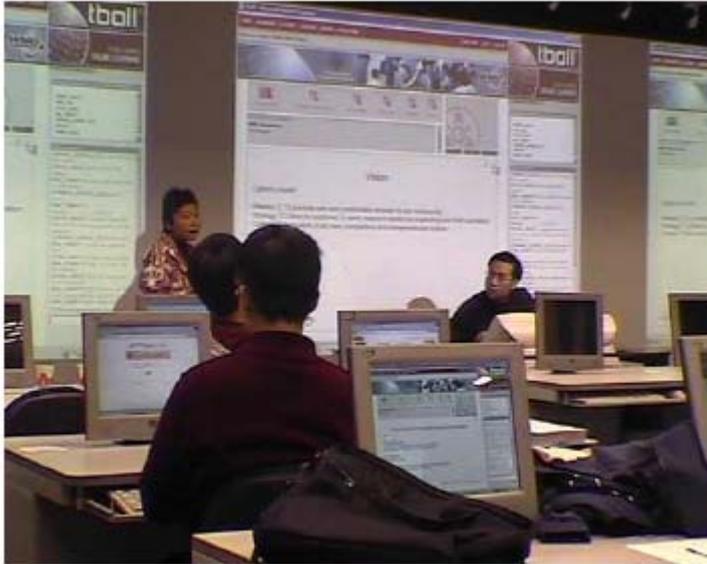


Global E-Learning in Hong Kong - WMG Style

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WHAT IS DIFFERENT ABOUT THIS PICTURE?

It appears to be a group of students sitting in a modern computer lab listening to a presentation by another student. But this represents Global e-Learning as delivered by WMG.

They are giving their final (assessed) presentations and the student on the left is the Syndicate Leader.

To their surprise, immediately after this picture was taken a message appeared on the screen saying 'Happy New Year for the year of the Horse to our friends in Hong Kong from the tball Support Team'. The applause was spontaneous and suddenly

the world seemed a very small place.

All the students are using the tball® on-line learning platform that was designed and built to deliver Action Learning type Modules. WMG find that these are very effective. For the module being attended by these students the servers are installed in Telehouse (London) and as this is the second pilot in HK the support team is on-line in Coventry closely monitoring the operation of the platform. The time in the UK is 8.00am Sunday morning (4pm in HK). You will see that the presenter is being assisted by her colleague by clicking through the slides and Internet URL's. The distance that data travels between the users keyboard in this room and the overhead screen is about 12000 miles!

The response time is better than a 56k modem in the UK!

Some of the presentation being given has been created on-line whilst the students have been away from the PolyU – some students have been into Southern China during the development of this presentation. They were still able to connect with their colleagues and create content. They communicated via the Chatroom from their own laptops or Company PC's – in fact from anywhere they could get access to an Internet browser. They could have used webcam one –on-one video links but chose not to.

The screenshot shows a web-based learning interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links like 'HOME', 'NAVIGATE', 'LECTURES', 'SCHEDULE', 'LIBRARY', and 'APPLICATIONS'. Below this, a banner features a globe and the 'WMG' logo. The main content area is titled 'Welcome to the Global E - Business Module' and includes logos for 'THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK' and 'The Hong Kong Polytechnic University'. It contains three sections: 'First Time Users' with instructions to click 'here' for introductory slides, 'Skip Intro' with instructions to click 'here' if slides have been viewed, and 'The Warwick Experience' with a link to a video about the university. On the right side, there is a 'tboll' logo and 'TASK BASED ONLINE LEARNING' text. Below this is a video feed of a male tutor and a chat window with text messages.

You can see the Chat room at the right hand of the screen. This shows that most of the team members are on-line to the presentation whilst it is being given. They are following it on their own screens – or are they making last minute changes to their own input ?

The Global e-Business module has been converted to Mixed Mode delivery using tboll to make better use of time both for the students and the Tutor. It also makes the learning much richer. Other benefits for the Tutor lay in the reduced time spent on standard lectures and shorter overseas trips. It enables two cohorts totalling around 60 students to be accommodated in eight days instead of the usual 16 days. It also enables the tutor to monitor the contribution to the presentation that each syndicate member has made. The students benefit from the ability to do the work at their own pace and being able to listen to the English pronunciation while following the written transcribed text. The students also have their personal and group creation space.

The Mixed Mode IGDS consists of three phases – Distance Learning , Contact and Post Module Assignment Phase.

During the Distance Learning phase the lectures are given on-line. This can last up to a month and follows a briefing session to the whole cohort where they are introduced to the platform. The Tutor ensures that users can all log on and enter the 'welcome' screens (which tell them all about the module and the desktop and how to use it, what to expect and also help and assistance in case of difficulty. At the time of writing around 120 MSc students have used tboll at Warwick and in Hong Kong and only a two or three have had any difficulty - this being due to network problems)

Students have benefited by working at their own pace (especially as often English is not their first language) through the video lectures and through the exercises and questionnaires that go with them. They sit a multi-choice question exam as soon as they attend the contact phase and if they didn't get 50% pass mark they didn't continue. Feedback from some students indicated a desire to make this hurdle higher and put the pass mark at 60% to ensure that all syndicate members had done all the pre module work before the contact phase.

During the Contact phase the activities majored on syndicate work and focussed discussions with four pre-prepared lectures on the tutor's own subject. The syndicate work is based on an assignment (in the

GEB module it is a case study but in the original design a real company change assignment was used which builds through the sessions. The tboll desktop was used for the students to capture lecture material in their own private on-line learning logs and to create personal content that they could then share with a peer and then the rest of their syndicate. This formed the basis of the syndicate presentations on their assignment. Lecture material is backed by research either from a connection to the Virtual Library on WMG's website, from Application examples on directed URL's or from elsewhere on the web via the Internet browser.



tboll desktop lecture

The contact phase ends with a Forum where the syndicates give their final presentations to a Panel. In HK, on previous modules, this has consisted of local business men including an Investment banker who are asked to give their feedback on the quality of the presentations.

Finally, during the post module phase of the activity, all the syndicate presentations are captured and uploaded to the Lecturespace so that all students can use them for reference. They can also use the syndicate creation space to exchange ideas.



tboll desktop student forum

Now a few words about tboll. Tboll® is a new means of using the Internet to enable large cohorts of students to learn together but in their own time. It has been developed by Shared Solutions Ltd in association with other partners to fulfil the needs of academic and Corporate development programmes using the Internet as means of learning material to geographically separated workgroups. The tboll methodology can be used for a number of applications in corporate change or partnership development programmes where focus is needed to develop shared learning. This complies well with the WMG designed programmes which were originally based on the need for individual and group learning in context with corporate change.

The tboll® learning structure consists of three parts.

- the tboll methodology
- the tboll addictive front-end
- the tboll desktop to e-enable the delivery process

The methodology concerns the use of learning modules representing the equivalent of a one day, three day or five day 'real time' residential courses. These are divided into a number of capsules. Capsules consist of sessions – tutor sessions which normally introduce the capsule and may contain some 'core knowledge', speaker sessions which are formally recorded as academic core knowledge, research sessions and - following the successful completion of the in-module questionnaires – the syndicate sessions. The whole process is centred around a progressive task which provides context for the information provided in the speaker and tutor sessions and complemented by on-line research.

The learning structure within tboll is based on learning templates and desired outcomes through the achievement of group tasks. It is task based learning. The major difference between tboll and a Learning Management System (LMS) is that the former is based on e-enabling behaviour and then using the power of web technology to create personal and group space to which is added the access to learning assets. It's a sort of inside moving outwards process whereas LMS design starts with the database and tries to make it more individual (and more recently group) user friendly : a sort of outside moving inwards process. Tboll is designed to emulate a tutor.

The addictive-front-end helps overcome the technology barriers experienced by many older students who often find complex on-line processes confusing and intimidating. It includes learning-to-learn and trust building exercises.

The platform was designed by a small experienced Internet solutions team working with a tutor to e-enable the teaching process – the process being embedded in the tool. The whole application resides on a web server with a streaming server linked for video delivery. Substantial security (the personal space is really private and not even the administrative support team can access this without the student's permission), interface logic, unique group creation space and navigation have been welcomed by the users.

The on-line lectures use much of the content created for the classroom but in a modified format for distance learning and augmented by video and text. The tboll® authoring system is very easy to use - the bulk of the effort going into scripting and media filming for the video.

The software product tboll® was inspired by the emerging need particularly in the US for large enterprises to change rapidly. It became obvious that despite many offerings ranging from University e-commerce sites (constructed to sell canned material), Virtual Campus and commodity type of on-line presentation platforms and user friendly databases there appeared to be no answer which started with individual behavioral needs of the learner and worked towards corporate change needs. The processes described in many corporate 'change programmes' are all built on a basic assumption. This is that a way can be found which delivers the desired learning and shift in an individual's understanding and then developing a commitment to deliver the desired performance outcome as a member of a group (This appears to be a clash between Confucianism & Taoism in eastern culture and philosophy, and that of individualism which is more natural in the West. Enterprises strive to get the best from both.)

The use of mixed mode learning in the way described has proved very successful. All the module reviews have been excellent and the standard of the post module assignments has also improved – another step along the road to continuously improve the way in which we add value to our teaching.....in the year of The Horse.

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To discuss any issues raised by this article please contact CAP tel: 024 7652 4766 email: cap@warwick.ac.uk