

Chapter 19

Blueprint for a Mashup: Corporate Education in Moodle, Sloodle and Second Life

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ABSTRACT

In 2005 the Centre for Professional Learning and Development at the Open University (OU) established a pioneering collaboration with Reuters (which in 2008 became Thomson Reuters), working together on The Management Challenge Online (TMCO), a 10-week cohort-based course for First Line Managers. The course is currently delivered in the open source Moodle environment using Flash learning modules, to a model that encourages and supports collaborative participation and deep learning for delegates. This chapter will begin with an introduction to TMCO, providing some context and background to its development, structure and delegate groups. This has been described in detail elsewhere, see Peachey & Walshe (2008), where it was identified that “a Second Life activity programme element for TMCO would offer additional engagement potential for a significant number of participants.” The chapter will describe the virtual world Second Life and the course management integration system Sloodle before exploring the motivation and structure for integrating these new tools into the next evolution of TMCO. The chapter will propose an adaptation of an evaluation framework originally proposed by de Freitas & Oliver (2006), creating a tool for evaluating the introduction of virtual world technology into a work based training curriculum, and will outline the proposed Second Life/Moodle/Sloodle activity for TMCO in some detail.

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO TMCO

TMCO was established in partnership between The Open University and Reuters in 2005 in response to a demand for focused, repeatable and adaptable professional development for the First Line Managers that provide the organisational interface between middle/senior managers and frontline staff and customers. These line managers, with a variety of experience and service vested in the company, face considerable challenges managing the needs of many stakeholders, often in circumstances where time and other resources are limited. Their pivotal role in the system requires them to work across a global organisation with all the inherent challenge that implies, and significant emphasis is placed on supporting their professional development in ways that are both meaningful and flexible.

Many models of distance learning conform to an instructional, isolationist model where there is a central focus on the delivery of knowledge from the teacher (expert) to the student (novice), either directly or as mediated through instructional learning material. This form of learning is predicated upon ‘facts’, making it easy to assess at a distance through automated summative assessment such as multiple choice quizzes and computer marked assignments (CMAs). As noted in Peachey and Walshe (2008), this model is currently employed by The Open University in its regular undergraduate courses, where course material is delivered online and increasingly assessed through the use of CMAs, but blended with tutor support to facilitate the student’s self-directed learning and to mark and provide feedback on electronically submitted tutor marked assignments (eTMAs). Despite efforts to engage students with critical analysis and ‘knowledge age skills’, there remains a tendency for eTMA assessment to advantage information description over ways of thinking and doing, primarily due to the scale of provision

that drives a need for consistency across multiple tutorial groups.

The Centre For Professional Learning And Development (CPLD) provides a commercial facility from within the OU, catering to professional development needs by offering a bespoke service to create and deliver flexible, accessible and personalised learning that can be tailored to the needs of the participant’s immediate workplace setting. TMCO was designed and evolved according to pedagogies of social constructivism, see Vygotsky (1934) and later in this chapter, and experiential learning, see Kolb & Fry (1974), providing participants with learning material, enabling them towards the construction of understanding from that material and the application of that understanding in practical experimentation and active workplace experience, and encouraging them to reflect on that experience within the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). Kolb & Fry (1974) proposed that experiential learning is a cycle of abstract conceptualisation, active experimentation, concrete experience and reflective observation and that a learner may join the cycle at any point – the structure of TMCO strives to recognise the experience that participants bring to the course and to enable them to share that experience constructively. The course has evolved over its lifetime as the course team have incorporated a move from Teletop, the original VLE, into Moodle, and have adapted the course according to the manner in which participants are seen to be gaining most benefit. The pedagogy and evolution is described in detail in Peachey & Walshe (2008) but for the purposes of this chapter we are describing the course as it stands today.

The ten week online Management Challenge begins for a cohort in the week that immediately follows their participation in a three day residential workshop, facilitated by Development Dimensions International (DDI), a third partner. The cohorts of up to 30 participants are loosely grouped by area as EMEA, Americas and Asia, but within that grouping they may be widely

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