Chapter 21

Learning with Multimedia Cases in the Information Systems Area

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The entrance of interactive multimedia systems into the arena of education and training has meant that in only a couple of years, a number of multimedia case studies for educational and training purposes in the Management of Information Systems area have emerged, and the tendency seems to be increasing. Use of such Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) is often claimed to be both valuable and effective for conveying the intended learning. However, because of the novelty of this area, very little is written about the role that a multimedia case study can play and how to apply such cases in a learning environment. Through the BUSINES-LINC project, sponsored by the European Commission, eighteen multimedia cases have been developed, with the objective to support innovative business solutions, especially in the e-commerce area.1 The research study presented in this paper is currently rigorously investigating possible learning scenarios for three Italian and three Danish cases through the collection of qualitative and quantitative empirical data. Our objective is to gain experience in and knowledge about how the chosen learning objectives from a multimedia case are best transferred to the users. The results of the research study will guide instructors and developers of different types of multimedia cases to better contemplate their learning objectives and course structure according to their target group. The paper first presents a short introduction to the field and the theoretical foundation

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of the research study. Then the methodological aspects are described, and finally, our current experiences and preliminary results are conveyed, together with a short overview of the issues, which we are currently investigating further by means of our empirical material.

INTRODUCTION

The method of teaching with cases has existed for much more than a century in law and medical schools, but it was not used in the business area until 1910, when Dr. Copeland from the Harvard Business School was encouraged to do so by his dean. In 1921, Dr. Copeland wrote the first book containing written cases (Leenders and Erskine, 1989). A traditional, paper-based case, it describes a company, its strategies, objectives, and often a current problem which a decision-maker is facing. The case enables the student to get a feeling of the organization, its problems and opportunities, and in class the student discusses the possible solutions to the presented problem. In the case-based learning model, a traditional paper case is thus defined to be a description of real events, which contains interesting decisions that have been structured in a way that stimulates the students to reflect and discuss them (Mauffette-Leenders, Erskine, and Leenders, 1997).

The method of case-based learning has won a widespread use in business schools for executive and MBA training programs from all over the world. The model of learning by cases consists of much more than the actual case itself. In general, the North American/Canadian approach, when teaching with cases, is to let the students prepare the case individually and in groups, then they discuss the case in a plenary session, and maybe they also write an assignment over the subject (Erskine, Leenders and Mauffette-Leenders, 1998). This implies that a case cannot be evaluated in itself, but has to be assessed in the learning process it is being used, while considering the learning objectives and target group for that session.

Interactive multimedia allow the user to navigate and interact with the system and can support the creation of new meanings (reflections) and enhance communication. The change in media usage from the traditional paper-based cases to multimedia cases poses some very interesting challenges, from the perspective of learning and pedagogical strategies as well as considerations on which techniques to use when evaluating the use of such cases (Orngreen, Christiansen, Nielsen, and Siggaard Jensen, 1999).

The underlying pedagogical theories of case-based learning are action learning and experiential learning (see, for example, Hazard, 2000 and Dewey, 1994). In David Kolb’s experiential learning cycle, people reflect over their experiences, which founds the basis for their internal subjective interpretation and individual formulation of concepts that explains the world as they have experienced it; this
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