Tweetstorming PLNs: Using Twitter to Brainstorm about Personal Learning Networks

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“Tweetstorming PLNs: Using Twitter to Brainstorm about Personal Learning Networks”

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Background

Personal learning networks (PLN) aim to help learners to manage their learning and communicate with others more effectively. Building a personal learning network requires that one not only seek to learn from others, but also help others in the network to learn. It is a way to “narrow the divide between consumers and producers: consumers themselves become producers through creating and sharing” (Attwell, 2007). But in practice, learners are hindered by several problems, of which the two following stand out: 1) information overload and 2) bounded rationality (Simon, 1982; Selten, 1998).

As the size of one’s network increases, so does the complexity and the number of candidate peers that you can connect to. The abundance of choices creates information overload (De Choudhury, 2008).

In a learning network, it is important to make an adequate choice about whom to connect to in order to maximise the learning outcome. However, people lack the cognitive ability to make a decision that is satisfactory (bounded rationality). In other words, they are not able to make a calculation about the value of peers that takes into account personal, psychological, network-driven and environmental variables. As a result they resort to so-called *satisficing*, a solution that is both sufficient and satisfactory, but not optimal.

Based on the aforementioned problems, we invite the participants to take an active role in discussing what factors constitute an effective and efficient learning network. The connections are one of the key elements of the PLN. We assume that learning takes place both in relation to others and in relation to learning resources. In that context, some connections are more relevant

in supporting one's learning than others. If not all connections are equal, is there a way to define which connections are more meaningful than others? With the PLN workshop we would like to explore the connections of a personal learning network as a learning tool. We want to find out which connections matter and why. Besides, we aim to gain insight into the expertise and characteristics of the participants' network, to be able to identify criteria to recommend new people accordingly.
To achieve the above aims, we will ask the participants to 1) visualise their personal learning network and 2) take part in a brainstorm via Twitter (Tweetstorm). Both will be explained in more detail in the format section.

Format

We start off by giving a short introduction. The introduction defines the scope of the workshop, the purpose, and the means. Particularly, the participants will be asked to identify their personal online learning network. They should identify how they are connected to others (Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, offline), and what they think their peers' expertises are. This will provide us with an elaborate view on how participants perceive their learning network.
Next, the Tweetstorm (brainstorm over Twitter) will be introduced and explained. During the Tweetstorm, we discuss what contributes to meaningful cooperation within a learning network. A twitter hashtag (#usePLN) will be used to monitor and aggregate the participants' utterances. A 'Twitter wall' (hashtags.org) will be used to visualise the brainstorm, such that participants see what others have posted, building upon their ideas and reacting to their ideas.
Finally, we collect the results and conclude our session with an overview of the learning network and the outcomes of the Tweetstorm session.

Impact

At the end of the workshop participants should be able to understand the importance and structure of meaningful connections and start building/developing/managing their personal learning network from this perspective. Furthermore, participants will have the opportunity to reflect and articulate their own learning networks, of which they have only tacit awareness; such explication may be useful in improving participants' awareness of the learning resources (i.e. other people) that they currently have. Besides feeding back the outcomes to the participants during the workshop, we plan to keep the participants updated about our findings. We will do so by informing them by email and through dissemination in PLE-related output media.

Technical/material requirements

The workshops has the following technical requirements:

- Bring Your Own Laptop (BYOL)
- a Twitter account for the Twitter brainstorm
- internet connection
- Diagramo network drawing tool (or a similar tool). The organisers will provide this tool during the workshop.