The Social Function of Ad Hoc Transient Communities

Sibren Fetter
Celstec, Open University the Netherlands
Overview

- The need for communities

- Main Problem:
  - Dynamic nature (two edged sword)
  - Social capital
    - Centralization
    - Sense of belonging
    - Received and provided support

- Ad Hoc Transient Communities

- Hypotheses

- Methods
Online learning environments need communities

Communities are of high importance for the social interaction

Communities provide easy access to peers for any type of collaborative needs
What is a Learning network (LN)?

- Social network that allows various types of participants to collaborate and socialize
- Infrastructure for formal, non-formal and informal learning
- It emerges from the participants out
- No central control
- One or more communities
Main problem

- Communities need to emerge from the participants out
- Communities have a dynamic nature
- Problem: how can we improve the likelihood that a community emerges as well as stays in existence over time?
Dynamics

- Dynamics are what provide life to a community
- Dynamics are a two edged sword
  - Too little dynamics:
    - Nothing is happening within the community
    - No new people coming in
    - No requests fulfilled
  - Too many dynamics:
    - Community becomes a mess
    - Too many people leave
    - Too high amount of requests

These dynamics directly influence the social capital of the community
Maximize dynamics’ benefits on social capital
Minimize dynamics’ negatives on social capital

3 Features of social capital:

- Social network structure
- Sense of belonging
- Received and provided support
Social network structure (1)

- Centralization
Sense of belonging

- Low sense of belonging can lead to:
  - Detachment
  - Isolation
  - Distraction
  - Lack of personal attention

- Increased chance on drop-out
Received and provided support

- Professional support often not feasible
- Using peers as tutors can take care of this problem
- But how do participants know who to contact for support?
Ad Hoc Transient Communities
What is an Ad Hoc Transient Community (AHTC)?
- Ad Hoc – It is comes into being the moment there is a request
- Transient – Once the request has been fulfilled, the AHTC disappears again

Matching participants together improves the AHTC

Used so far only for the support feature

What effect do the AHTCs have on the social structure and sense of belonging?
Regarding the social network structure, when using AHTCs...

- The communities have a lower centralization
- Lower the centralization
- There are more connections in between users within each community
- Increase the connections....

- There are more bridging connections in between communities
Hypotheses (2)

- Regarding the sense of belonging, when using AHTCs...
  - Participants feel a stronger sense of belonging to the community
  - The sense of belonging is acquired in an earlier stage
  - There is higher level of trust in between participants
  - Drop-out will decrease
Hypotheses (3)

- Regarding the received and provided support, when using AHTCs...
  - There is a higher ratio of fulfilled requests
  - There is a lower threshold for participants to accept a request
  - There is a lower threshold for participants to post a request
  - Participants deem the community and Learning Network as more valuable
Methods

- Model and simulations
- Expert evaluation
- 1 or 2 experiments
  - Social Network Analysis (SNA)
    - Centralization measurement
    - Longitudinal
    - Measurements at intervals
    - (Strength and location of the relationships)
  - Ego Network Analysis (ENA)
    - Included are measurements for sense of belonging
  - Frequency of relationships
Questions and comments