Community Dimensions of Learning Object Repositories – funded by JISC

Globally, public & private sector organisations have been setting up digital repositories to support sharing of resources for learning. The educational rationale is that resources can be restructured to support different pedagogical approaches and to achieve economies of scale. A key problem is that these learning object repositories (LORs), like many other learning technology innovations, are often designed to exploit the capabilities of technology rather than to meet learners' needs. This research explored whether the nature and organization of a community is likely to impact the way a LOR is used.

Research hypothesis

The way repositories are used will vary according to the needs of individual communities; therefore the issues associated with the implementation and use of repositories will differ across communities, although some will also be common across communities. For example geographically dispersed teaching and learning communities are often loosely knit. In such communities, members will communicate and interact in different ways as compared with locally based, tightly knit communities

Dimensions of LORs

Six dimensions of LORs were identified.
1. The purpose of the repository;
2. The subject discipline the LORs has been created to support. Although some LORs are mono-disciplinary, many are multidisciplinary;
3. The scope, for example some LORs support single departments or institutions, while others operate at a regional, national, or international level;
4. The sector, LORs are used in schools, higher and further education institutions as well as hobby-based or work-based communities;
5. Contributors may include teachers, students, publishers, institutions, employees or hobby enthusiasts, depending on the scope and sector;

6. The business model that governs the trading, and management framework underpinning the repository.

These six dimensions draw out important aspects of the context within which the LORs operate within and across communities.

Dimensions of communities

Our starting point was that the way repositories are used depends not only on the dimensions of repositories, but also on key characteristics of communities. Dimensions of communities include:
1. Purpose, the shared goal/interest of the community; the reason why the community was formed in the first place;
2. Dialogue, modes of participation and communication (online, face-to-face, or mixed) adopted by the community;
3. Roles and responsibilities;
4. Coherence, whether the community is close-knit or loosely confederated/transient;
5. Context, the broader ecology within which the community exists;
6. Rules, implicit and explicit rules that govern the functioning of community;
7. Pedagogy, predominant T&L approaches used in the community

Findings

From these dimensions, guidelines for repository development were devised. (http://www.gcu.ac.uk/cd-lor/). These guidelines have been used by key national organisations in the UK, Australia and the Netherlands to establish international Learning Object Repositories.

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