Future of FLOSSE: Interview with Teemu Leinonen

February 25, 2005 - Teemu Arina

"We are theory-based design-oriented group. Open Source software is just like study reports - we are releasing the software for commenting, referencing, peer review and so on. We just continue the academic tradition"

Listen (MP3) - 28min - 12,6Mb

This time we offer an interview with Teemu Leinonen, who is also one of our bloggers. Once again recorded in Skype for our series of future of FLOSS in education. I have created a future event analysis based on this interview, available in the end of this post.

Teemu Leinonen is doing learning environment research and design work at the University of Art and Design, Helsinki. His research group started in 1998 to work on future learning environment development. The idea is to use ICT in a meaningful way in a school .

This research is conducted together with the department of Psychology, University of Helsinki with Kai Hakkarainen and his research group.

In addition to study papers, his research group has also produced computer software that reflects the ideas central to their research. One of the tools created is the FLE (FLE is a Learning Environment) software - latest one being FLE3, the 3rd version supporting the FLE concept. FLE is a prototype to try out how to build a future learning environment. It aims to engage students in active process of building knowledge, rather than receiving information.

Teemu thinks that the traditional eLearning vendors should continue to do what they do and get better in providing content to students. Content based approach serves perfectly for the majority of people. In the other hand he sees that there will be space for alternative approaches like knowledge building.

Also he notes that many smart companies see that their biggest challenge is how to get people collaborate and share information together instead of taking traditional courses but that's what the eLearning industry is mostly offering. One way is to introduce so called learning add-ons to existing business tools.

Regarding Open Content, Leinonen mentions that teachers should understand that content production is not their core business as only a hanful are making money out of that. They should start sharing content and working together instead.

Some questions asked in the interview:

- What do you do?
- Open Source FLE3 research method?
- Are we going to see FLE4?
- Blogs and education?
- Future of current VLE systems?
- Knowledge building?
- Is the concept of a course going to change?
- eLearning business and universities?
- Collaborative learning and companies?
- Open Content?
- Non-technical factors that have to change?
- Copyright legislation?

"In traditional business tools there will be a learning add-on, which enables learning issues to be concidered there as well. These learning add-ons are offering people a place and time for meta-cognition"

"Read more" to see the extracted future events and analysis.

Future events

Here is a list of fictional future events extracted from the interview with Teemu Leinonen. If you want to comment or have additional future events to present based on the interview, please do so.

Disclaimer: The future events were constructed from the ideas presented in the interview and do not represent the ideas of the interviewee. No crystal ball or time machines were used in the construction of these events. Bear in mind, it's the future and everything is possible.

Year 2006

Organizations distribute geographically

Technology offers a lot of possibilities for the decentralization of organizations and virtual teams. Shared online workspaces are a common place. It's now cheaper and more efficient to work from multiple locations from all around the world. Multiple mobile units replace massive corporate headquarters. Some companies move parts of their premises to countries where it's cheaper to conduct business.

Educators find weblogs weak for learning

Weblogs are increasingly popular among students in their free time but the use for learning purposes is still lacking. Some teachers state arguments that a weblog is not straight away a great learning tool because the blog was originally created for very different purposes. Weblog was not designed for collaborative learning, knowledge

building or even for discussion. This is similar to the failure of discussion boards in learning which also were not originally designed for learning.

Blogs popular for personal learning

As people get more used to blogs, they notice their value for personal learning. According to a survey, 85% of bloggers find that they have learned major new concepts and are now able to better sort out their own understanding of issues through blogging. The concept of a learning diary finally reaches a critical mass as people start to voluntarily maintain their own learning diary to develop their meta-cognitive skills.

Content approach to learning serves the majority of people

There are many different learning styles. The content based approach trumpeted by LMS providers is getting better all the time. According to researchers, the traditional content based approach still serves the majority of people and is sufficient as a general method. A minority of learners find their way to online communities of practice where they are able to develop their understanding in a different manner.

DRM artificially prevents fair use

DRM has developed during the time and has been incorporated into many consumer technologies. Creative Commons and EFF are objecting its use because the DRM technology is also limiting the fair use of original content. Electronic book readers do not allow copying text out of copyrighted books and generate problems especially in education. In some instances people are not even able to copy or print open content or works under the public domain.

Year 2007

Businesses focus on developing knowledge building skills

Some revolutionary businesses are spending 20% of their training budget to train their employees in knowledge creation skills and related practices. It's more important to get people collaborate and share information instead of taking traditional courses. Employees continually challenge existing practices and transform what is known. These are both considered important to compete in the global economy.

Open Content start-ups receive funding

Investors have noticed certain innovative start-ups who have been able to turn the free and open content into profitable income. Among them are filtering technologies that gather open content from the fragmented web and cluster them into usable categories for businesses to use.

Open content licensing built into several applications

Over 25% of educational authoring tools now include open content licensing built-in. Users are forced to think if they want to keep the content or give it away. This step in

releasing all kinds of digital material accelerates the availability of open content in education and contributes to the troubles of traditional publishers as teachers are increasingly able to find people who are willing to share their work.

Proprietary learning environments start to provide syndication

Due to popular demand proprietary vendors are pressured to include open XML based syndication standards in their applications. Bigger LMS vendors try to reason why this is bad and refer to lack of authentication in the syndication scheme. The truth is it's against their business alliances with publishers. Open syndication would allow their systems to be used with open content based decentralized learning object repositories.

Year 2008

Learning add-ons enhance enterprise applications

As businesses transform into learning organizations, learning add-ons are introduced to existing information system infrastructures. Financial systems, groupware applications, corporate intranets, ERP and CRM applications are all extended with additional methods and software components that take learning aspects in the use of these systems into account. These learning add-ons are offering people a place and time for meta cognition and greatly improve just-in-time learning.

Several eLearning companies go out of business

The concept of eLearning is a failure by most counts and perceived by many as a ripple effect of the IT bust. Several eLearning vendors go out of business as educational institutions – especially universities – notice that what is offered under eLearning provides nothing they will need. Good practices are overridden by practices that are not as good. They focus their resources to develop their traditional practices instead.

Academics increasingly produce results as FLOSS

In academic research it's now common that end results of research include computer programs in addition to academic papers. In research where software programs are written in addition to academic papers, over 25% of these programs is now released under an Open Source compliant license. It's quite natural that the results are in such a form that they allow outside participation, commenting, peer review and reproduction on the source code level in spirit of the ethics of science.

Year 2009

Universities in trouble as core business get outsourced

Several notable universities have found out that they did strategically bad decisions in their hasty move towards online learning environments. The problem is that they happened to outsource their core business in the process: learning content and learning environments. Now they are locked in with contracts and are forced to buy content and learning environment technology from companies with mismatching values.

Information is self-organizing itself faster than before

Thanks to XML syndication, web interfaces and trackback technology, there are smart access points for users to personalize the information they receive based on their own requirements. The rise of the blogosphere fundamentally changed the way webpages were written and how hyperlinks were used. This enabled information to self-organize faster than before and as a result, machines are now able to sort out information in a more accurate manner. The semantic web appears in a different form than what W3C originally thought.

Year 2010

Three-dimensional navigation grows in popularity

After IBM's successful effort in developing the first mainstream targeted three-dimensional desktop navigation for popular Linux desktops, also the web developers started to create similar navigational systems. 3D navigation became especially helpful for navigating tags based on folksonomies. In learning 3D navigation is successfully used in knowledge building applications because 3D is perceived as a more suitable way for navigation of complex networked ideas.

The notion of a course has changed

Originally a course was primarily constructed based on content that is teached and what concepts are supposedly learned through the content. This has changed. Memorizing small instances of information are not anymore considered important because that information is quickly available through smart information hubs or online experts. Ability to reach a higher level in understanding and ability grasp concepts in a certain topic is considered as more important.

Open content is reducing the size of the publishing industry

Open content in audio, video and text form is starting to distract the publishing industry. The phenomenon is growing so fast and through so many fronts that the publishing industry is unable to fight the movement and are forced to change their business models. Only a handful of larger publishing companies are able to cleanly change their revenue models to fit in the new sharing economy.

Mickey Mouse is free

The copyright legislation, especially the ridiculously long authors copyright has been changed as a result of global political pressure carried out by open content advocates. Disney Inc. is not anymore able to block the use of Mickey Mouse as it has entered the public domain. Hooray!

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