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Community of Practice as the Driving force for RENs

The global digital world challenges the society to adjust the way of communicating, working, learning and teaching. National, geographical, cultural and social boarders get dissolved. Direct interaction with counterparts becomes indirect. Programmed technical middle ware/facilitators such as internet, social media, skype etc. become the transmitters in the communication and leading to working materials and databases. The digital world is not just for the private sphere and businesses. It also reaches out to academia, science and research. In the last decade governments around the world got involved in providing information and communication infrastructure for universities and research centres to lay the ground for innovative, international cooperation at digital level. Information and communication technology is determining the way of cooperation. Researchers around the world are linked with their international counterparts desks-to-desks and laboratories-to-laboratories. The scenario for students to join at one-and-the-same-time different classrooms around the world while not leaving the own campus or home is developing gradually. Researchers have professional interest to access databases from international research organisations, to exchange data and results in order to check the validity of research outcomes. Among students the classroom international cooperation is at grassroots level. The possibilities of digital classrooms need to be explored and extended to professional levels.

Today's students are the workers from tomorrow. What students experience in their education will be brought further to their working environment in to the private and public sectors.

The National Research and Education Networks (NREN) are widely funded by the national governments. Governments'justification for that is often seen in the front-running of the information and technology (IT) development (innovation) for best practices for industry and the wider society. Students learn to work and move along these networks. They learn about the possibilities and innovation potentials these networks offer in the global context. The knowledge and skills graduates reflect at working in the virtual level appears as a matter of course. Innovation from the classroom spreads out into the real world.

However, to make the classroom as the breeding ground for global cooperation, lecturers need to interfere as managers and facilitators.

This research work intends to present an Ethiopian approach for a community of practice at an Ethiopian university and will present the concept, how to integrate further Ethiopian and international universities. This concept will make clear what are the needs of a community of practice starting in a classroom and what could be expected as a result. For the purpose of this research the focus will be brought primarily to the technical requirements, the Ethiopian NREN (EthERNet) has to provide the floor to give communities of practice a chance to become a standard approach at university level.

This research will be structured into an overview of the current classroom situation at Ethiopian universities in the first part. The second part will refer to the facilities and services EthERNet provides. The third part will refer to a specific challenge at a selected Ethiopian university and includes the concept of a suitable community of practice. In the fourth part this concept will be analysed against the current situation and will elaborate a list of requirements for the university ICT department respectively the NREN. The final part will evaluate the community of practice as a driving force for the development of the NREN.

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