TEACHING TUTORING - INTELLIGENT AGENTS TO CUSTOMIZE LIFELONG LEARNING PATHWAYS IN THE MICROFINANCE SECTOR

Ilaria Mascitti (author and presenter)
Valentina Bern (author)
Federica Funghi (author)
Mikail Feituri (author)
Paolo Degasperi (author)
Consorzio FOR.COM, Italy

Summary

University “Gugliemo Marconi” designed the T2 project, combining e-learning methods and I.A. technologies, to design a blended course addressed to a specific target group in the microfinance sector.

T2 stands for “Teaching Tutoring - Intelligent Agents to customize lifelong learning pathways in the microfinance sector”. It is implemented in the microfinance sector with a partnership composed of two Open-Universities and two European Microfinance Institution (MFIs) networks with the financial support of the European Commission.

T² adapts and transfers an pedagogical and didactic model developed in PARMENDE, an previous Leonardo da Vinci funded project, into the course “Foundation of sustainable microfinance” planned in the framework of previous PEMTE project, supported by e-Content Programme. That model is based on combining e-learning methods and Intelligent Agents technologies.

The result is the development of a blended course, where the e-learning session integrates a web-based intelligent tutoring system able to generate individualised assessment pathways for each participant. The system helps guide teachers in designing short, face-to-face seminars, following specific guidelines based on trainees’ needs.

INTRODUCTION

E-learning allows access to training without time and space limits. It is an effective tool used to deliver training courses to professionals, regardless of their location, that would otherwise not be able to attend traditional face-to-face training programs, due to the high cost and inconvenience of time and travel. E-learning, however, still does not offer the possibility for learners to customize their own personal training paths. The integration of artificial intelligence with instructional design could provide a possible solution to this issue by opening up new prospects to set up high quality training options. Incorporating these aspects of e-learning, the open-university “Gugliemo Marconi” designed the T2 project to develop and test a didactic model aimed at delivering customized learning
pathways to a specific target group. T2 stands for “Teaching Tutoring - Intelligent Agents to customize lifelong learning pathways in the microfinance sector”.

Providing micro-credit to non-bankable micro-enterprises and low income and marginalized people, microfinance is a strategic sector in Europe, for both growth and jobs and social inclusion, in accordance with modern emphasis on flexicurity.

The sector has been rapidly growing since 2000, however, these professional are relatively young and lack experience. The majority of MFIs active today have been established between 2000 and 2005. Due to different national legal frameworks and the different nature and intervention models of MFIs, the training opportunities and market available today fails to meet these professionals’ diversified and specifics training needs. T2 aims at improving the quality, attractiveness and accessibility of training in the field of microfinance, providing training organisations with a model to individualize training on specific MFI's needs, setting up a common and integrated European training offer on sustainability of microlending and microfinance programmes.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The project addresses to a target group who often suffer from a lack of training courses available due to the small number of MFI professionals, working in geographically scattered locations causing the economical cost of a face-to-face training course to be extremely high and therefore virtually impossible to implement.

T2 adapts and transfers a pedagogical and didactic model developed in PARMENDE, and previous Leonardo da Vinci funded project, into the course “Foundation of sustainable microfinance” planned in the framework of previous PEMTE project, supported by e-Content Programme.

That model is based on combining e-learning methods and Intelligent Agents technologies. The result is a web-based intelligent tutoring system able to generate individualised assessment pathways for each student. In T2 the same model is set up to support both student in self-learning and trainer in customize the lessons, following specific student needs and gaps.

A blended course has been developed, where the e-learning session integrates a web-based intelligent tutoring system able to generate individualised assessment pathways for each participant. The system helps guide teachers in designing short, face-to-face seminars, following specific guidelines based on trainees’ needs.

The project is carried out by a Consortium of 4 complementary partners located in 4 EU Member States: 2 Universities specialised in e-learning and 2 European microfinance networks.

The project work plan includes the research, made by experts on the microfinance sector, finalized to the identification of the target group. Research results will provide a basis for the design and implementation of the e-course “Foundations of sustainable microfinance”, developed during the PEMTE project.

The activities continue with the transfer of the andragogical didactic model, based on the integration of Intelligent Agent, on the e-learning paths, developed during the PARMENIDE project.

The experimentation methodology foresees the establishment of the testing group, composed by teachers, who will use the “new Intelligent Agent technology” in order to identify the training path. An internal test is provided to verify the e-learning platform and the virtual tutor software functions. The course testing is made by three MFIs selected by the partners from their national network, and Results came out from the test allow to added eventual modifications to the course.
Dissemination and exploitation activities will be planned in order to promote the main project results, adopting a specific communication strategy addressed to a specific audience.

CONCLUSION

At the end of project, open-university UTGM and the 2 networks MFC and Planet Finance set up an common and integrated didactic offer in France, Italy and Poland based on blended course “Foundation of sustainable microfinance”, as updated in T2. Consortium estimate in 50 MFIs per year the final beneficiaries. It’s not few is related to size of sector. The course also is designed to be easily interpolated with others e-learning platforms and delivered in other European countries. The course also is designed to be easily interpolated with others e-learning platforms and delivered in other European courtiers.

REFERENCES

- Mascitti I., Funghi F., The Talas project: from mobility to connectivity and back again, IADIS Web Communities 2006.