

ONLINE COMMUNITIES: AN ECOLOGY FOR KNOWLEDGE COLLABORATION

In a world characterised by ecosystems, universities themselves are an ecosystem in which service providers and the university community are coming together as separate groups seeking to interact and engage with each other. The future can be expected to offer a vibrant and rich online environment where technologies seamlessly enable knowledge collaboration and information exchange.

In the current Web 2.0 environment there is a high expectation that libraries and IT service providers will embrace online technologies to engage with their users. Some libraries, for example, have reported on their implementation of technologies to develop online communities; however there is a much greater potential to utilise this approach than is generally appreciated within both the profession and, more broadly, the university.

Like most universities, the Division of Information Services at Griffith University has used blogs, discussion forums, and a social media platform to engage and support academic enquiry. It has also experimented with a number of different technologies and applications to develop communities. Our thinking is maturing, moving from a technology focus to a strategy and use focus. In addition the focus goes beyond just academic enquiry. The Division is adopting a more planned approach to online communities.

Within this context, two quite different communities have been established on the Yammer platform. One is an example of a private community, pre-planned to support an academic-led emerging technologies planning group. The other is an open community created for any Griffith staff or student to discuss technology used within the University's learning, teaching and research environment.

Based on a combination of observation and interviews, this paper reviews these two initiatives in terms of their characteristics, modes of participation, and rules of engagement (written and unwritten). It concludes with a suggested ecology based on a multiplex relationship model.

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