

## **USABILITY IN USER GENERATED LEARNING SPACES**

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### **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

Learning spaces encompass the full range of places in which learning occurs, from real to virtual; classroom to chat room. The effective design of learning spaces whether physical or virtual can enhance the way learning takes place and consequently the outcome.

With the advancements in technology leading to convergence of platforms and proliferation of high capacity mobile devices, learners are increasingly shifting their preferences for learning environments from the physical to the virtual; virtual learning spaces offer significant advantages in enabling learning activities that are distributed in time and space.

For any interactive system that implements virtual learning spaces, usability is a key determinant in uptake. Usability is defined by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO 9412) as "the extent to which a product can be used by specified users to achieve specified goals with effectiveness, efficiency, and satisfaction in a specified context of use". Besides usability, the use of learning spaces needs an understanding of how learners construct knowledge in the context of their activities.

### **PROJECT AIM AND SCOPE**

The aim of this project is to investigate usability in user generated learning spaces, with a specific emphasis on improving the usability of the virtual learning spaces in the Manchester Personal Learning Environment (MPLE). This will be done using standard usability evaluation processes and frameworks such as those defined by the International Organization for Standardization.

### **OUTCOMES**

The expected outcome for this project is an improved virtual learning space for the PLE. This might involve a total re-design or major modifications to improve the usability of the existing learning spaces in the PLE.

This project has significant impact on the academia as well as the society at large. The outcomes of the usability evaluation will reveal strengths and weaknesses in support for the way knowledge is being acquired by learners.