Foreword

The book you are holding in your hands is a multiform tool enabling learning and insights into the potential that could be obtained by a virtual campus at its best. I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to access all these articles ‘fresh from the oven’. Besides enjoying the process, my reading quest naturally had a more serious purpose as well, that is, pinpointing such aspects from the material that I would like you to draw your attention to, or rather through which to challenge you to learn. At the same time, I attempted to identify new insights which have such significance for me that I wish to share them with others. As always when I read, I associate my findings and insights with individuals with whom I collaborate in smaller or larger teams and networks in pursuit of some common goal.

Several articles describe both the theories and practices of the ongoing paradigm shift. The endless world of knowledge enabled by ICT is a sphere that books cannot even compare with. However, the core of the change is not technology. The core is culture – the paradigm shift related to how and what people learn, learn as individuals, learn as teams and learn as networks. Enormous opportunities for empowering through networking means an increasing number of people whose driving force is the passion to learn. Our world is an e-world with easy access to the kind of information we need. And not just access to information, but to knowledge that we, as members of networks, wish to disseminate to and process with others. Everyone is also allowed to question and argue, in favour or against. Not to mention proposing new views and pushing the limits of our own thinking. As a foundation of this type of processing we require cross-sections such as this book to indicate where we stand in a particular field.

This is what the world of information and knowledge framed in this book is about. The importance of pioneers and early adopters is clearly recognised. Global challenges cannot be met without the potentials painted throughout this book. You, the authors of this book and your network partners, play a crucial role. This all deals with knowledge creation and knowledge management which we engage in with others with the same interests, independent of where we come from and of whether we have ever even met face-to-face.

We are invited to form a common learning organisation that operates without boundaries or limits. I have described this by saying that this is not just about active interacting but about creating a shared knowledge reality – the elements, processes and concepts of which are available to all of us and are in use by all of us, at all times. And by means of the semantic web and all other sophisticated forms of ICT this knowledge reality is constantly expanding and deepening.

This book is in many respects an outstanding manual and a door to the world of virtual campuses. The articles provide well-grounded insights into what the future learning community and university could be like. Several articles include long lists of recommendations, as well as clearly focused concluding remarks which help decision makers to write the policy papers needed for setting the frames for implementation.
The future of education is learner centric. This means that we – the educators and decision makers – need systems intelligence to operate within the complex ecosystems and, in particular, to understand and to develop them further. In education the complexity increases when the trend is towards Personal Learning Environments, instead of large learning management systems. PLEs require virtual campuses which embrace the future culture of working and learning together.

In this book learning is characterised as a social process, where learners are co-producers in the learning process and not just consumers of learning content. Virtual campuses are collaborative communities providing added value to especially all those contributing. I encourage all of you, the readers of this book, to respond by becoming creators of a shared virtual knowledge reality of advanced e-learning practices.

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