Abstract:
The e-Learning communities are beginning, little by little, to take off worldwide and now they are an important part of the educational system. One of those e-Learning communities is European Certification and Qualification Association (ECQA). ECQA (www.ecqa.org) - is a non-profit association; it is joining institutions and thousands of professionals from all over Europe and abroad. The ECQA has developed a set of quality criteria, which are used for the certification of the following types of service providers: trainers, training organizations, exam organizations, and certification organizations. The aim is to ensure the same level of training and certification quality in all participating countries. In this context, the present paper will present a marketing survey based on a questionnaire (using the Google Docs Questionnaire facilities) that was distributed among the ECQA members, in October 2012; with the occasion of the ECQA Days 2012 - Innovation in Education and Future Key Skills for European Research and Industry - at the IMC University of Applied Sciences Krems from Austria. The main ideas behind this research are related to: (1) management of virtual project teams for e-Learning communities; (2) the role of using specific information and communication technology (ICT) for e-Learning and (3) the importance of using the new ICT for e-Learning.

Keywords: virtual teams, e-Learning communities, management, marketing survey.
1. INTRODUCTION

Modern organizations build-up and encourage the development of virtual project teams for better attend their global objectives/interests in the global economy. The changes in managing people, employees have underlined, in the last years, the importance of virtual project teams for the global business management. Virtual teams’ definitions evolve from the primary description of the concept made by (Lipnack et al., 1997): virtual teams are most definitely teams, not electronic representations of the real thing. They are going digital, using the Internet and Intranets. Unlike conventional teams, a virtual team works across space, time, and organizational boundaries with links strengthened by webs of communication technologies. Other following researchers conclude that a real working team can be transform into a virtual one if some criteria, characteristics are satisfied simultaneously (Ale Ebrahim et al., 2009): (a) They are geographically dispersed (Dafoulas & Macaulay, 2002), (Shin, 2005), (Nemiro, 2002), (Peters & Manz, 2007), (Lee-Kelley & Sankey, 2008); (b) They are driven by common purpose (Bal & Teo, 2001), (Shin, 2005), (Hertel et al., 2005), (Gassmann & Von Zedtwitz, 2003), (Rezgui, 2007); (c) They are enabled by communication technologies (Bal & Teo, 2001), (Nemiro, 2002), (Peters & Manz, 2007), (Lee-Kelley & Sankey, 2008); (d) They are involved in cross-boundary collaboration (Bal & Teo, 2001), (Gassmann & Von Zedtwitz, 2003), (Rezgui, 2007), (Precup et al., 2006).

Today, most emblematic definitions of e-Learning communities evolve from the experiment of two psychology professors, Patrick Suppes and Richard C. Atkinson, from Stanford University. They try by using computers to learn mathematic and to read to pupils from elementary school in East Palo Alto, California (Wikipedia). Another pioneer is Bernard Luskin, who in 1963, working with Stanford University and others installed the first computer in a community college for instruction, developing the computer assisted instruction (Wikipedia).

The e-Learning communities are beginning, little by little, to take off worldwide and now they are an important part of the educational system. Increasingly more universities and companies are turning to e-Learning, the reasons being different. But the most important reasons include them are low-cost and eco-friendly. Several typical definitions of learning community and e-Learning community are summarizing in Table 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operating concepts</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning community</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-learning communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Kilpatrick, 2003 & Digolo, 2011

From the above definitions we can observe that e-Learning communities are the next generation of learning communities. Methods and tools based Internet technologies (e. g. web based technologies,
web-based information systems) have been developed in the last years to support not only communication, but also work processes related to e-Learning communities.

One of e-Learning communities, established as the certification unit for university – industry based learning partnerships in the IT & services sector (Georgiadou, 2009), is European Certification and Qualification Association (ECQA). Provides a world-wide unified certification schema for numerous professions and brings together experts from the market and supports the definition and development of the knowledge required for professions. Likewise, defines and verifies quality criteria for training organizations and trainers to assure the same level of training all over the world.

The main ideas behind this research are related to: (1) management of virtual project teams for e-Learning communities; (2) the role of using specific information and communication technology (ICT) for e-Learning and (3) the importance of using the new ICT for e-Learning.

2. EUROPEAN CERTIFICATION AND QUALIFICATION ASSOCIATION (ECQA)

2.1 Visions on ECQA 2020

If you currently look at the situation of ECQA, you look to a success story. ECQA was founded 2009 as the result of several European projects (networking) and had the basic idea of improving the visibility for some jobs all over Europe. This grew to an association, which in 2012 looks at 60 members of 25 European countries and thousands of already issued certificates in 27 different job roles. The community of interested people grows constantly as well as the number of ambassadors all over Europe. Additionally the impact worldwide is visible as ECQA is more and more approached by interested people, be it to cooperate in certificates, cooperate as trainings- or exam provider.

The next step for ECQA should be to concentrate on their core idea, to enhance employability with Europe wide recognized certificates and to strengthen these certificates in cooperation with international companies. Here we have already started the work on clustering several job roles together and try to identify similar units/elements or performance criteria. If this is done, we could analyze how to align these job roles together so that complete clusters can be managed together by the Job role committees rather than every job role itself.

The next important work package will be to analyze the difference for every Job role, of the European market and worldwide view. It will be critical to decide if there is the need of splitting those Job roles into “core” job roles, for worldwide use, and regional modules to be added to that or if we should rather focus on “core” job roles and add specializations to that. For this view, we are in need of research, as well as new partners worldwide. The important part is still the quality, as we think that this is the key to ECQAs success. To demonstrate that our Quality is as good as we think we will be looking forward to get the ISO certifications on 17024 and 9001 for ECQA over the next few years.

In the next few years ECQA should be Europe wide and worldwide known for their high quality management certificates. These should enhance the employability of every person passing these exams.

2.2 Retrospective of the projects

ECQA has set up a partnership of experienced partners in 18 European countries to create a pool of knowledge for specific professions. These specific professions were created after several projects with Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) supports. The European Exam Portal System is being used by a Europe wide LLP project EU Cert Campus (www.eu-certificates.org) and promoted by the ECQA. The existing skills assessment portals are extended to cover the new requirements of the ISO 17024 (General Requirements for Bodies operating Certification of Persons) standard. In 2009, they were 15 European professions supported by the system; in 2010 were 20 European professions and now, in 2013, they are already 26 European professions (ECQA Guideline, 2011).

The EU projects that helped in the development of the ECQA platform and strategy are (http://www.ecqa.org/index.php?id=222):
- FP5 Project MM 1032 CREDIT: Development of skills portals, skills assessment functions, standards for skills sets in Europe (1998-2001);
- LLP project EQN: Design of Europe-wide valid quality criteria to empower a Europe-wide quality control in course delivery and certification for courses in the LLP schema. These guidelines formed the basis to form the ECQA association legally with defined quality and certification guidelines (2005 - 2007).
- LLP multilateral project EU Cert Campus: An online training campus has been established supporting skills assessment, online training, certification and a trainer pool (2008 - 2009).
- LLP multilateral project dEUCert: Dissemination of ECQA and the EU Cert Campus takes place in all European countries and regional certification centers are being set up (2010 - 2011).

The professions and professional qualifications, the ECQA Job Roles, created after several projects with Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) supports, in this moment are:
- ECQA Certified Applied Sustainability & CSR Manager (in development)
- ECQA Certified Business Process Manager
- ECQA Certified Diversity Manager (in development)
- ECQA Certified E-Learning Manager
- ECQA Certified EU Internal Financial Control Assessor
- ECQA Certified EU Project Manager
- ECQA Certified Functional Safety Manager (SaFeUr)
- ECQA Certified Governance SPICE Assessor
- ECQA Certified Incubation Manager
- ECQA Certified Innovation Manager
- ECQA Certified Integrated Design Engineer (iDesigner)
- ECQA Certified IT Consultant for SMEs
- ECQA Certified ISECMA© Professional for IT-Security Management
- ECQA Certified Lean Six Sigma - Yellow Belt (in development)
- ECQA Certified Lean Six Sigma - Orange Belt (in development)
- ECQA Certified Lean Six Sigma - Green Belt (in development)
- ECQA Certified Lean Six Sigma - Black Belt (in development)
- ECQA Certified Researcher-Entrepreneur (ResEUr)
- ECQA Certified SCOPE Manager
- ECQA Certified Social Media Networker (SIMS)
- ECQA Certified Social Responsibility Manager (in development)
- ECQA Certified SPI Manager
- ECQA Certified Terminology Manager - Basic
- ECQA Certified Transnational RTI-Manager for Centre Region
- ECQA Certified Valorisation Manager
- ECQA Certified m-Learning Managers (mLeMan)

In Picture 1 are summarizing the main ECQA project with Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) supports:
Pursuant to ADAM, the project and product portal for Leonardo da Vinci, ECQA Certified Integrated Design Engineer – also known as iDesigner – is introduced in the category of Best Projects. Is one of the projects that are helping Europe along the path to meeting its 2020 targets for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. These projects are fostering new ideas and innovations that are vital as Europe faces up to the challenges of a competitive global environment (http://www.adam-europe.eu/adam/thematicgroup/MMVII).

3. MARKETING SURVEY – QUESTIONNAIRE

The research method used was a marketing survey based on a questionnaire (with close and open question). This questionnaire was also designed as an on-line one using the Google Docs Questionnaire facilities for the centralization of the data. And it was distributed among the ECQA members, in October 2012; with the occasion of the ECQA Days 2012 - Innovation in Education and Future Key Skills for European Research and Industry - at the IMC University of Applied Sciences Krems from Austria. The research sample includes 32 subjects, of project managers and ECQA partners, having different nationalities: Spanish (1), Polish (1), Austrian (6), Croatian (1), Afghan (1), German (4), Romanian (8), Hungarian (1), Bulgarian (2), Finnish (3), Danish (1), French (1), Greek (1) and Slovenian (1). Age of participants ranged below 25 and above 61 years.

In this paper are performed researches regarding the following: (1) management of virtual project teams for e-Learning communities; (2) the role of using specific information and communication technology (ICT) for e-Learning and (3) the importance of using the new ICT for e-Learning.

Regarding the first research hypothesis of this survey (to identify the management of virtual project teams for e-Learning communities) the research survey underlines that the most important challenges to achieving a successful project management of e-Learning communities is understanding and managing user expectations (50%), next is data quality (47%), then data integration (31%), the penultimate is tool capability (28%) and the less important are culture change (3%) and time required to implement (3%)(Table 2).

Table 2: The most important challenges to achieving a successful project management of e-Learning communities (Where 1 means very important and 5 means very unimportant)
For the second research hypothesis of this survey (the role of using specific information and communication technology (ICT) for e-Learning) underlines (in Table 3) that to a great extent the most used mean of communication is e-mail (78%), very often is used telephone (38%), fairly often the conference calls (34%) and web collaboration tools (34%), to a small extent are used face-to-face meetings (31%) and 53% never use fax. Regarding other functionalities (Table 4) that are very important the research sample said that the following functionalities are as well very important: synchronization (with local PC); recording of sessions, so as to give the absent members the possibility to follow up; “no bottle-necks”, i.e. shared and genuine responsibility and flexible replace ability within the project team whenever it’s required / needed; earned value analysis; something which cannot be measured: full interest about the project (nearly dedication) and devotion of adequate time and effort.

In terms of the third research hypothesis, the importance of using new ICT for e-Learning and if sophisticated communications technology can enhance the ability of teams to collaborate in a virtual environment like e-Learning communities, we notice that: 47% agree and 22% are strongly agree (Table 5). The name of the software tool used by project managers and ECQA partners are: NQA by ISCN (Network Quality Assurance), Fronter, Flash, Skype, Adobe (Videoconference), Google Docs, Netmeeting, Anymeeting, Surversion, Cisco Communicator, Chat (MSN, GCHAT, ICQ), Office 365 (Sharepoint), Webex, Dropbox, Collaber, Microsoft Lync, Confluence, Scrum Master, Bugzilla, Project place, EVO and IBM Sametime.

Table 3: Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>To a small extent</th>
<th>Fairly often</th>
<th>Very often</th>
<th>To a great extent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fax</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-mail</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-face meetings</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice mail</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video conferencing</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conference calls</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web collaboration tools</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: The most important functionalities of ICT (Where 1 means very important and 5 means very unimportant)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Functionality</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>instant messages / chat</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sound transmission</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>video transmission</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>whiteboard</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e-mail</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e-mail notification</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>screen sharing</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>synchronous work on files/documents</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5: Sophisticated communications technology can enhance the ability of teams to collaborate in a virtual environment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No. %</td>
<td>No. %</td>
<td>No. %</td>
<td>No. %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2 6%</td>
<td>5 16%</td>
<td>15 47%</td>
<td>7 22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. CONCLUSIONS

The research results have important aspects regarding the management of virtual project teams for e-Learning communities; that the most important challenges to achieving a successful project management of e-Learning communities is understand and manage user expectations. Of course in practice there have to be consider other specific conditions and/or aspects, like data quality, data integration, tool capability, and many other requirements. The research hypothesis regarding the role of using specific information and communication technology (ICT) for e-Learning underlined that to a great extent the most used mean of communication is e-mail, telephone, the conference calls, web collaboration tools and face-to-face meetings. In terms of the third research hypothesis, the importance of using new ICT for e-Learning and if sophisticated communications technology can enhance the ability of teams to collaborate in a virtual environment like e-Learning communities, almost all research sample agreed that new communication tools perform functions to support e-Learning communities to collaborate in optimal conditions.

ECQA virtual community was described in the paper with respect of the association aims and objectives. ECQA is a non-for-profit association, joining institutions and several thousands of professionals from all over the Europe and abroad. ECQA provides a worldwide unified certification schema for numerous professions.

The present research will be extended for the whole ECQA community (not only project managers and ECQA partners) and by using specific software for the statistical data process (SPSS), some correlation will be shown.

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REFERENCE LIST


