to-face communication is not possible**
- **learning assessment and progress monitoring of the mentor-mentee relationship**
- **accounting for varying learning abilities of students**
- **overcoming the limitations in time or space etc. of traditional training environments which are restricted to rules in order to adequately fine tune a group to pre-defined criteria**
- **reducing the limitations of the classroom and allow the learner to work at his or her own space, speed and depth with structured support from both, the educators and the other learners.**

A route map for the successful deployment of a coaching and mentoring program

within the specific context of a SME environment (Germany):

- **Putting the specific working environment into context.**
- **Researching the role played by the organisational culture or “climate” in the development, maintenance and success of the SME.**
- **Determining real qualification needs of the staff before starting the mentoring process.**
- **Determining the knowledge gaps and which of them can be minimised by a mentoring system.**
- **Demonstrating that a mentoring intervention has real benefits in this context and not being bureaucratic.**
- **Being a process based on trust, experience, and supervision and informal learning.**
- **Identifying barriers to effective mentoring/coaching.**
- **Determining issues that need to be incorporated within the mentoring/coaching intervention, if it is to be successful.**
- **Qualifying coaches and mentors for different forms of working and learning.**
- **If necessary, using big companies for delivering mentors (learning consultants).**

Handbook for trainers

In the on-line version:

- Theory in multimedia form
- Exercises for self-testing: The students have the possibility to give their answers to some questions and to compare these with standard answers saved in the system.

The exercises correspond to the parts of the theory.

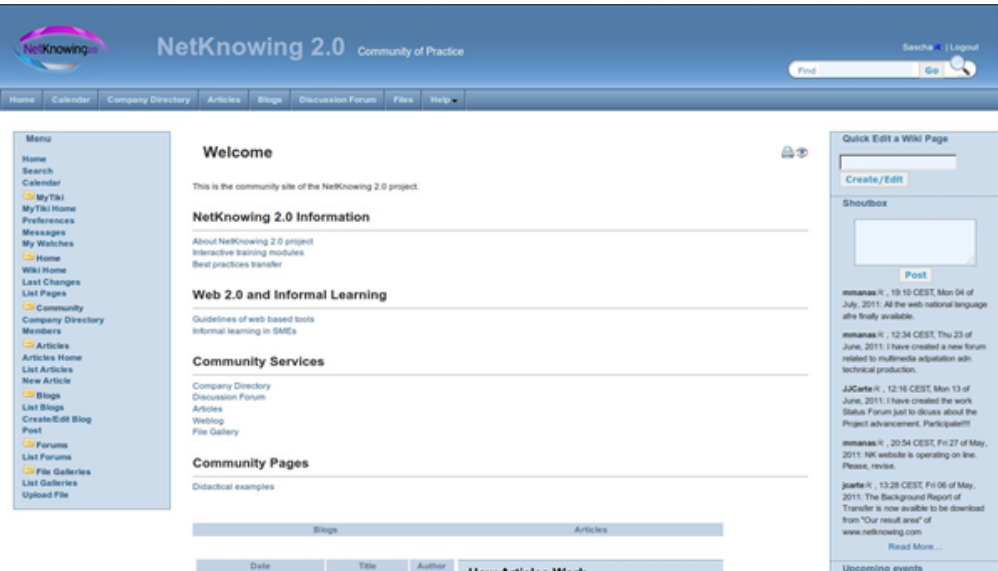
In the Trainer space

- Theory as Word file to download and complete
- Exercises to be discussed face-to-face
- Examples of learning strategies
- Example of Scenarios
- ask is more suitable for working in small groups.
- Tools for assessment like Interviews and Check Lists

The trainer has the possibility:

- to create new exercises and to save them in your special space on the CoP platform.
- to create new material exercises and to save them in your "Own File Gallery"

Figure 1: CoP of the project NetKnowing 2.0





THANK YOU

FOR YOUR ATTENTION !

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