I Did This

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In the midst of presentations in Polish it's quite comforting to recognise English words like 'Tin Can' scattered about occasionally. It was 14th Conference „Virtual University – model, tools, practice" conference in Warsaw in June 2014.

The conference organisers invited me to speak on the Tin Can API (also known as Experience API or xAPI for short). This is the name given to the new e-learning standards that, in time, will replace SCORM. It expands to type of e-learning tracking, provides the ability to use 'new' mobile technology, and also resolves some of SCORM's long standing issues. I've been watching and writing about the development of this new specification over a number of years for my column on e-learning standards in a UK based magazine called 'e-learning age'.

The structure of TinCan is based on learning statements in the format "I Did This" (noun, verb, object). Therefore, there is the potential to track any learning intervention (formal or informal), monitor changes in behaviour and even record sales or production figures. So with enough data, over time, trends can be statistically analysed to show which learning interventions were the most effective. Could we actually get to the 'holy grail' of ROI (Return On Investment)?

At the conference I did discover that 'Zrobiłem to' is Polish for 'I did this'. It is only two words which made me wonder whether "I did this" translates around the world? But that is a question for another time! It was fascinating throughout the conference to recognise other words and phrases like 'Massive Open Online Courses' (MOOC's) and gamification; we might speak a different language but we are all on the same page!

As well as talking about the basics of the xAPI, I also introduced the idea of the Personal Data Locker. This is an individual's version of the Learning Record Store (LRS), which is an organisaion's database where the learners' activity statements can be stored. This lead to another interesting question which could have many answers, "who would you trust to host your personal data?"

To illustrate the potential use of a Personal Data Locker (PDL) I described a scenario as if it was happening in the future, maybe the year 2020:

Career wise it's time to move on and I've seen a job advertised that I feel would suit me. I need to submit a CV, written specifically to meet the requirements of the new job description and then prepare for a competency based interview. As it is 2020 I can go to my personal data locker, which has all my data on my career, health and social life. Using the PDL's simple analytic tools I drill down into the career section; this initially is split into formal qualifications, job roles and experience.

Currently in 2014 my degree certificates are on paper, I would have to rummage through some boxes for my engineering degree, my MBA is framed but not on a wall. I hope in the future the electronic versions will be available for verification and authentication from the various Qualification Awarding Bodies. There are also MOOC's that I've taken which are relevant for this role; there is a lot of information stored in my PDL however on this occasion I only need 'the badge' that verifies that I completed it.

Currently in 2014, many large organisations when you leave, do not give full references except to say that someone was employed between specific dates. In 2020 employment might be represented as a 'badge' electronically or in the format "I worked for ….." with dates and a means of verifying its authenticity.

Then we looked at 'my experience': Currently in 2014 there is no evidence of this to show a prospective employer, it is just my written or spoken word. In my PDL in 2020 I have lists of learning statements that I can sort and filter against the various competences required by the new job role. These could be leadership, problem solving, communication skills or commercial acumen. Currently there is something similar on LinkedIn with endorsements; however in the future instead of this being provided by random third parties these evidence statements could be authenticated by the originator.

If I choose 'communication skills', I could drill down to my learning statements that are recorded in the format of 'I did this'. So for example: "I wrote an article"; this could also have a status like 'published' and some further context about the magazine or journal with url's if appropriate. Or, "I delivered a presentation" could have the context of where it was delivered, like the conference programme or link to a webinar. If these publications and conferences are TinCan compliant, I presume it would be possible to record how many people read the articles or attended the presentation. With these and many more experiences tracked in my PDL I can filter and choose the experiences I want to share with this specific recruiter.

For some job roles that are generic like a sales person or call-centre operative, the recruiter might have a lot of historical data available in their own LRS (held securely and anonymously) about people who were taken on with similar experience. The company could then predict that by providing the candidate with some specific learning interventions, this would mean they achieve a particular level of success within a given time frame. The company would also know that missing certain interventions, such as training, promotion, or pay rises, would mean the candidate could under-perform or leave the organisation prematurely.

It is exciting that the new standards offer us such a future; however we have a lot of work to do to make this a reality. During the conference I was able to share the personal relevance of this example, and I'm now happy to share that on returning to the UK I was offered the job for which I'd applied. So now as the Global Learning Technology Services Manager at Bupa I hope to have the opportunity to implement these new e-learning standards over the coming years.

So finally let's go back to one of my earlier questions: Who would you trust with your data? With all the future possibilities that are in store, whoever that is, will be in possession of a goldmine!