Chapter 9
The e-Tutor in Learning 2.0 Scenarios: Profile, Professional Empowerment, and New Roles

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ABSTRACT

With this contribution, we briefly explain how both the e-Tutor role and competencies have changed since the beginning of the debate about this essential e-Learning human resource. Until now, what set of professional functions were requested to be a good e-Tutor? What training policies must be identified to give an answer to the needs of e-Tutors for them to be able to interact effectively in e-Learning scenarios oriented to sharing knowledge and social networking?

INTRODUCTION

The professional profile of the e-Tutor has been completely changed since the beginning of the debate about e-Learning. In the period 1993-1997, according to fundamental contributions by authors as Mason (1992), Berge & Collins (1995) or Rowntree (1995), the e-Tutor (more frequently called “e-moderator”) has been described as an expert in mediated communication by e-mail, forums or chat. This approach concerns the “vision” of e-Learning in those years, initially considered as an opportunity to activate peer-to-peer communication and share thoughts on content: that model requires moderators with technical and communication skills, to avoid the risk of ineffectiveness due to poor experience of e-learners in the use of computer and network tools. However, the real evolution started when research and applications began to inquire the close relationship between the e-Tutor role and the development of more complex e-Learning models.

This contribution is entirely focused on the profile of the e-Tutor from this point of view. The e-Tutor is now one of the most important professional profiles in e-Learning, as emphasized by researchers and stakeholders: we briefly explain how the e-Tutor’s relevance has grown in the last few years and how his role has been defined as a profession. Then, we try to analyze how the e-Tutor’s role in e-Learning scenarios will change in the next few

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Figure 1. The relationships between the role of the e-Tutors, learning goals and various instructional approaches.

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<th>Open and flexible learning goals</th>
<th>Beahaviour-oriented learning goals</th>
<th>Skills-oriented learning goals</th>
<th>Content-oriented learning goals</th>
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<td>e-tutor as “moderator”</td>
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<td>Learning goals</td>
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<td>Learning models and course’s</td>
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years, in terms of functions to be performed, skills to be improved, and training policies to be planned. Probably, we can already imagine a “next generation” of e-Tutors, based on a lot of issues coming from the 2.0 scenarios: but, firstly, we have to understand the background of the e-Tutor’s professional profile, and all the possible directions of future evolutions.

1. BACKGROUND: THE e-TUTOR AS AN e-LEARNING PROFESSIONAL: A BRIEF HISTORY

Especially between 1997 and 2000, the research (Calvani & Rotta, 2000; Cornelius & Higgison, 2000; Collison & al., 2000; Salmon, 2000) focused on more complex frameworks to define e-Learning: both researchers and practitioners defined or experimented e-Learning as a wide range of opportunities to change educational strategies. So, in that period, the e-Tutor was involved not only in moderating online communication but also in a lot of other tasks, such as facilitating learners in time management or content understanding, motivating students, supporting technical problems, organizing the virtual learning environment. The main framework (accepted in Italy for many years), according to scenarios described by Mason and Kaye (1992), reinforced by Rowntree (1995), and re-visited in Italy by Trentin (1999), Calvani and Rotta (2000), identified three main “levels” of e-tutoring, matching the main goals of different learning processes and the more referred models of online courses. Thus, referring to the profile of the e-Tutor, firstly we considered the Instructor, more involved in supporting content, and content and support models of courses, then the Facilitator, more focused on facilitating the learning process in learner-centred, and in the so called wrap-around courses, and, finally, the Moderator, more oriented towards the management of conferencing and social interactions between learners with a key-role in all courses based on collaborative approach. All the relationships between e-tutoring and instructional approaches