OnCreate

EU Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership in Higher Education

Teaching Method for Online Collaboration Courses

Visual Activity Overview

Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

Visual Activity Overview

Authors: Björn Stockleben (Hochschule Magdeburg-Stendal), Jannik Sörensen (Aalborg University)

Abstract

In a larger team or consortium that works mainly in online collaboration, it is important to convey the project plan well to everyone and make each other aware of who is commited to which activity with how many resources. A extended visualisation of the project plan can be a great help for this.

Method Description

The main purpose of the visual activity overview is to connect activities with people. It shall answer the question about who is leading the activity and who will I collaborate with. For the management of the OnCreate consortium we made an overview for the first project year in the following style:

- Start and end date of activity, marked on a timeline
- Code and title of activity (note that especially the codes will get mixed up all the time, use it always along with the title)
- Big icons with thumbnail photos of staff to mark leaders and co-leaders: Those people have to start the activity and actively report to the output leader. They are also responsible of collecting and editing the material to be part of the output.
- Small icons to contributing collaborators: Those persons answer to the leaders, but do not have to take initiative on their own. This is an important distinction helping people on the project focusing their initiative and attention.
- Small attached circles show the number of person days initially allocated to the activity.

These activity entries can be used both in the overview plan (see example at end of document) and as attachment to the respective task-threads on the project management platform (basecamp.com in case of OnCreate).

Method Tipps & Challenges

- A visual overview as shown here has to be designed by hand, using tools like Adobe Illustrator or Inkscape (recommended, open source).
- This method is useful especially at the beginning of a project to create a shared understanding of the allocation of resources and responsibilities.
- For complex projects with large consortia and staff fluctuation the effort of creating and maintaining the overview is considerable and should be weighted against the gains.
- In modern project management tools it is not easy to find a way to post this information in a way that it remains continually in sight and attention of the project members, as they work with dynamic threads emphasizing the most current content. It might be advisable to create some kind of static content section.

Example

OnCreate Activities Q4/14 - Q3/15