

Auditing technology uses within a global voluntary organisation

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Auditing Technology Uses within a Global Voluntary Organisation

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Abstract: WAGGGS, the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, is the umbrella organization for Member Organizations from 145 countries around the world. As such one of its remits is to provide programmes that promote leadership development and opportunities for girls and young women to advocate on issues they care about. One of the ways WAGGGS is exploring to do this more widely and efficiently is through the use of digital technologies. This paper presents the results of an audit undertaken of the technologies already used by potential participants in online communities and courses and investigates the challenges faced in using technology to facilitate learning, within this context.

Introduction

Technology has changed the way in which communities come together, (Wenger, White, & Smith, 2009); however attracting people and retaining people within an online community can be a challenge (Barab, Kling, & Gray, 2004) as, in many online environments participation is characterized by the 90:9:1 rule of Nielsen (2006), which states:

“In most online communities, 90% of users are lurkers who never contribute, 9% of users contribute a little, and 1% of users account for almost all the action.”

It is widely accepted that not everyone is at ease with technology: degrees of digital literacy vary (Hargittai, 2005). Prensky (2001) suggested that the digital literacy division was based largely on age with his Digital Immigrants and Digital Natives typology, while (White & Cornu, 2011) suggest it is more to do with the regularity of use of a particular technology, with the classification Visitors and Residents indicating online engagement. Certainly, for all groups, introducing new technologies is a complex process, can impact on community dynamics and needs to be approached with sensitivity and responsibility (Arnold, Smith, & Trayner, 2010).

Technology was expected to create a revolution in education by providing access across the globe (Friedman, 2005; Liyanagunawardena, Adams, Rassool, & Williams, 2011). Manicas (2007, p. 71) for example, cites the co-founder of Netscape saying: ‘Today, the most profound thing to me is the fact that a 14-year-old in Romania or Bangalore or the Soviet Union or Vietnam has all the information, all the tools, all the software easily available to apply knowledge however they want.’ However, despite offering the potential for ubiquitous education, there are concerns that the use of technology for educational delivery will further marginalise the deprived (Carr-Chellman, 2005). A similar vision and concerns about the use of ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies) applies to their employment in the voluntary and community sector. It was felt that they would enhance active participation and support democratic practices (Trench & O'Donnell, 1997). However, in practice a very top-down approach seems to exclude more internet-based community organisations from decision-making processes (Moll & Shade, 2004).

Understanding individuals' competences within the arena of digital literacies is challenging without a definition of the term (van Deursen & van Dijk, 2010). The UK's Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC, 2011) gives the definition:

“digital literacy defines those capabilities which fit an individual for living, learning and working in a digital society”

and Hargittai (2005) has shown how surveys can be used to gain understanding of such literacies..

With ten million Girl Guides and Girl Scouts from 145 countries across the world, the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) is the largest voluntary movement dedicated to girls and young women in the world. WAGGGS has developed a very successful selection of programmes which help the girls and young women of their membership to develop their skills and knowledge particularly in

relationship to citizenship and leadership; courses are currently held in several physical locations with participants from around the world. The demand for places on these courses is high and many potential participants are excluded for a variety of reasons, ranging from: the prohibitive expense, their inability to travel, or the lack of capacity on the course. Technology is seen as being a way of broadening the reach of these programmes and facilitating other learning and community aspects of the organisation.

This project sought to undertake an audit so as to understand the current experiences and competencies of potential stakeholders regarding their use of, and access to, technology and communications; with a view to developing appropriate e-learning materials for use within the organisation and across its entire membership, including enhancing their current leadership programme.

The Study

A diverse approach was taken to gathering information for the technology audit, with materials prepared in each of the three official WAGGGS languages (English, Spanish and French) plus Arabic, so as to gain a broad understanding of issues across the organization and its membership. Groups of stakeholders were identified to ensure appropriate views were considered. These were identified broadly as:

- **Participants:** Girls and young women participating in a programme.
- **Facilitators:** Volunteers leading a particular instance of a programme.
- **Member organisations:** The constituent organisations that form WAGGGS, from the different countries around the world.
- **WAGGGS:** The training and education provider.
- **Sponsors:** Providers of funding for development of materials.

The following events were used in the data collection:

- The WAGGGS 34th World Conference (an event held every 3 years) which took place in Edinburgh (UK) during July, 2011, with participants from the member organisations in 145 countries. All stakeholders were represented at this event.
- A World Leadership Development Programme (WLDP) course which took place in Burundi during September 2011. This allowed contact with a group of participants and facilitators.

Members of the research team attended the World Conference where they ran a series of activities that showcased different technologies that could be used in educational contexts, and from which they collected data regarding participants' digital/ICT/technology experiences. They also issued a paper questionnaire to conference attendees to find out more about their awareness, preferences and use of digital technologies. One member of the team attended the WLDP event where interviews and discussions were undertaken and a questionnaire was administered. In addition questionnaires were sent, by email, to people involved in earlier WLDP events and representatives of member organisations. Members of staff based at WAGGGS HQ also completed a questionnaire.

Findings

The study produced a plethora of results which are presented here in a synthesized form. Overall the majority of responses indicated a high use of technologies and the Internet within both their personal lives and through their involvement in the organisation.

Figure 1 shows that across the respondents many regularly used desktop computers and laptops to access the Internet, a few also had access via smart phones or tablets. Although, all respondents were able to access the Internet (**Figure 2**), with some 60% having access in their own home, some reported having to travel considerable distances in order to achieve access. In general the respondents considered their Internet connection reliable (**Figure 3**), but there were a small percentage with poor connectivity. The strength of their connectivity was explored by asking users within member organizations to assess the ease by which they could undertake certain tasks; for a number downloading documents took a considerable time (**Figure 4**).

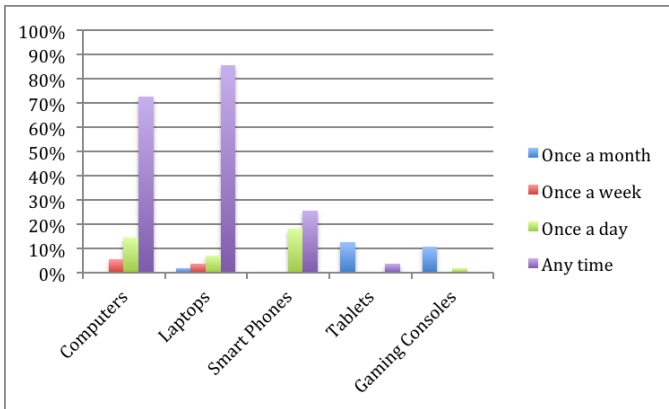


Figure 1 Devices used to access Internet

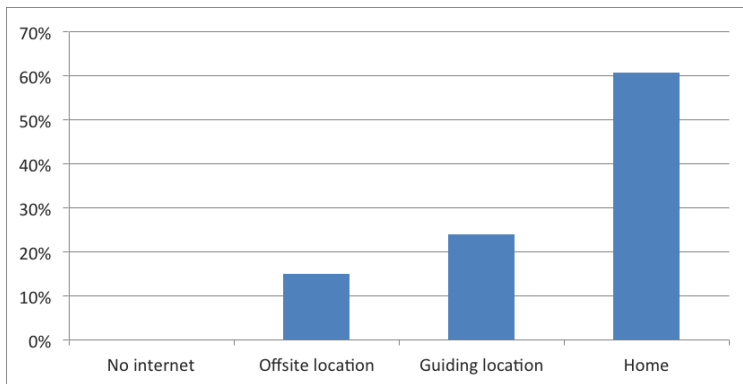


Figure 2 Place Internet accessed

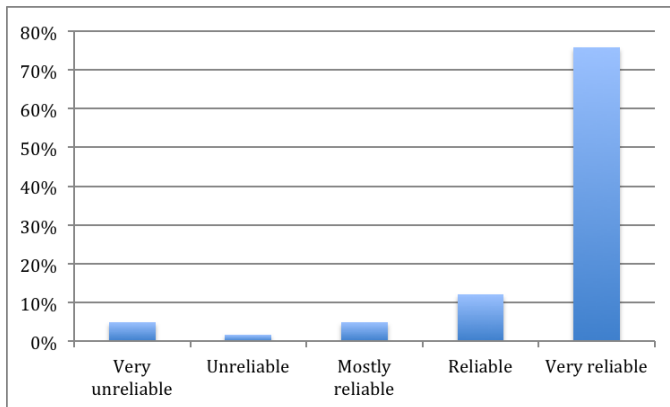


Figure 3 Reliability of Connection

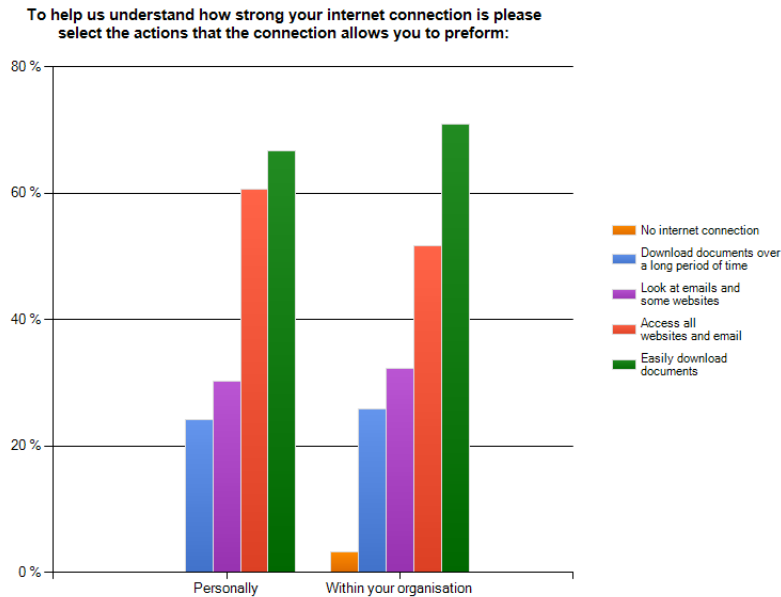


Figure 4 Strength of Connection

Within the WLDP: facilitators indicated they spent an average of 37 hours a week online (largely for their job, not as a WAGGGS volunteer) and participants indicating an average of 24 hours a week spent online. There was evidence of general understanding of a range of technologies and a high interest in their use. Overall there was marginally less use of technologies within their WAGGGS organisational role than when compared to their personal lives (explained in part by recognising that some of the volunteers have technical related jobs outside of their work for WAGGGS) (**Figure 5**). The reported uses of the Internet were varied, many cited using it for research, several mentioned using online translation facilities, and a smaller number indicated that they provided material for the internet, for example running a website.

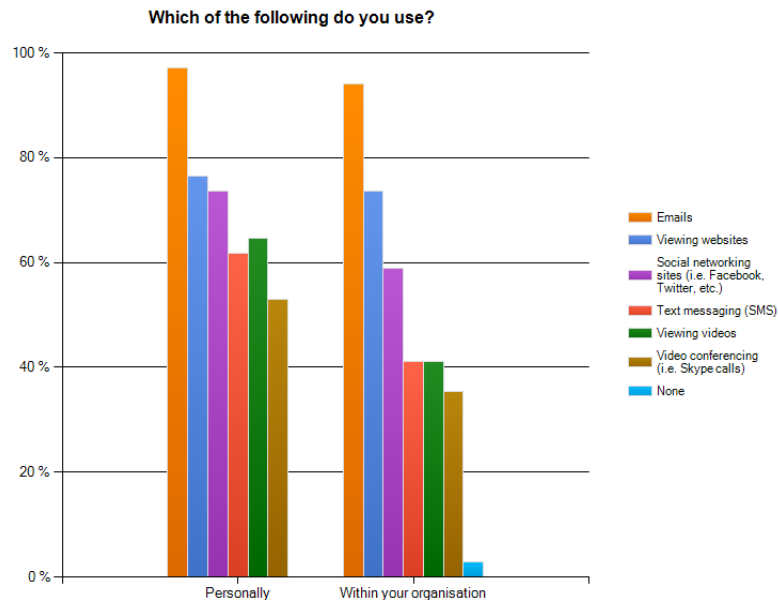


Figure 5 Technologies used

The respondents experience with e-learning was also explored, Figure 6 shows that over 30% of respondents had experience of it (for example at university), 25% had tried it at some point, while the remainder had only heard of it or seen others using it.

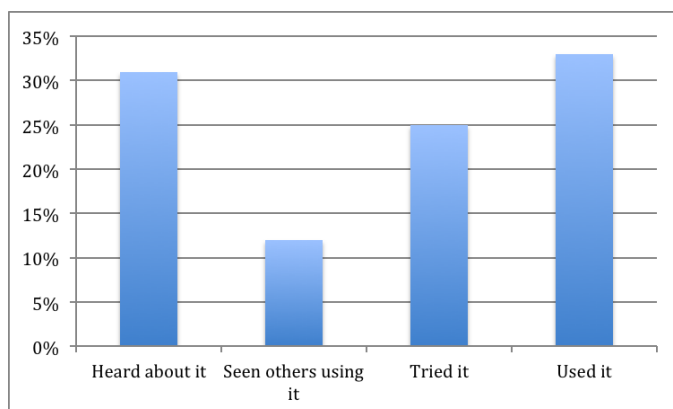


Figure 6 Experience of e-Learning

Conclusions

Overall this research has shown that there is a high use and appreciation of technology within WAGGGS, across ages, cultures and languages. However there is not equal access to technologies and their technological capabilities vary around the world and within neighbourhoods. There was however no particular group that could be identified as lacking basic digital literacies (JISC, 2011), nor in belonging to one of the typologies (Immigrant/Native, Resident/Visitor (Prensky, 2001; White & Cornu, 2011)), although individuals could be classified as such. A number of members do not have experience of e-learning and so some basic training will be needed alongside the provision of the training materials.

The connectivity to the Internet will also be a severe challenge to some members with regard to their accessing online materials, and any online materials will need to be able to be accessible when not online. Consideration should also be given to mechanisms by which participants in deprived areas can be given funding to cover access to computers and the Internet.

The next stage of the project will be to develop and trial e-learning resources for use within the organisation.

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