

TOWARDS COMMUNITY- BASED COLLA- BORATIVE WORKPLACES

NOWADAYS, THERE ARE MANY SCENARIOS, BASED ON NEW TECHNOLOGIES, EXPLAINING HOW PEOPLE WILL BE ABLE, USING A WIRELESS DEVICE, TO REMOTELY TURN ON/OFF CAR AND HOUSE HEATING, HOW PEOPLE WILL GET A CALL FOR A MILK EMPTY ALERT FROM THEIR REFRIGERATOR AND SO ON. IS IT GOING TO CONTRIBUTE TO A BETTER SOCIETY? SOMEONE MAY ANSWER "NOT REALLY, IT IS SIMPLY MAKING LIFE EASIER." ONCE, IT WAS SAID THAT THE WAY OF USING TECHNOLOGY REFLECT THE MATURITY OF OUR SOCIETY. SO, INSTEAD OF SIMPLY MAKING LIFE EASIER IS THERE A WAY TO USE WIRELESS TECHNOLOGY FOR ACCESSING COMMUNITY BASED KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE SERVICES?

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Looking at the actual success of digital photos, either taken with a digital camera or simply with a mobile phone, it seems there are many people who are fond of sharing with people in similar communities. *Is it a sign showing that the border between private and public life has become very tiny? Is socialising with people far away more feasible?*

Social activities and working activities have always been considered as separated periods of time. However, several studies demonstrate the importance of social activities to the creativity and innovation process. This could explain why the coffee machine area is so important for socialising and discovering or maturing new ideas. It is not a conventional area but a place

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where conviviality is the main or only rule; anyone can enjoy the discussion and feel confident. **Patricia Vendramin**⁽¹⁾ discusses the challenge for the future of work: *how to develop flexible telework or mobile work patterns while preventing a deterioration of working conditions?*

There is a trend suggesting that organisations are in a transition towards more flexible arrangements in the workplace (see diagram). *Who will benefit from those arrangements and what will be the role of ICT?*

The categorization shows an evolution from individual workplace to team workplace and then from team workplace to community based workplace. At the same time there has been a transition from fixed to mobile solutions. This demonstrates the evolution of services from individual needs to team needs and from team needs to community needs. It's certain that a project team is bound by a business contract that rules relationships among team members - while community members are not bound by any business contract so far.

The term **Mobile workplace** could be interpreted as people moving from one working location to another one. Our interpretation or vision is rather a single workplace everywhere at any time, which follows the worker wherever he is. There is no more need to carry on documents or a heavy lap-top or to look for a power socket and network socket to plug in your computer. You just bring a small wireless computer device, fitting in the pocket of your jacket or on your wrist like a watch, which enables instant connection to the Network wherever you are and whenever you need it. Wireless connectable flat screens are available almost everywhere; the Network becomes the working place.

This mobile workplace brings the opportunity for global socialising with faraway people, and local socialising with people nearby with common interests. Instead of working inefficiently for hours, there could be breaks for social activities.

This approach integrates working, learning and social activities for a more balanced way of

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living. No more need to travel every morning to your office and every evening back to your home - with the added bonus of a positive impact on traffic jams, pollution and transportation stress. One direct consequence is more time for social, learning or sporting activities and a better family life.

Another interesting trend is the **emergence of communities of knowledge** and practice on the internet, suggesting that workers are in a transition towards a new working place in between their organisation and the communities they belong to. In the eighties, organisations were expecting Artificial Intelligence and expert systems to be able to collect workers' know-how, knowledge and good practices. It simply failed. During the last decade, **Knowledge Management (KM)** constituted the next attempt to make knowledge a resource available to every worker. Unfortunately, KM still requires a lot of effort to maintain the huge amount of information for a low level of potential re-use inside the organisation. Even with extensive, available knowledge information, identifying sources and audience is time consuming.

This is exactly the point where communities of knowledge and practice are emerging as a unique places which collect workers' experiences in specific domains, turning this information into re-usable knowledge and into library of shared information. Concepts are developed and maintained by those communities as part of a combined, group of effort.

Further, communities are then turning knowledge and practices inside-out by offering services directly to members. Communities of knowledge and practice are reflecting the new paradigm of 'knowledge everywhere anytime'.

A community workspace is, for example, composed of projects and topics spaces where members can collaborate. Virtual meeting spaces for brainstorming or conferencing and conviviality space for socialising with others are among the other possible components of a community workspace.

The community-based collaborative workplace looks like a promising area for further research where human, social, business, organisation, ICT and legal aspects need to be considered for the best chance of developing successful and innovative frameworks.

References

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- (2) P. Pulli, P. Antoniac, M. Pallot, A. Stanescu, *Modeling scenarios of Innovative Mobile Services, Proceedings of 8th International Conference on Concurrent Enterprising "Ubiquitous Engineering in the Collaborative Economy"*, Rome, Italy, 17-19 June 2002

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