Chapter XV

Communities of Practice:
Enhancing Collective Effectiveness

Abstract

The objective of this chapter is to explore the social dynamics and the effectiveness benefits that a community of practice creates for its members in a knowledge-intensive IT industry. Social dynamics is examined in terms of informal and organised forms of socialisation processes. Effectiveness benefits were evaluated in terms of commitment, friendship, community satisfaction, process satisfaction, and trust. The results of the study indicate that organised socialisation had a significant positive impact on all aspects of community effectiveness, but no particularly outstanding effect. The results further indicate that informal socialisation had a stronger positive impact on community effectiveness than organised socialisation, except for process satisfaction. These findings confirm the value of socialisation for effective knowledge organisations, and suggest the need for strategies that would provide encouragement without overformalisation.
Introducction

Knowledge intensive organisations, as well as extraorganisational groups of professionals, are often structured as communities of practice (CoP). These are groups of people that engage in activities that encompass a common interest or goal, and ongoing learning through practice (Hasan & Crawford, 2003). Typically, they employ common practices, use the same tools, communicate in common language, and hold similar beliefs and values.

Most studies concentrate on investigating communities inside an organisation. There is an increasing awareness that knowledge creation and innovation in organisations can be achieved through knowledge sharing among members of such communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). In addition to being creative work units and learning, communities also represent important social structures in organisations. As such, they enable and constrain the actions of individual members through reinforcing preferred-shared beliefs and behaviours and discouraging less preferred ones. In short, they shape the organisational social capital including its norms and relationships. It is assumed that social capital is beneficial as it reduces the cost of doing business and creates opportunity by facilitating coordination and cooperation (Standards Australia, 2001).

The wide range of benefits of communities of learning and practice are so significant that government and corporations are seeking ways to encourage their establishment and continued existence (Mentzas, Apostolou, Young, & Abecker, 2001). Knowledge management (KM) can be used to encourage development of social capital. Socialisation is assumed to enable tacit knowledge, values, and beliefs to be transferred between individuals through shared experience, space, and time (Nonaka, 1998). Through socialising, community members develop relationships. Interactive sessions, including spending time, working together, or attending informal social meetings, provide a chance for participants to relax, have fun, and develop trust. Socialisation is a way to establish an individual status in terms of abilities, skills, and knowledge relative to other members. Interaction also drives the creation and growth of the personal tacit knowledge base of individuals. By seeing other people’s perspective and ideas, a new interpretation of what one knows is created.

Many knowledge workers have both organizational and professional affiliations. They are both employees of the organization in which they work and members of professional associations that extend beyond organizational borders. Typically, these extraorganizational communities of practice are groups of individuals who are linked by what they do rather than where and for whom they work (Viehland, 2005). Of particular interest to this study is “IT community of practice,” made up of professionals who either work directly in the IT industry or are heavily involved in IT activities at their respective workplaces. So far, there has been very little research conducted on knowledge sharing within such extraorganisational broad,
Implications of Pressure for Shortening the Time to Market (TTM) in Defense Projects
www.igi-global.com/article/implications-of-pressure-for-shortening-the-time-to-market-ttm-in-defense-projects/109088?camid=4v1a