DynaLearn

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Abstract

Different project management tools have been evaluated. We have chosen several well-known, flexible and mature tools to support management activities and communication between the DynaLearn project participants. We have created a DynaLearn website for stakeholders outside the DynaLearn website. An internal website and a project Wiki support the process of establishing and sharing ideas and discussions. They also facilitate document collection within the project. E-mail communication is supported through project mailing lists. Software development is supported through the distributed version management tool Git and the bug tracking package Mantis.

Document history

Version	Modifications	Data	Author(s)
01	Outline, draft text	2009/03/11	Bredeweg
02	Revised text, added and filled in sections	2009/03/17	Liem
03	Wrote abstract, introduction and conclusions. Towards finalising document	2009/03/18	Liem
04	Finalised document	2009/03/20	Bredeweg

Contents

1. Introduction

This document describes the DynaLearn project management structure and implementation. It describes how different management tools support particular management roles within the project. Section 2 describes the overall project management structure and the different management roles used within the DynaLearn project. This section identifies the users that will use the management support tools. Section 3 describes the communication and document sharing tools. Specific tools support the stakeholders outside the DynaLearn project, and different groups of project participants within the project. For example different mailing lists are established for the educational aspects of the project and technological aspects of the project. Section 4 describes the reporting process and which documents are used for that to. Finally, Section 5 summarizes and concludes this document.

2. Project organisation and implementation
The organisational structure and operating procedures of the Dynalearn project are detailed in the Description of Work (DoW) [1] and the Consortium Agreement [2]. Here the main details are summarised.

2.1 List of beneficiaries
The DymaLearn project consists of 8 beneficiaries (Table 1):

Table 1: List of beneficiaries

Beneficiary Number	Beneficiary name	Beneficiary short name	Country
1 (coordinator)	University of Amsterdam	UVA	The Netherlands
2	Universidad Politécnica de Madrid	UPM	Spain
3	University of Augsburg	UAU	Germany
4	University of Brasília	FUB	Brazil
5	Tel Aviv University	TAU	Israel
6	University of Hull	UH	United Kingdom
7	Bulgarian Academy of Sciences	CLGE	Bulgaria
8	University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences	BOKU	Austria

2.2 Project management structure
The main roles (consortium bodies) in the DynaLearn project are as follows (Figure 1):
- Overall Project Coordination (OPC)
- Project Management Board (PMB)
- Scientific and Technical Steering Committee (STSC)
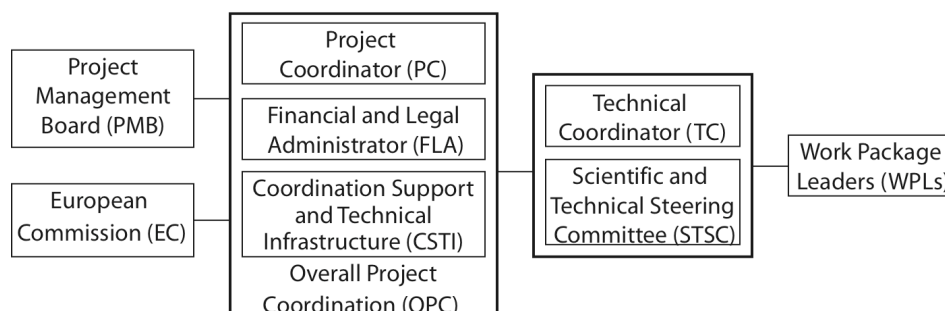- Work package leaders (WPLs)

Figure 1: Project management structure

2.3 Overall project coordination (OPC)
OPC handles the overall project coordination and official communication with the European Commission. OPC is the tasks of project coordinator (UVA) and has of the following sub-roles:
- Project Coordinator (PC): Bert Bredeweg, HCS, Faculty of Science, UVA.
- Finance and Legal administration (FLA): Vanessa Wolters, Financial office, Faculty of Science, UVA.
- Coordination Support and Technical Infrastructure (CSTI): Jochem Liem, HCS, Faculty of Science, UVA.

2.4 Project Management Board (PMB)
The PMB acts as the ultimate decision-making body of the project and consist of one senior delegate from each beneficiary:
- Bert Bredeweg (UVA) (Associate professor) (Chair)

- Elisabeth André (UAU) (Full professor)
- Asunción Gómez-Pérez (UPM) (Full professor)
- Paulo Salles (FUB) (Adjoint professor)
- David Mioduser (TAU) (Associate professor)
- Ian Cowx (UH) (Full professor)
- Yordan Uzunov (CLGE) (Associate professor)
- Suzanne Muhar (BOKU) (Full professor)

2.5 Scientific and Technical Steering Committee (STSC)
The STSC is an advisory body for the project execution. The STCS advises the PMB and consists of representatives of the major project beneficiaries:
- Bert Bredeweg (UVA)
- Asunción Gómez-Pérez (UPM)
- Elisabeth André (UAU)
- Paulo Salles (FUB)

The Technical Coordinator (TC) leads and chairs the STSC meetings. Bert Bredeweg will carry out this role, until UVA appoints someone specific.

2.6 Work Package Leader (WPL)
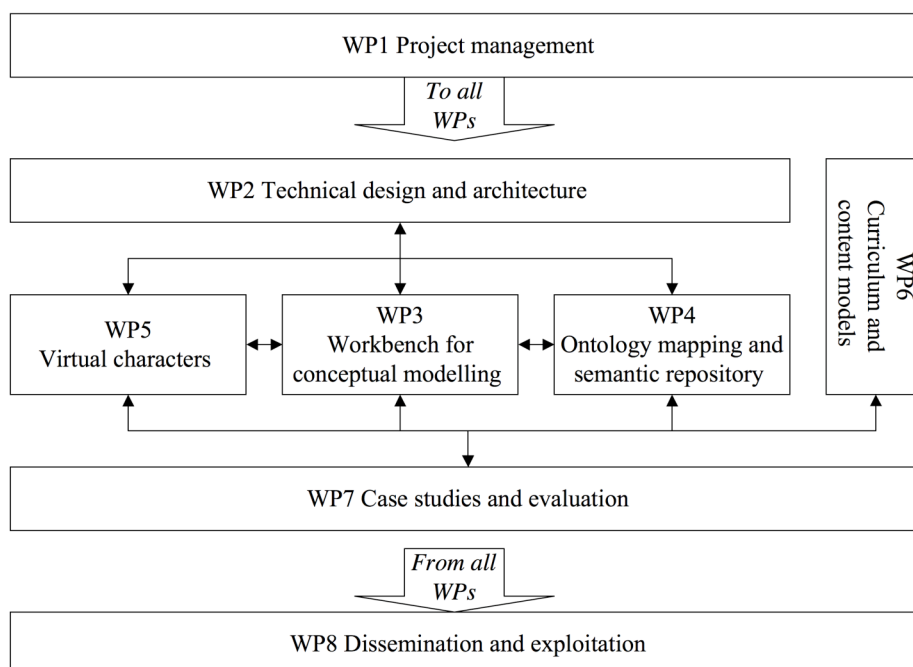The DynaLearn project work plan is broken down into 8 work packages (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Work package overview

Each work package is led by a Work Package Leader (WPL). The WPL is responsible for the timely execution and submission of deliverables. The WPL also monitors the status of milestones and expenditure of effort in their respective work packages. The WPLs will keep the PMB informed of developments and progress status on a regular basis (bi-monthly). The WPLs are senior staff members:
- WP1: Bert Bredeweg (UVA)
- WP2: Elisabeth André (UAU)
- WP3: Bert Bredeweg (UVA)
- WP4: Asunción Gómez-Pérez (UPM)
- WP5: Elisabeth André (UAU)

- WP6: Paulo Salles (FUB)
- WP7: David Mioduser (TAU)
- WP8: Oscar Corcho (UPM)

The basic idea underlying the management structure is as follows. The WPL's collaborate and resolve issues within and between the Work Packages. In the case of problems WPLs report to the STSC who develops solutions and advices the PMB. The PMB takes decisions (if needed). The PC should always be informed by each of the consortium bodies. The OPC supports and facilitates the ongoing processes as much as possible.

2.7 Project meetings

The DynaLearn has project meetings every 6 months[1]. A project meeting takes 4 days during which all consortium bodies meet (that is: Work Packages, Scientific and Technical Steering Committee, and Project Management Board). The PMB typically meets on the 2nd day of the project meeting. The PMB meeting is open for all project members (attending is in fact recommended to facilitate internal communication and dissemination), unless the PMB decides that the meeting needs to be restricted to PMB members only.

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[1] 1st meeting was held in Amsterdam, February 2nd – 5th, 2009.

3. Communication and document sharing

The DynaLearn project uses multiple means for communication and document sharing among the beneficiaries, particular the project Website, the project Wiki, and the project mailing lists. These facilities use the Internet domain-name: www.DynaLearn.eu, which has been claimed for the DynaLearn project for the next 10 years.

3.1 DynaLearn external project website

An initial version of the project website (http://www.DynaLearn.eu) has been developed (Figure 3). It will be replaced by a professionally designed version with more features (such as a blog) in month 3 of the project. We are currently evaluating the first versions of the logo, and expect the first versions of the webpage design in due course. The website has an open (external) and a project 'only' (internal) area. The open area of the website displays information on the DynaLearn project suitable for the general audience. The website also hosts all released project deliverables with dissemination level: public. This also includes the software developed in the project. A special feature is the 'project-blog', which must be used by all the project members as a dissemination facility to share information related to the DynaLearn project to the general audience.
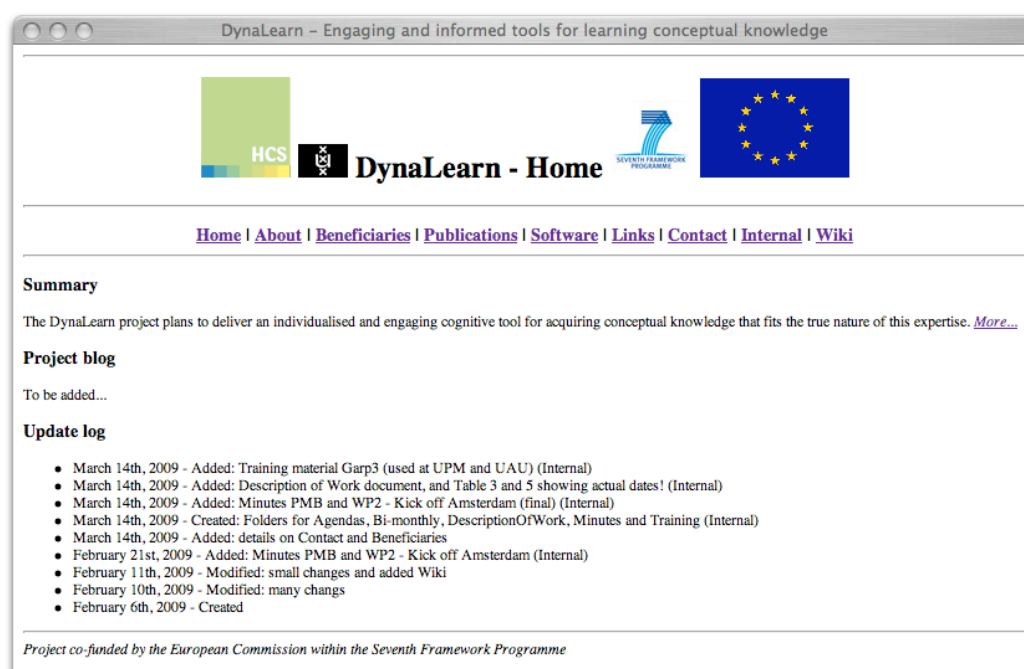

Figure 3: Initial version of the DynaLearn external project website

3.2 DynaLearn internal project website

The project 'only' area of the website is password protected. It functions as a repository for project members, storing all the project documents generated within and relevant to the project (Figure 4). The contents of this repository is managed and updated by the OPC team to assure a well-maintained structure and uniform file naming. The team typically takes files from the Wiki (see below), when a finalised document has been uploaded to the Wiki. The website repository includes the following document types:

- Agendas for consortium body meetings
- Minutes of consortium body meetings
- Presentations given at consortium body meetings
- Project deliverables (including periodical progress reports and form C)
- Dissemination documents / proofs (e.g. papers, invited lectures, newsletter items)
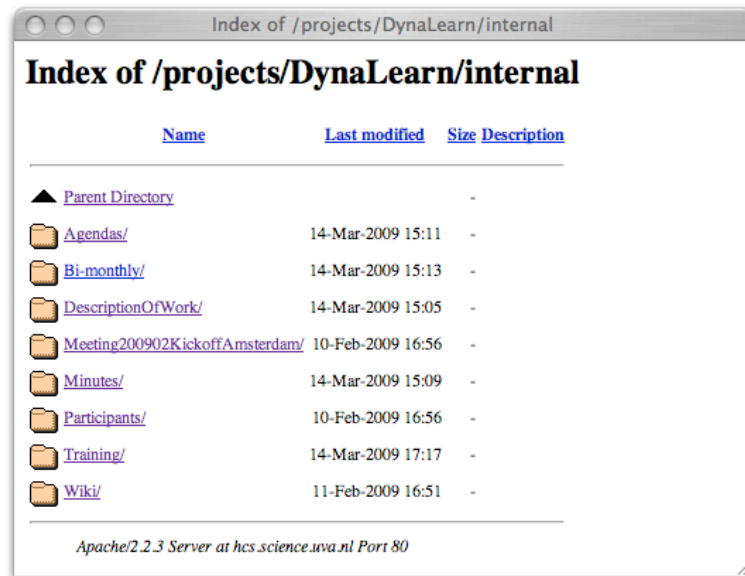- Training facilities

Figure 4: Initial version of the DynaLearn internal project website

3.3 DynaLearn Wiki

The project Wiki (Figure 5) is meant for project internal use, as such it is password protected. The Wiki supports two things relevant to the DynaLearn project. On the one hand it can be used to upload and share partial documents and discussion fragments among the project workers. In that sense the Wiki is a 'sandbox' for project members to collaboratively establish innovative ideas and solutions. The following sub-areas have been created for this purpose:

- General (for all project members)
- Technology (particularly for WP2, WP3, WP4 and WP5)
- Education (particularly for WP6 and WP7)
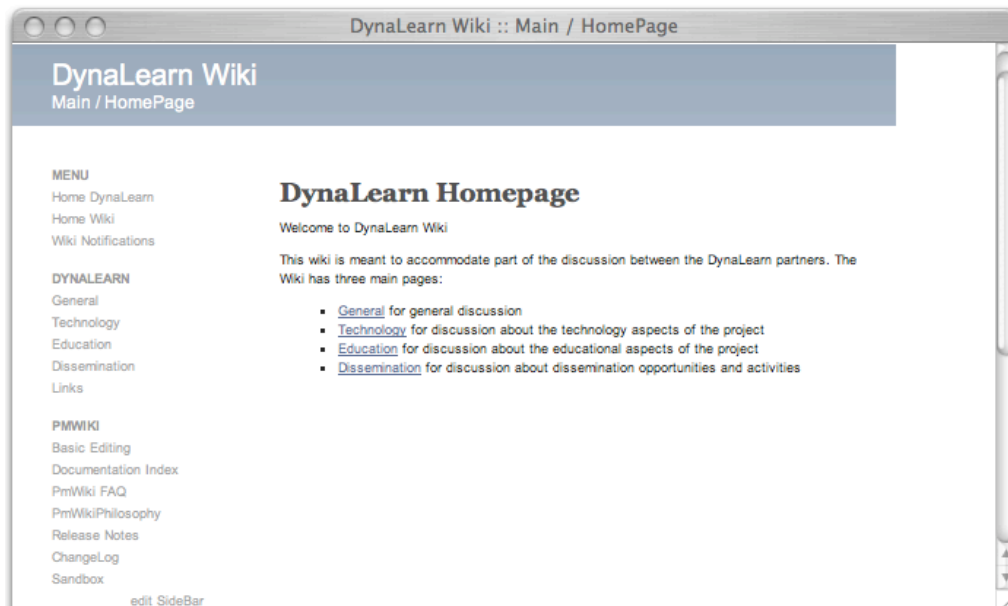- Dissemination (particularly for WP8)

Figure 5: Initial version of the DynaLearn Wiki project

A second function of the Wiki is that of being a placeholder for uploading formal documents, concerning both research and administration. Particularly the Wiki provides a virtual space for:

- The WPLs to upload the project deliverables
- The WPLs to upload the bi-monthly reports
- The PC to upload the half-yearly progress reports
- The beneficiaries to upload their form C

We have chosen to use PMWiki (http://www.pmwiki.org), due to its proven maturity in other projects and its flexibility. PMWiki can easily be extended with new functionality via plugins.

3. 4 DynaLearn mailing lists
The following mailing lists have been established to facilitate communication and discussion within the project:

- Project@DynaLearn.eu This list includes all members working on the project and is meant for addressing general project issues.
- Technology@DynaLearn.eu This list includes members working on the software development within the project, i.e. those active in WP2, WP3, WP4 and WP5. The list is meant to handle technical issues relevant to the project.
- Education@DynaLearn.eu This list includes members working on the educational aspects within the project, i.e. those active in WP6 and WP7. The list is meant to handle educational issues relevant to the project.
- Dissemination@DynaLearn.eu This list includes all members working on the project and is meant to address project dissemination issues.
- PMB@DynaLearn.eu This list includes only the PMB members and is meant to handle management and administrational issues concerning the project.
- STSC@DynaLearn.eu This list includes only the STSC members. The list is meant to support the STSC in carrying out its task.

The mailing lists mentioned above are restricted in the sense that only 'list-members' can send e-mails via a list. If members want to, they can be included in lists beyond the default inclusion. To make this effective, they should ask the PC to be added. However, the PMB and STSC lists are restricted and only for members belonging to these consortium bodies. Finally, project members are strongly advised to use insightful subject fields when sending e-mails to a list. Particularly, always add '[DynaLearn]' at the start of the subject field.

A few other e-mail accounts have been created to address miscellaneous issues:

- Info@DynaLearn.eu This is a public e-mail address to accommodate interests and requests from outside the project. Anybody interested in the DynaLearn project can send a message to this e-mail account. Messages are forwarded to the OPC team, who will address them. The account DynaLearn@DynaLearn.eu has a similar role.
- Webmaster@DynaLearn.eu This e-mail account is used to forward error messages concerning the website and e-mail handling to the OPC team, who can then take action to solve the problem.

3.5 Phone, Skype and Flashmeeting
In addition to the means mentioned above, beneficiaries can also make use of third party group audio and video conferencing facilities as well as a range of on-line collaboration tools (e.g. telephone, Skype, Flashmeeting). Particularly, Flashmeeting (Figure 6) provides an interesting and inexpensive alternative for having online meetings. To use Flashmeeting project members have to contact the PC, or arrange their own access via the software developers (http://flashmeeting.open.ac.uk/, Open University, UK). However, Flashmeeting users should be aware that Flashmeeting meetings are recorded and used for research purposes by the developers. Hence, there is a limit to what the tool can be used for.
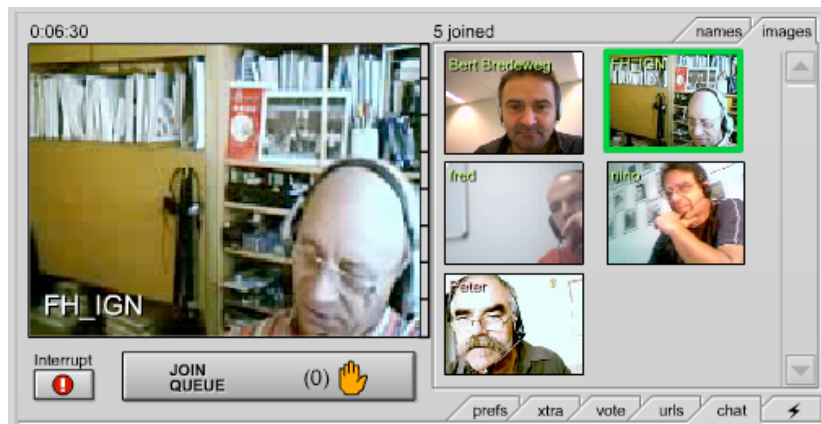
Figure 6: Snapshot of an online meeting using Flashmeeting (http://flashmeeting.open.ac.uk/)

3.6 Version management and bug report

The software version management tool GIT (http://git-scm.com/) has been installed on the computer facilities of the project coordinator and is available for use in the DynaLearn project. GIT has proven its maturity by versioning several large open source software projects such as the Linux Kernel, X.org, and Perl. In the DynaLearn project GIT will also be used to handle version management of the DynaLearn Website and DynaLearn Wiki.

A software bug-report system will be made available using the Mantis web-based bug tracking system (http://www.mantisbt.org/).

3.7 Formats

In addition to the professional design for the DynaLearn website, a design is being made for the front and back pages of DynaLearn documents. All official DynaLearn deliverables should use these cover pages.

Within the DynaLearn project we will not enforce members to use a specific word-processing facility such as LaTeX (www.**latex**-project.org/) or MSWord. In the case of a collaborative document writing effort participants should agree among themselves what to use. However, technology beneficiaries should beware that non-computer specialists may not be as skilled in using dedicated software such as LaTeX. Hence, they should either sufficiently support non-experts in using such tools or agree to use a more general-purpose tool such as MSWord. In the case of a dispute the PMB will take a decision.

All final versions of formal DynaLearn project deliverables should be delivered in PDF.

3.8 Alternatives considered

We have considered using the online collaboration platform available to Dutch universities known as SURFgroepen (http://www.surfgroepen.nl). It allows sharing of documents, has a shared agenda, and allows communication via videoconferencing and chatting. However, for our purposes there seemed to be too many features that would then not be used by the DynaLearn project (members). Furthermore, we have no control to adapt the system if the need would arise. For these reasons we have chosen for other more well-known and flexible technology of which we are sure of its maturity.

4. Reporting

Several types of documents will be used to report to the EC:

- Each WPL will write bi-monthly reports with details about the progress made on tasks, effort spent, important changes and upcoming challenges. The coordinator will provide a template with headers identifying the important content that should be included. Furthermore the OPC team will create pages on the Wiki to allow the bi-monthly reports to be easily uploaded. These documents are not sent to the EC.
- Every 6 months the coordinator will aggregate the bi-monthly reports to create a half-year consortium progress report. This report will be sent to the EC.
- Every year an annual consortium progress report will be made. It consists of the previous half-year consortium progress report, and the aggregation of the last 3 bi-monthly reports. This report will be sent to the EC.
- Also annually, the beneficiaries will fill in cost statements (form C). The forms are provided by the EC, and checked by the OPC team. Then, the forms will be sent to the EC.

5. Concluding remarks

The project management support tools were implemented to support the different actors managing the DynaLearn project. We have chosen to use well-known flexible software that has proven its maturity in previous projects. If new functionality is required within the DynaLearn project we will either extend the existing technology (using plugins), or choose another well-known mature tool to provide it.

Different tools have been chosen to support communication and document sharing. E-mail communication is established through various mailing lists. Each list targets a particular subset of the DynaLearn participants. The external project website is meant for stakeholders outside the project. The DynaLearn Wiki is implemented to allow project participants to express their considerations in making technical decisions. Furthermore, it allows participants to upload and share documents. In most cases the OPM team will create pages and entries to allow participants to easily upload documents. The OPM team will take finalised documents from the Wiki and put them on the internal DynaLearn website. This assures that the files are consistently named and filed in the appropriate places.

To support the software development DynaLearn will use the distributed version management software Git. The bug reporting system Mantis allows software users (and developers) to submit and track bugs.

Related to the overall management of the DynaLearn project are the Risk and Contingency Plan (D1.2) and the Quality Assurance Plan and Methodology (D1.3).

References

[1] Description of work (DoW). (2008) DynaLearn - Engaging and informed tools for learning conceptual system knowledge, Collaborative project (STREP), Call identifier FP7-ICT-2007-3, Project number 231526, October 9th, 2008.

[2] Consortium agreement (CA). (2009) DynaLearn - Engaging and informed tools for learning conceptual system knowledge, Collaborative project (STREP), Call identifier FP7-ICT-2007-3, Project number 231526, February 1st, 2009.