Chapter XL
A Wiki on the Teaching of Business Administration

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ABSTRACT

The European Credit Transfer System establishes a calculation based on the work students do, rather than direct teaching hours as is the case with the current credit system. These are known as ECTS credits and they represent the amount of work the student needs to do to pass a subject. In short, ECTS credits are the quantity of work needed to learn a subject, including theory, practical classes, seminars, exams as well as anything the student has done individually which can be evaluated. This is where a Wiki would provide a new space for students, where they could and should introduce information on matters related to the subject, as well as edit, correct, expand and improve etc. the already existing information. This information, which would be a collection of web pages in hypertext, would make it possible to create a computer application based on the collaborative work of the students which can be accessed by any student from any Internet connection. At the same time, it can be assessed and therefore form part of the student's final grade for the subject. The aim of this chapter is to show the methodology which will enable a Wiki to be used for professional learning. Therefore, first the authors define what a Wiki is; second they discuss the Wiki as a collaborative teaching instrument; and third they deal with Wikis as a tool for educational assessment.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to set out how Wikis can be used as a teaching instrument in Finance and Accounts Analysis. This subject uses the philosophy of the new European Higher Education Area and is part of the Master's in Industrial Organization in the Faculty of Economic and Business Sciences at the Rovira i Virgili University. These ideas, as with all ideas, can be a source of discussion and new knowledge which can be easily extrapolated to other curricula and learning environments.

Wikis are still not used in everyday life, and even less so in university teaching. This chapter aims to make people aware of this new technology as a teaching tool based on practical experience and cooperation. Therefore, this chapter looks into the world of collaborative learning with the aim of making Wikis available as another teaching tool. Other subjects that are discussed are: collaborative work as an educational tool to help overcome individualism among the students, and Wikis as part of the assessment process. Because there are some people who believe that if something is not evaluated, it becomes devalued, it is very important to analyze how Wikis can contribute to teaching assessment. The chapter finishes with our conclusions.

BACKGROUND

What is a Wiki? An initial definition of a Wiki might be that: "it is a website that can be edited by any person". However, this definition is not altogether accurate. First, a Wiki is not exactly a website, but rather several websites linked to one another. Furthermore, a Wiki does not have its own html code, as websites do. In fact, the functions and presentation of a Wiki are quite different from those of a website. Nevertheless, a Wiki is a system for publishing on the World Wide Web, as are websites.

What possibly differentiates a website from a Wiki more than anything else is the fact that any person can modify it, and this is the fundamental characteristic that makes it suitable as a teaching instrument, as the following section shows:

According to the people who host the "Wiki-WikiWeb", it's a "composition system; it's a discussion medium; it's a repository; it's a mail system; it's a tool for collaboration. Really, we don't know quite what it is, but it's a fun way of communicating asynchronously across the network." (Retrieved September 18, 2008, from http://www.c2.com/cgi/Wiki).

Thus, a Wiki is a webpage which looks very much like a website, and it is very difficult to tell the difference at first glance. However, a Wiki can be modified and this turns us into webmasters, because we can enter the page and write anything that we like. Furthermore, any Internet surfer can see, read and edit what we have written (by editing we mean modifying, completing, improving, documenting, etc. what we have written).

The word Wiki comes from the Hawaiian language and means "rapid". Specifically, it is an abbreviation of WikiWikiWeb. The reason why this word is used is because of the speed at which it is possible to generate information which can be accessed globally. The Wiki was invented by the North American Ward Cunningham in 1995, who defined it as "the simplest online database that could possibly work" (Retrieved June 18, 2005, from http://www.c2.com/cgi/Wiki?WelcomeVisitors)

THE WIKI AS A TEACHING INSTRUMENT

As we have just shown, a Wiki allows articles to be coauthored using a very simple editing process and a navigator. This characteristic of the Wiki, the ease with which information can be published, modified, corrected and expanded, is the basis which allows students to obtain and improve

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