Imparting social values through eLearning platform: A social learning approach

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Abstract: In this paper, we have identified a gap with regard to imparting social values in an eLearning platform that was designed for orienting immigrants entering Sweden (newcomers). We identified that an existing eLearning platform is more oriented towards creating awareness rather than imparting transformative learning. Therefore, we propose a conceptual framework suggesting how to bring in the social values in eLearning platform, by subsequently applying social learning approach to promulgate transformative learning in which the learner also internalize the values in their attitude and behavior. The proposed framework makes a theoretical contribution by combining the notion of value, value content, value systems and social learning approach in the eLearning platform. The contribution also has practical implications in terms of providing transformative learning to newcomers. We argue that the contents on social values through the eLearning platform should be transformative, and not only informative. We suggest to integrate social values in the eLearning platform; make the learning transformative, and impart those values through social learning approaches such as triple-loop learning, connecting various communities of practices and to make the platform more interactive and engaging.

Keywords: Social values, eLearning platform, social learning, immigrants, Sweden

1. Introduction

Majority of EU countries located in the Schengen area have recently experienced an influx of immigrants and refugees (also referred to as newcomers). The newcomers are from various countries, for various reasons, and with various backgrounds and experiences. Many of them enter EU countries because of critical reasons in their home countries such as war and poverty [1]. Others enter because of their political
backgrounds, which prohibits them to stay in their home countries without getting killed or persecuted. Then, there are newcomers that enter EU countries due to change in their family situation and/or working situation. Thus, there exist a heterogeneous span of differences among the newcomers themselves, and their underlying reasons with why they leave their home countries. As a consequence, a central challenge with the EU countries is to socially integrate the newcomers into their societies. The challenge is highly situated depending on which country the newcomers enter, and how that society is constituted in terms of laws, regulations, norms, values and more. Hence, the challenge with integrating newcomers into understanding new social values is not only situated on a social level for the authorities of the societies to address, but the challenge is also situated for the newcomers on an individual level to learn how to adapt to a new society in general. Their pre-understandings, beliefs, norms, and values, may differ and not be in tune with the societies they enter. It can bring a change in terms of their life quality and can lead to problematic situation. It is not enough to learn the language, but they also need to learn new culture, social values, laws and regulations, which are governed by underlying social values. Learning new social values is highly situated depending on which society the newcomers enter. Therefore, in this paper, we are particularly focusing on Swedish society and their social values. In Sweden (as many other European countries) theoretically society follows the written values of the United Nations (UN) [2]. Therefore, in order to integrate the newcomers to Swedish society, the government needs to impart the social values to them. In Europe in general, and in Scandinavia in particular, Sweden has up to now become one of the most generous countries to take in newcomers in large numbers [3]. For example, the central statistics bureau of Sweden shows that the amount of incoming newcomers has increased since 2010 [4].

1.1. Problem

Considering the influx of newcomers in Sweden, authorities in Sweden have decided to establish a learning platform known as ‘civic orientation’ in 2010. The purpose of the platform is to create awareness among newcomers in terms of telling how Swedish society is configured and how it works. Specifically, to inform the social issues such as: human rights and fundamental democratic values; the rights and obligations of the individual; how the Swedish society is organized in terms of laws, norms and values; practical every day and social life in Sweden. However, the ‘civic orientation’ is mainly oriented towards providing the necessary facts about the Swedish society (e.g. laws and regulations) through a learning discourse. A typical learning scenario in civic orientation is when a tutor conveys single-loop learning [5] about norms and values in Sweden. For example, the newcomers must follow laws and regulations (e.g. parking fee), otherwise, there will be consequences (e.g. parking ticket).

In response to the influx of newcomers in Sweden, authorities decided to extend the ‘civic orientation’ platform by digitalizing the civic orientation program [6, 7]. The eLearning platform is implemented and used by a representative group of geographically dispersed newcomers to organize, conduct, and distribute civic
orientation in Sweden. Consequently, the newcomers can now participate in the learning discourse and learn civic orientation, regardless of their geographical location, both directly (e.g. face-to-face) and indirectly (e.g. eLearning modules [8]).

This flexible mode to deliver civic orientation has opened up new kind of learning opportunities. The challenge, however, is not just creating awareness, but also to create transformative learning i.e. changing the attitudes and behavior based on new learning [9]. In this regard, ‘civic orientation’ needs to practice other approaches for imparting social values. We argue that one needs to grasp societies’ norms and values, by experiencing them, but not only through a fact mediated discourse. Hence, in this paper, we propose a social learning approach in order to extend the idea of transformative learning with explicit emphasize on social values. We suggests that such learning discourse shall:

1) Grasp the nature of situated social values;
2) Organize the attributes of situated social values;
3) Realize the social values into a system;
4) Impart a system social values to relevant target groups of a society (e.g. newcomers).

However, such task is difficult to realize and scrutinize thoroughly without a supporting and informing theory. We will therefore investigate what possibilities there are in terms of imparting social values through an eLearning platform, which does not only impart facts about the Swedish society (e.g. such as civic orientation), but which also emphasizes social values as the explicit learning content. Hence, we formulate the following research question for this paper:

- **RQ:** *How do we incorporate social values in eLearning platform, and impart the social values to the newcomers in the Swedish society?*

In order to address the research question we consider the social learning theory (SLT) [10, 11] to be an appropriate theory and in the next section elaborate on how and why this theory is suitable in this context.

### 2. Description of Social learning Theory

Social learning has its root in organization and management discipline. The idea was to engage various stakeholders in decision-making process through learning ‘adaptive management approach’ [10, 11]. Earlier concept of social learning was more focused on individual learning that takes place in social context [12]. However, recent proponents of social learning provided wider definition. They address social leaning as a process of social change in which people learn from each other; furthermore the dynamic interaction between people and the environment construct the meaning and the identity [11]. Literature also suggests that we have to be careful in naming stakeholder participation as social learning, though it can be a mean to social learning [13]. Another misunderstanding is taking outcome of social learning as ‘social learning’ itself, for example attitudinal and behavioral change. Therefore, it is argued
that social learning is a process of social and political change: The process of reinforcing interaction between people through networks, which leads to transformative learning. However, social learning is not without caveat, the transformative learning may not always lead to positive outcome. For example, down leveling under group pressure, domination of certain group, influence of powerful personality, etc.

Based on Reed et al’s [11] conceptualization of social learning, we describe three main notions of social learning as follows:

1. **A change in understanding**: Reed et al [11] suggested different level of learning derived from [9] these are: *Instrumental learning* i.e. acquiring new knowledge or skills, communicative (for example civic orientation platform), *Understanding and reinterpreting knowledge* through communication with others, and *Transformative Learning* i.e. where an examination of underlying assumptions leads to change in attitudes, behavior, and social norms. They further extended the understanding as single-loop learning, i.e. learning about the consequences of specific actions, double-loop learning which is same as transformative learning, and triple-loop learning, i.e. learning that challenges the values, norms, and higher order thinking processes that underpin assumptions and actions. In our proposition the idea is to impart transformative and triple-loop learning through eLearning platform.

2. **Learning that is situated within wider social units**: Reed et al [11] suggested that the social learning should be situated in wider social context or communities of practice [10] rather than a fixed boundary of organizational setup, in which, people collectively become critically literate about their circumstances and achieve consensus through collective reflection and problematization. As recommended, good citizenship can be learned, not from a formal curriculum but instead through positive experiences of active involvement within society [14]. The main idea behind our study is to create an informal, active environment with value system incorporated in an eLearning platform and engage the new member of the society for the active evolvement leading to triple-loop or transformative learning.

3. **Learning through social interaction**: The third element of social learning is social interaction. It suggests that learning occurs through social interactions and processes between actors within a social network, either through direct interaction, e.g. conversation, or through other media, e.g. mass media, telephone, or web 2.0 applications. The focus of our study is also to impart the value system in wider audience through an eLearning platform. Therefore, the implications go to incorporate such features in the platform that facilitate social interaction process.

We will use social learning theory by incorporating the three above-written notions into our own conceptual framework of value types and value contents. We believe
that we can use social learning theory to impart social values to the society in general and new members of the society in particular. The existing approaches such as civic orientation, does only emphasize informing basic understanding of facts such as laws, policies, or basic protocols. However, to convey the values in a transformative ways of learning, the behavior of the recipient (e.g. newcomer) need to be affected and changed [9]. Various other organizational learning theories have in IS research been adopted to internalize knowledge and direct the actions of the employees to achieve certain goals [15] [5] [16]. However, for this paper, we propose an eLearning platform beyond organizational boundaries that stretches to a social level. Hence, we choose social learning theory to address the challenge of imparting social values through a eLearning platform. In the next section, we discuss the characteristics of value types, value contents and value systems, of which the social values consist of.

3. Value Systems, Value Types and Value Content

Because we are elaborating on the idea of bringing in social values into a eLearning platform, the concept of values becomes crucial. In ethics, value denotes something's degree of importance, as the aim of determining what action of life is best to do (deontology), or to describe the significance of different actions (axiology). We treat values as abstract objects, value types, and put value content into their instances. A value system is a set of consistent ethical values (more specifically the personal and cultural values). A well-defined value system we call an ethics.

Values have been discussed among philosophers from Aristotle [17], via Spinoza [18] and Kant [19, 20] to Hägerström [21] who claimed that moral and ethics was meaningless. However, for this paper, we take a pragmatic approach into consideration, where the content of values are simply chosen through the use of the UN declaration of Human Rights [2]. The UN declaration of Human Rights has thirty articles that comprises respected values regarding fundamental human rights, dignity and worth of the human person. Hence, we choose the declaration as our main source of inspiration for defining value types and value content. Despite the fact that such value types and value content should be universally respected, it is not always the fact and many newcomers are used to other value systems.

Let us take an example. In social media one women, waiting for her asylum for Sweden to be treated posted: “I think Sweden is an inhuman society!” When she was asked why, she claimed it was inhuman because you cannot pay for being treated earlier. It turned out that, in her culture, bribing is something natural, something that is necessary and acceptable. Such issue addresses the contrast in how people from different cultures are used to different value types and value content. Hence, we advocate that a possible solution for imparting a set of accepted value types and value content, shall not only mediate knowledge about forbidden acts in the society (such as bribing), but also implement the value system associated with the governing norm that addresses bribing as inappropriate. Bribing is a value type, here with the content “no”. It is expressed as an imperative: “You shall not bribe”. Such a value content can be informed through a single-loop learning procedure when tutors informing
newcomers in civic orientation, but to comprehend the meaning of it in reality, one needs to experience the actual outcomes about what are right and wrong values [22].

The concept of values is often used in marketing. Customer’s values are discussed and categorized for instance in [23, 24] and then in connection with codes of conduct for the behavior of marketing. But, in the context of this paper, values have another meaning, namely dealing with ethical values for the whole society. One of the pioneers for investigating this area was Rokeach [25]. Other researchers have build upon his value system. In 1992, Schwartz [26] introduced a theory of basic human values, building on common elements in his approach. The theory includes 10 distinct values presumed to encompass the major value orientations recognized across cultures. Schwartz also presented a first instrument to measure these values that he validated cross-culturally [26]. An alternative instrument, also validated across cultures, was presented in 2001 [27]. In Davidov et al’s paper [28], the latest version of the value system is presented, as well as an instrument for measuring the 10 most dominant values in different countries. The values are (ibid p 424):

- **POWER**: Social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources
- **ACHIEVEMENT**: Personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards
- **HEDONISM**: Pleasure and sensuous gratification for oneself
- **STIMULATION**: Excitement, novelty, and challenge in life
- **SELF-DIRECTION**: Independent thought and action-choosing, creating, exploring
- **UNIVERSALISM**: Understanding, appreciation, tolerance and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature
- **BENEVOLENCE**: Preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact
- **TRADITION**: Respect, commitment and acceptance of the customs and ideas that traditional culture or religion provide the self
- **CONFORMITY**: Restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms
- **SECURITY**: Safety, harmony and stability of society, of relationships, and of self - power values may be compatible. Seeking personal success for oneself tends to strengthen and to be strengthened by actions aimed at enhancing ones own social position and authority over others.

Overall we can conclude that there exist commonly accepted value systems that are comparable between different countries and which are based on empirical research. Using Davidov et al’s [28] set of values, we have value types that are important. If they shall become rich and informative, we also need to put content into these values, which is a common notion expressed in laws, religion, ethic codes etc.
By replacing the content, we can create *value systems* based upon different ethics and morals, which would make it possible for us to create a certain kind of value system (e.g. capitalistic, feminist etc). Fundamentally, we will use the universal declaration of human rights from UN [2] to create a hard-coded value system for the eLearning platform to impart for newcomers, which it shall not be possible to violate – similar to Asimovs three laws for robots [29]. Founded a suitable set of value types; we have also founded an *ethics*, serving as basis for content to put into the value system.

The last question to address is: Can we express this as something a computer can use? This question is coupled with the first and third issues presented in the problem section of this paper, namely: 1) the search for a potential solution that incorporates and imparts social values for newcomers; 3) how to operationalize the potential solution in terms of an appropriate media that facilitates and imparts the social values. We will in the upcoming sections elaborate further on how these issues can be addressed through a conceptual set of values-, -types, and -content, imparted through social learning theory in an eLearning platform.

4. **A Conceptual Framework for Imparting Social Values through a eLearning Platform**

We propose a conceptual framework (Fig 1) supporting the idea of imparting values through a eLearning platform. The framework consists of four different components:
1. **An experience component:** serve as a repository for storing experiences through a set of stories. The experiences may origin from real people’s experiences (captured through interviews) and/or collective experiences that are typical for a society (e.g. the effects of violating a specific law).

![Fig 1 A conceptual framework of an eLearning Platform to impart social values](image)

2. **A stories component:** serve as a repository for mediating stories that incorporate a notion of values, content and types. They are written in such a way that a value type is demonstrated in each story and presented in experiences. Each story has several **levels**, where the person is supposed to take certain actions.

3. **A value content component:** Each level represents mainly a certain value content and the actions taken by the person demonstrates how well (s)he has internalized it. An action can span several value types. Degree of internalization is measured in points for each. Each level has a maximum point. The higher level in an experience, the harder it becomes to achieve maximum point. The person can switch between experiences arbitrarily, but not between the levels in each experience. In each level there are also actions
representing some other values than the main value and the person can achieve points also for these values.

4. **A value system component:** The value types are organized in a value system, such as for instance that from Davidov et al [28]. Each value type has a value content, referring to explicit rules, ethics, laws and customs. This could be considered as an ontology for a specific instance of the eLearning platform (e.g. a game). By changing the ontology, we should thus be possible to change ethics, laws, rules and customs in another instance (e.g. another game).

Fig 1 also depicts how each and every component interacts. For instance stories are based on experiences, which incorporate a value system that comprises value content. The value content is distributed to the value system, which interacts and embeds relevant value types into the experience component, which in turn either uses existing stories to distribute experiences into the platform, or encapsulates new experiences that get transformed and stored in the stories component. New stories are formed through actual experiences and experiences generated through actions in the platform. But the one thing crucial for the platform is the value system, the ethics, which is hard-coded as the UN declaration of human rights. The idea is to mediate these values through the platform and facilitate a change of newcomers understanding of the society. We establish a learning discourse that is situated through social interactions between newcomers and other actors (e.g. present social citizens). Doing so we may resolve issues 1 & 3 in the social learning theory. But even if we have a platform with an underlying conceptual framework based on rigorous components (shown in Fig 1), we need to facilitate the social values by imparting the value system, content and so forth through the platform. Hence, we will in the next section illustrate how social learning theory can be utilized to support such a notion.

### 4.1 Imparting Values, Content and Types through Social Learning

In the previous section, we conceptualized a framework that shall support a eLearning platform for imparting social values (-types and -content). But in order to actually establish a mechanism that makes it possible to impart social values, we need to clarify how elements and principles of social learning can be mapped with eLearning platform features. As an example of propositions for how a system of values can be incorporated with value content and types, we illustrate the following example, which is governed by the 18th article in the declaration of human rights [2]: “**Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.**” We further elaborate upon the content and meaning of the 18th article by fragmentizing it into the following hierarchy of propositions:

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of religion
   1.1. Everyone has freedom of thought
1.2. Everyone has freedom of conscience
1.3. Everyone has the right to change his religion
1.4. Everyone has the right to manifest his religion in
   1.4.1. Teaching
   1.4.2. Practice
   1.4.3. Worship
   1.4.4. Observance
   1.4.5. This can be done alone or in community with others and in public or private

A further elaboration upon the fragmentation above, can be formulated as concrete rules in a value system as follows:

**Table. 1. An Elaboration of Social Values into a Value System**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value type</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Power</strong></td>
<td>You can practice, teach, worship or obey any rule in any religion as long as it not violate any of the rules in this value system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Power</strong></td>
<td>You may not hinder anybody to change his or her religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Achievement</strong></td>
<td>Practicing a religion in a competent way will give you personal success in the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hedonism</strong></td>
<td>Practicing a religion will create pleasure for the one who practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stimulation</strong></td>
<td>Practicing a religion will be a challenge for the one who practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-Direction</strong></td>
<td>You can freely explore any part of the religion you believe in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Universalism</strong></td>
<td>Practicing your religion should not prohibit understanding, appreciation, tolerance and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Benevolence</strong></td>
<td>Practicing your religion should not harm the welfare of people with whom you are in frequent personal contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tradition</strong></td>
<td>Practicing your religion should allow customs ideas and traditional culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conformity</strong></td>
<td>Practicing your religion should not harm others and violate social expectations or norms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Security</strong></td>
<td>Practicing your religion should not violate the safety, harmony and stability of the society</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The schema shown in Fig 2 illustrates the overall elements of an eLearning platform with the objective of imparting social values through social learning. The conceptual framework provides necessary elements in terms of value system, value content and value types that are captured and distributed through experiences and stories. The distribution gets imparted through the three main notions of social learning, which in turn gets realized through a set of appropriate platform-features. We will in the next section illustrate a scenario that incorporates an example of how an experience of social values can be mediated and imparted through the eLearning platform.

4.3 Imparting value systems through social learning

Based on the value system above, we can use elements and principles of social learning to impart it in the eLearning platform. Each and every value type and content above can be supported with Reed et al’s [11] three main notions of social learning. Imparting social values for a change in the newcomers understanding about situated value (e.g. Benevolence, Tradition), shall make it possible for them to learn the value system through interaction in an active environment that mediates triple-loop and transformative learning [11][13]. The eLearning platform shall map the value system, with informing facets of social learning theory, and then impart a learning discourse to a wider audience of newcomers. Examples of social learning processes are learning through conversations; learning through social interaction (e.g. humans, artifacts); learning within wider social units (e.g. communities of practice); and learning that motivates critical reflection and problematization of social values. In order to use social learning for imparting social values through the eLearning platform, it needs to establish supporting functionality and features. Doing so, we may through the eLearning platform, mediate scenarios that capture each and every component of the conceptual framework (shown in Fig 1) together with crucial elements and principles of social learning that makes it possible to impart situated social values for the newcomers (shown in Fig 2).

The schema shown in Fig 2 illustrates the overall elements of a eLearning platform with the objective of imparting social values through social learning. The conceptual framework provides necessary elements in terms of value system, value content and value types that are captured and distributed through experiences and stories. The distribution gets imparted through the three main notions of social learning, which in turn gets realized through a set of appropriate platform-features. We will in the next section illustrate a scenario of how an experience of social values can be mediated and imparted through the eLearning platform.
Fig 2 Schema of a eLearning Platform that Imparts Social Values through Social Learning

4.4 A Scenario

A person, P, comes to a square in a town. Many people are gathered there for a meeting in an election campaign for the political party VRW (Very Right Wing) that is against immigrants. On a scene there is a speaker who says very bad things about immigrants: They rape our women, they take our jobs, they cost the society a lot of money that could be used for elderly care, health care and schools, they introduce foreign customs in Sweden and soon all Swedish women have to wear hijab, maybe even nicab! Another person approach P pointing at the speaker and says: “Those bastard should be shot! They don’t deserve to live!” If P then agree his collected “value points” will decrease. If he instead says something like “We have freedom to speech in this country, so I think he should continue. But I definitely not agree!” his points will rise.

Suddenly tumult arises and people begin throwing stones at the speaker. P is offered a stone. If he takes the stone and throw it at the speaker his points will decrease very much. If he refuses and leave, small increase will occur. But if he takes his mobile and take pictures and movies of the tumult and provide the police with them, his points will skyrocket!

In the tumult he discovers a gold bracelet on the ground. If he takes it for himself, points decrease at a steady pace as long as he keep it. If he sells it, the points will decrease even faster. On his way he passes a police station. If he enters and handle in the bracelet, all lost points will be restored and he will achieve many new nice points.

5. Concluding Discussion

In this paper we have identified and addressed an existing gap in an eLearning platform designed for informing newcomers in civic orientation [6]. It addresses the constraints with only orienting newcomers towards a basic awareness regarding social phenomena (e.g. laws, rules), instead of imparting transformative learning [11]. Furthermore, the gap that we identified was captured and formulated through our research question: How do we incorporate social values in eLearning platform, and impart the social values to the newcomers in the Swedish society? The research question led us to propose a conceptual framework that incorporates transformative learning about social values into the discourse of an eLearning platform. Further on by subsequently applying the social learning approach regarding transformative learning the newcomers internalize the promulgated values in their everyday attitudes and behaviors. We believe that our conceptual framework proposes a theoretical contribution in terms of combining the notions of value, value content, value systems and the social learning approach, and impart those notions through an eLearning platform. The conceptual framework is also significant for further research in terms of practical implications that can be realized into practice for connecting various
communities of practices [10] and imparts social values for newcomers through rich interaction and engagement. However, we believe that our contribution also opens up for an ethical discussion regarding what ethical implications the framework may afford for future realization.

There are three interesting ethical questions in our paper:
1. Is it possible to implement an ethic into a computer program?
2. Is it possible to influence and change a person’s ethics with a computer program?
3. Is it right to do so?

An ethic we defined as a well-formulated value system. It can be seen as a set of rules, regulating our behavior in the society or community [18]. The Christian ethics can be expressed in the Ten Commandments and other religions have similar set of rules, more or less detailed. Question 1 is then changed to a more general one: Is it possible to implement a set of rules in a computer program? The answer is obvious: The computer program is a set of rules. There is even a program language, Prolog, which is declarative, meaning if you specify a set of logical rules, the program can draw conclusions from the logical rules [30].

Concerning question 2, it is at least possible to make a person aware of his ethical considerations. Fogg [31] describes several cases, such as ELIZA and Tamagochi where computers persuade people to behave in a certain way. Almost all textbooks in ethics [32, 33, 34] describe certain case where the reader is supposed to have an opinion. The result is dependent on which ethics you choose, deontic, utilitarian and consequential ethics. By presenting the user of the platform for certain chosen scenarios the consequences of the actions according to a certain ethics or value system can be demonstrated and hopefully create an awareness of the used ethics.

The third question is the tricky one. For example, according to the UN declaration of human rights you should have freedom to practice your religion. But surely this is not allowed, if the practice means killing a lot of people not sharing your ideas. On the other side, according to question 2 it is possible to influence and even change people’s ethic values by using the platform. It means the value system implemented in it is seen as the right one. There is a risk that people’s freedom of expression is hampered. Therefore it is extremely important that the value system can be changed or modified in order to not conflict shared values.

A very interesting design could be separating the values and the experiences and stories. Thus the same scenario could be treated very different based upon the used value system. People not sharing the right value system could thus experience what happens if their value system was implemented.

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