Executive Summary

Blogs (short for Weblogs) are personal journals that display new updates in a chronological manner. Blogs are typically owned by one author but readers may respond to each posting. Blogs provide an easy way to publish content on the web, and so, through 2004, we examined the use of blogs for note-taking in corporate learning settings.

Four major processes are involved in effective learning: explication of knowledge, knowledge organization, reflection on the content and discussion over the content. Blogs may be used for supporting any of these processes. Taking study notes, especially in informal learning settings, assist in knowledge explication. Rereading previous posts encourages reflection. Blog categories help in organizing notes, while publishing notes and commenting on them is an important tool for discussion.

We conducted four pilots of using blogs in a corporate-learning environment. In one case – of formal, moderated learning – the participants of a face-to-face course that took place once a week, for 15 consecutive weeks were given access to the course material through a course blog. One of the students contributed her study notes and we organized them in a dedicated blog. In another case – of informal, moderated learning – employees who spent some time learning new domains volunteered to organize their findings – good tutorials, articles, tips, etc. – in single-author topic-oriented blogs for the benefit of their corporate peers. In the third case – of formal, unmoderated learning – a more detailed study was conducted with 75 participants of the LEADing@IBM pilot. The students took self-study online lessons where they were asked to reflect upon their studies and record their reflections in a Journal system that is similar in functionality to a blog. The final case – an informal, unmoderated case – members of the Collaboration Technologies group in IBM Haifa Research Lab, working in different projects, conducted personal blogs where they reported their progress as well as shared thoughts and references for peer-learning.

Our goal over these pilots was twofold: 1) we wanted to corroborate our hypotheses that using blogs for organizing and sharing study notes will improve the learning experience 2) We tried to collect comments and learn from the experience, in order to be able to enhance a blogging environment and adapt it for learning.

1 LEADing@IBM is an enterprise-wide leadership development approach that helps IBM develop the best managers
The first three case studies were slower to progress than we have hoped. One of the significant conclusions of our experiments is that the diffusion process of blogs is not easy. It may require careful planning, and it may take time before the social trend of blog authoring will penetrate the workplace. The qualitative answers that we received from our pilots participants show a clear identification of the positive potential of blogs. However, the actual participation on all pilots was not high enough to establish a proper blogging environment. The gap between the potential of blogs and their actual proliferation in the corporate world is a challenge that still needs to be addressed.

Based on our observations and discussions with the bloggers we formulated a few recommendations for features that may enhance a blogging environment and adapt it to learning:

- A blog-in-context feature that will allow blogging directly from the online course or from within a word processor environment is desirable. It will improve the *explication* process. This is similar to the “BlogThis!” button provided by Google’s Blogger®.

- In addition to temporal classification of blog posts, there is a need for classification by type: summary, assignment, terminology, question, tip. This would improve knowledge *organization*. There are cases where the system should take different actions depending on the post type. For example, lesson summaries may prompt an alert on subscribers’ system, while assignment submission posts may send an alert to the moderator of the course. Questions should be posted in the context of the relevant lesson and tips should be prominently displayed so they are not overlooked.

- To ease navigation and further improve knowledge *organization*, there should be a tighter connection between material and relevant blogs. For example, the front page of a course should list blogs and recent posts that are relevant to the content of the course. Specific lessons within a course, should also list blog posts that referred to them.

- A *reflection* panel is suggested, where previous posts are popped up to allow users to recall and reflect upon past experiences.

- Enhanced awareness would make the *discussion* over blogs a more effective experience

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2 [http://www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com)