Networked Learning in a Multinational Company: 

An Innovative Approach to Informal and Situated Learning

Introduction
Two Dutch universities (Delft Univ. of Technology, Leyden University,) together with IBM has joined forces to develop strategies and methods for networked learning enhancing performance of employees. The consortium designed a model for networked learning and implemented and experimented with an innovative tool to help employees to learn in social networks. The results from a first group of employees have been positive. Users experienced an added value doing their daily work. They reported higher empowerment on human networking and relevant resources, more efficiency, and fun. The two-year project has resulted in an innovative product (combination of human intervention, tools and resources) for the learning market.

Organisational learning and innovation
When it comes to organisational learning, it is not uncommon to find that learning is still considered as an individual activity, ‘consumed’ in a situation outside the workplace. The ‘lonely learner’ exists in traditional courses as well as in flashy looking e-learning courses. Innovation of work processes or products rarely result from such learning settings. Collaboration is often part of traditional (e-) courses, but collective learning rarely takes place. Where collaborative learning aims at learning with and from each other and learning outcomes are mostly geared towards individual needs, collective learning explicitly aims at collaborative performance and innovative knowledge creation within a team. Innovative ideas often occur during informal communication and activities within a group of people from diverse backgrounds, often in a temporary team. Although teams are one-time formations, created with a purpose and a deadline, the innovative and creative nature of team learning can be used strategically within organisations.

Changing Demographics
Currently, the Baby Boom Generation (born 1940-1960) is starting to retire and the Net-generation (born 1990-2000) is steadily joining the workforce. In general, the Net-generation is pre-skilled with computer proficiencies, at ease with multitasking, processing discontinued information and highly networked. Motivating and retaining talented employees requires an adapted approach towards employee development, as the characteristics of today’s and future’s worker is changing. How can we take advantage of the net generation’s networking attitudes and skills to enhance business outcomes?

Changing Technologies
Technology developments enable and, at times, drive market developments. Technology itself is changing rapidly. New tools effect the way people interact and advanced technology and social software tools facilitate online communication and knowledge building and sharing. Web2.0 applications such as Wonderland, Second Life, Facebook, Work Place, Think, Moodle, Drupal, show new social networking patterns based on self-direction that might promote learning on the workplace. How can we make technology provide opportunities that support people to learn and work effectively and creatively?

A Model for Networked Learning
The new labour force will rely heavily on technical and distributed social networks. Networked learning refers to a context in which internet-based information and communication technologies are used to promote connections: between participants; between participants and experts; between a learning community and its learning resources,
so that participants can extend and develop their understanding and capabilities in ways that are important to them, and over which they have significant control. These connections vary from face-to-face to distributed, across a variety of media, and with various degrees of time shifting. Crucial is the connectedness of participants.

![Diagram of Networked Learning](image)

**Fig 1:** A model for Networked Learning: enabling people to connect, share and co-create.

**An innovative tool for Networked Learning**

The above-mentioned model has been worked out in a tool that has been implemented supporting employees to easily and efficiently find peers and resources.