# Chapter 77
# Social Issues and Web 2.0:
## A Closer Look at Culture in E-Learning

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## ABSTRACT

*Developing the foundations for intelligent applications that efficiently manage information is one goal of Web 2.0 technologies and the Semantic Web. As a result, the organization of Web 2.0 and other Semantic Web approaches to learning hold significant implications for learning, especially when one considers the role of cultures in learning and e-learning. Exploring how these technologies impact learning, this chapter focuses on social and cultural issues from potential users' and learners' standpoints. Furthermore, the chapter offers dimensions of cultural variability as a framework for its arguments. The chapter draws from existing literature and research to present implications of Semantic Web and Web 2.0, along with the issue of digital divide which is critical when exploring access to Web 2.0 technology platforms. The chapter ends by addressing key implications for Web 2.0 and the Semantic Web regarding usage and general effectiveness in the learning context.*

## INTRODUCTION

Web 2.0 promises a more powerful, more engaging, and more interactive user experience that will revolutionize the way people interact with information technologies and resources, especially in learning environments. The Web 2.0 approach to public web reshapes the relationship between how users connect and use information. While Web 2.0 is not a technological innovation *per se*, it is changing the landscape of information, knowledge acquisition and dissemination and the role of users. This is accomplished through the read/write feature that allows learners and users to author or edit information in a way that suits their goals or learning needs.

## SOCIAL ISSUES AND CULTURE

This chapter discusses learning in the context of social interaction. Learning and knowledge management is increasingly being conceived as a social activity, where communication technologies are used as tools to help learners and individuals become increasingly aware of their social environment in the learning process. To this end, e-Learning is undergoing paradigmatic shift from an organized and formal network context to an informal and spontaneous network context, otherwise referred to as Web 2.0 or semantic web environment. Learning technologies, courses, and learning objects--anything that is pedagogically formal, closed, and developer/teacher-driven is considered passé because the current emphasis on constructivist ideologies of making learning fun, user-driven, and informal are now paramount. This approach, however, is currently under scrutiny because not everyone subscribes to this method of learning. Therefore, information technology (IT) designers are trending toward a new zeitgeist where they replace standardized courses with *in-context* learning or learning on demand (Braun & Schmidt, 2006a), a trend of great import when the context is heavily influenced by culture.

The Web 2.0 is a new generation of web applications developed to harness the power of the web to create a new standard in human computer interaction (HCI). The majority of the technologies classified under Web 2.0 are prevalent in social networking communities, eLearning, professional business and organizational environments. Given that Web 2.0 is not a term that refers to any specific or new form of World Wide Web (W3), instead, it refers to the aggregate of social software that uses the Internet as a platform for which such devices can be connected (Kenney, 2007; O'Reilly, 2005). Web 2.0 is used largely as a metaphor to suggest a major software upgrade to the W3 (Tredinnick, 2006). A key goal of these technologies is to bring about *network effects* for users to participate. Examples of social software that enable Web 2.0 for collaboration include blogs and its multimedia companion such as pods and videocasts (Cameron & Anderson, 2006; Kenney, 2007), wikis, distributed classification systems, flickr, and RSS feeds (Dron, 2007; Mejias, 2005). Essentially, Web 2.0 is an idea that includes enabling technologies that facilitate read, write, and edit features that reflect semantic web. IT designers and platform theorists are giving Web 2.0 and its possibilities considerable attention. While the technology has much to offer individuals and users, the technologies face significant social and cultural challenges and especially as they relate to knowledge and platform of choice in global organizations, education, and eLearning.

The goal of the semantic web is to develop a basis for intelligent applications enabling more efficient information use through collections of repository knowledge (Schoop, Moor, & Dietz, 2006). As such, IT designers have offered the semantic web as a valuable resource in achieving the goals of eLearning or distance education and training often embraced in global organizations and their respective workers. For example, knowledge gap analysis can be automated by competencies and learning objects that are connected through ontologies (Sicilia, 2005). It follows that the organization of Web 2.0 and other semantic web approaches to learning holds significant implications for learning and cultures that the literature rarely addresses. With this in mind, the proposed chapter explores, in general, how these technologies impact learning by focusing on social and cultural issues from potential users' and learners' standpoints.

The driver of Web 2.0 involves user's ability to create and publish content online at will using the read/write features of the web (Richardson, 2007). Building upon this always open and ready environment, the social component of the Web 2.0 platforms helps users engage in high, seemingly unlimited, levels of interactivity with the technologies and other users. More important, however, is the role of Web 2.0 in educational pedagogy.

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