

The Social Function of Ad Hoc Transient Communities

Sibren Fetter
Celstec, Open University the Netherlands



Overview

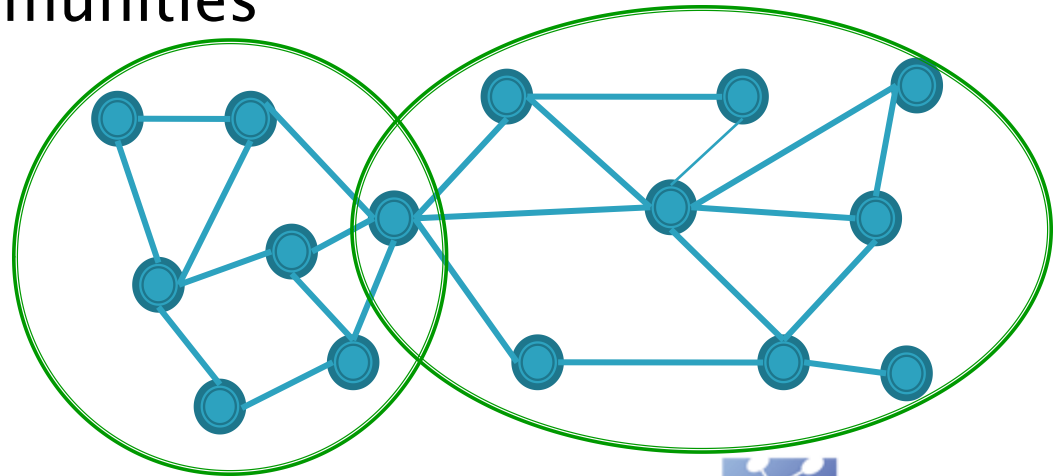
- ▶ The need for communities
- ▶ Main Problem:
 - Dynamic nature (two edged sword)
 - Social capital
 - Centralization
 - Sense of belonging
 - Received and provided support
- ▶ Ad Hoc Transient Communities
- ▶ Hypotheses
- ▶ Methods

The need for communities

- ▶ Online learning environments need communities
- ▶ Communities are of high importance for the social interaction
- ▶ Communities provide easy access to peers for any type of collaborative needs

A Learning Network

- ▶ What is a Learning network (LN)?
 - Social network that allows various types of participants to collaborate and socialize
 - Infrastructure for formal, non-formal and informal learning
 - It emerges from the participants out
 - No central control
 - One or more communities



Main problem

- ▶ Communities need to emerge from the participants out
- ▶ Communities have a dynamic nature



- ▶ Problem: how can we improve the likelihood that a community emerges as well as stays in existence over time?

Dynamics

- ▶ Dynamics are what provide life to a community
- ▶ Dynamics are a two edged sword

Too little dynamics

Nothing is happening within
the community

No new people coming in

No requests fulfilled



Too many dynamics

Community becomes a mess

Too many people leave

Too high amount of requests

These dynamics directly influence the social capital of the community

Social Capital

Maximize dynamics' benefits on social capital

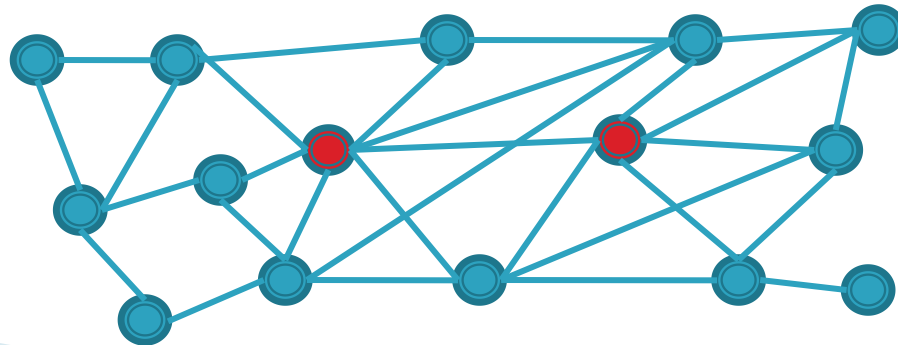
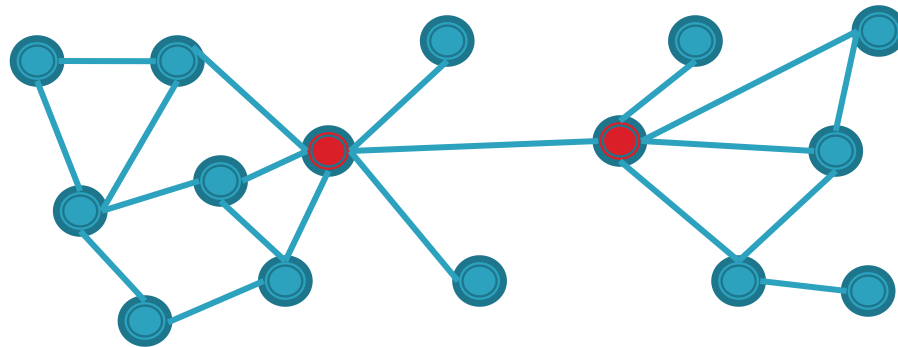
Minimize dynamics' negatives on social capital

3 Features of social capital:

- ▶ Social network structure
- ▶ Sense of belonging
- ▶ Received and provided support

Social network structure (1)

- ▶ Centralization



Sense of belonging

- ▶ Low sense of belonging can lead to:
 - Detachment
 - Isolation
 - Distraction
 - Lack of personal attention



- ▶ Increased chance on drop-out

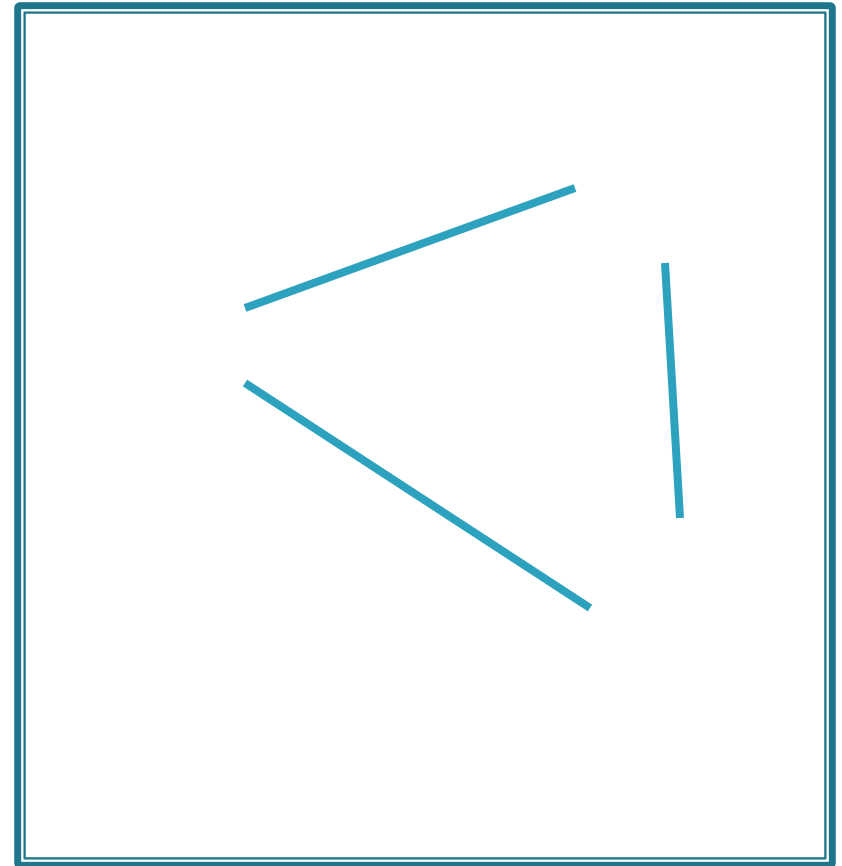
Received and provided support

- ▶ Professional support often not feasible
- ▶ Using peers as tutors can take care of this problem
- ▶ But how do participants know who to contact for support?

Ad Hoc Transient Communities



Ad Hoc Transient Community
Communication environment



Ad Hoc Transient Communities

- ▶ What is an Ad Hoc Transient Community (AHTC)?
 - Ad Hoc – It comes into being the moment there is a request
 - Transient – Once the request has been fulfilled, the AHTC disappears again
- ▶ Matching participants together improves the AHTC
- ▶ Used so far only for the support feature
- ▶ What effect do the AHTCs have on the social structure and sense of belonging?

Hypotheses (1)

- ▶ Regarding the social network structure, when using AHTCs...
 - The communities have a lower centralization
 - Lower the centralization
 - There are more connections in between users within each community
 - Increase the connections....
 - There are more bridging connections in between communities

Hypotheses (2)

- ▶ Regarding the sense of belonging, when using AHTCs...
 - Participants feel a stronger sense of belonging to the community
 - The sense of belonging is acquired in an earlier stage
 - There is higher level of trust in between participants
 - Drop-out will decrease

Hypotheses (3)

- ▶ Regarding the received and provided support, when using AHTCs...
 - There is a higher ratio of fulfilled requests
 - There is a lower threshold for participants to accept a request
 - There is a lower threshold for participants to post a request
 - Participants deem the community and Learning Network as more valuable

Methods

- ▶ Model and simulations
- ▶ Expert evaluation
- ▶ 1 or 2 experiments
 - Social Network Analysis (SNA)
 - Centralization measurement
 - Longitudinal
 - Measurements at intervals
 - (Strength and location of the relationships)
 - Ego Network Analysis (ENA)
 - Included are measurements for sense of belonging
 - Frequency of relationships

Questions and comments

