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## Editorial

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**Biographical notes:** Constance E. Kampf is an Assistant Professor in the Knowledge Communication Research Group at the Aarhus School of Business, Denmark. Her PhD is in Rhetoric and Scientific and Technical Communication from the University of Minnesota, USA. She investigates the intersection of knowledge communication and culture through approaches grounded in the fields of rhetoric, linguistics and intercultural communication. Her focus includes corporate web presence and the connection between knowledge communication and project management. Her recent publications include 'Corporate social responsibility: WalMart, Maersk and the cultural bounds of representation in corporate websites' in *Corporate Communication: An International Journal*.

Dr. Piet Kommers is an Associate Professor at the University of Twente, the Netherlands. His specialties are educational technologies, World Wide Web-based communities and mobile learning. His research and teachings stretch from teacher education via the European Joint Research Projects to international projects under the auspices of UNESCO. His recent publications are on learners' preconceptions and representations that express pre-intuitive ideas before the actual learning starts: cognitive support for learning and imagining the unknown. He is the Editor of several research journals and he organises conferences under the auspices of IADIS.

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In past issues, World Wide Web (WWW)-based communities have been described with the metaphors of village for first-generation communities and that of city for second-generation communities (Kommers, 2006). This issue shifts the focus from web communities as such to the interaction between web communities and society. Here the metaphor in focus is WWW-based communities as reflections of society. This focus

returns to the societal contexts in which particular WWW-based communities connect technology with the cultural and rhetorical contexts in which those communities are situated through knowledge communication.

This shift from WWW-based communities to interactions between WWW-based communities and their social, cultural and rhetorical contexts offers e-learning developers the opportunity to reflect on the social aspects of knowledge communication via online environments and on the ways in which they are situated in cultural and rhetorical contexts. The authors come from various backgrounds, including expertise in the fields of social sciences, media studies, instructional design, education, human-computer interaction, communication, rhetoric, intercultural communication and computer science. Their research includes cases from Australia, New Zealand, Denmark, Estonia, Canada and the USA. Thus, the perspectives on knowledge communication via these different WWW-based communities in this issue offer e-learning developers a set of tools emerging from case studies in different contexts around the world. These tools and models can aid e-learning developers in expanding their design focus to include the contexts in which WWW-based community members interact on both sides of the screen.

The key concepts addressed by the authors include communities of practice, genre, technological frames, high and low context cultures, power relationships, culture as a transformational process, communities of inquiry, and dualisms in online and offline knowledge exchange. These concepts are used to discuss ways in which knowledge is communicated in WWW-based communities around the world.

Starke-Meyerring, from the Department of Integrated Studies in Education, Center for the Study and Teaching of Writing at McGill University in Canada, investigates wikis as discursive spaces for knowledge communication on the web. She focuses on academic writing in wikis, using a genre theory approach to highlight the connections between genres and knowledge communication practices which play out differently in wikis than in the traditional peer review process. From a rhetorical approach, she argues that the opportunities offered by the code interact with the genres already present in the cultural practices of users, creating tensions. The questions she raises for e-learning designers involve ways in which the combination of preexisting social genre practices and new possibilities made available by the technology can be addressed in the interaction between the design possibilities and the users' practices in communicating knowledge through WWW-based communities.

Hanisch, from the School of Information and Computer Science, University of South Australia, and Churchman, from the Flexible Learning Centre, University of South Australia, used interviews to examine intercultural communication processes in three virtual communities of practice constructed for software development. The organisations supporting these communities are companies based in New Zealand, and in Adelaide and Perth, Australia. These communities also include members from Europe, the USA and Asia. Using qualitative data from a number of intercultural and international virtual communities of practice in the workplace, they found that several issues interfered with the long-term knowledge communication goals of the management. Central among these issues is the inability of legitimate peripheral participants to become full practising members of the community of practice. They argue for a cultural basis for understanding the sharing of knowledge in virtual communities of practice, and the need for managers to allow virtual communities of practice to emerge rather than constructing them. This article underscores the need for acknowledging cultural diversity in the design of

WWW-based communities for e-learning and communicating knowledge, as well as the connection between communities of practice theory and the interaction between cultural and technological affordances of design.

Ling, from the Communication Department at the Petroleum Institute in the United Arab Emirates, looks at the impact of online synchronous chat in virtual learning communities at an Australian university. She uses a combination of interviews and discourse analysis to examine the impact of chat technology on knowledge communication from a knowledge construction perspective. She triangulates discourse analysis from chat forums with interviews from the participants in different sections of a web-based course. Her findings indicate that the actions of the instructor affect the knowledge communication processes in the learning community and suggest that the practice of scaffolding in online collaborative learning processes can be improved through reflection and increased awareness for participants regarding the impact of their contributions. This article highlights the role that teachers play in technology-based knowledge communication processes, which e-learning designers can take into account in addressing their goals for knowledge communication.

Rogers, Guest Researcher at the International Multidisciplinary PhD Studies programme at the University of Joensuu, Finland; Tinney, of Teacher's College at Western Governance University in Utah, the USA; and Gibbons, from the Department of Instructional Psychology and Technology at Brigham Young University in Utah, the USA, discuss the relationship between transformational processes of culture and knowledge communication in e-learning communities. They argue that online communities of practice can be seen as places where knowledge communication processes are co-constructed and built through cultural processes. They offer suggestions for virtual communities of practice members to engage in the cross-cultural communication process as part of knowledge communication. These suggestions and the underlying cultural theory which posits culture as a transformational process can help e-learning community designers support cross-cultural interaction.

Abdulnour-Nocera and Dunckley, from the Institute for Information Technology at Thames Valley University in Slough, England, explore the concept of technological frames in order to demonstrate the connections between culture, people and technology. They describe this co-configuration as a means of evaluating the role of context and culture at the local level in the design of interactive WWW-based communities. They use a case study from the VESEL or Village Science for Life project in Kenya to describe the intersection of knowledge communication processes and the underlying technology-based knowledge management system. Although the VESEL project is not entirely contained within an online community, the connection of technological frames to real community needs in Africa offers a valuable perspective for e-learning designers to reflect on the assumptions built into their conceptions of WWW-based communities and offers ways in which they can see their role as one of communicating across cultures from designers to users. The notion of technological frames and the intersection of technical and semiotic or meaning-making resources give e-learning designers a theoretical tool to use in systems design. They also explore the connection between technological frames and communities of practice, looking at the Kenyan farmers as an example of a community of practice.

Kendall, from the Library and Information Science Department at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in the USA, looks at the connection between power, identity and knowledge communication in online communities through the Animutation Portal. She examines postings in the Animutation forum as an example of a community of practice, positing knowledge communication as a group process with power relations reflected in the ways in which participants present themselves, respond to each other, position themselves with respect to other WWW-based communities and work together to co-construct the genre of Animutation videos. She uses discourse analysis to examine the roles of cultural norms in the site and offers the Animutation Portal as an example of a community of practice in which membership and identity are more important than purpose and are couched in cultural norms, both developed in the WWW community itself and from outside, calling for a need to include power in our understanding of online communities of practice. She focuses on power as derived from the cultural contexts in which the online participants are situated rather than the narrower context of the online community in itself.

Jensen, from the Media Studies Department at the University of Aarhus in Denmark, examines Virtual Tourist, a WWW-based travel community, as a place where users engage in knowledge communication processes as part of a global forum. He discusses the interactions on the Virtual Tourist sites and couches them in the co-constructed values system he has observed in this WWW community. In addition, he analyses the user rating system, explaining how it focuses on user engagement in knowledge communication as a basis for peer ratings. He argues that knowledge communication processes on Virtual Tourist take place both inside and in the larger cultural contexts surrounding the WWW-based community. The implications for e-learning designers from Jensen's work include considering the 'dualisms between virtual and physical space' in e-learning design, as well as the connection between aesthetic aspects of online communities and the processes involved in knowledge communication.

Oja, from the Linguistics programme at the Department of Estonian Philology, University of Tallinn in Estonia, and Simm, from the Computer Science Departments at the University of Tallinn, Estonia and the Tokyo Institute of Technology in Japan, look at the WWW-based community called Rate.ee, and the knowledge communication processes that youth use as they participate in the site. They use the intercultural communication concepts of high and low contexts together in their analysis of the site, demonstrating that high and low contexts can work together in one cultural setting, as well as demonstrating how these different types of cultural contexts affect the knowledge communication activities in the Rate.ee site. They offer a model which addresses the 'driving forces' or motivation which affect knowledge communication practices in WWW-based communities. This model incorporates notions of culture and motivation into the conception of knowledge communication processes. The implications of including motivation in our understanding of knowledge communication processes act to link together the social realities on both sides of the screen. In addition, they distinguish between technical and social online communication skills, and explore the links between these skills and culture in both processes of creating and communicating their identities online. They argue that the technical affordances of online communities affect knowledge communication practices and may even outweigh the cultural background of the users in determining the available means for communicating knowledge in web-based communities.

In conclusion, these articles offer a variety of perspectives on the importance and underlying effects of culture on the knowledge communication processes for systems designers and users. They demonstrate that culture plays a role in knowledge communication on both sides of the screen, and offer e-learning designers a variety of theoretical approaches to both understanding and accounting for the interaction between knowledge communication processes, communities of practice and culture in their design of WWW-based communities.

**Reference**

Kommers, P.A.M. (2006) *Introduction in the Proceedings of the IADIS International Conference Web Based Communities 2006*, San Sebastian, Spain, 26–28 February, ISBN: 974-8924-10-0.