Chapter 13
E-Collaboration Within, Between, and Without Institutions: Towards Better Functioning of Online Groups Through Networks

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses different ways for the exchange of knowledge in networks - within, between, and without institutions, as well as their implication on networks in economy and society. Network systems based on technologies and architectures of participation offer a new model of online knowledge sharing, cooperation, and collaboration, that are different from the traditional institutional framework. This paper suggests that this model opens new horizons for both companies and non-profit organizations. By developing an e-networked business model, companies can make as much or even more money in the long tail of power low distribution than they were making at the head of the curve in the traditional business model. This opens to everyone the possibility of participating and contributing content, non-profit organization and online communities, including Communities of Practice and online learning communities, which can ensure reaching the “critical mass” of contributors and involvement level that will keep these communities active. This paper concludes with an example illustrating how the ideas discussed could facilitate knowledge exchange in companies, organizations or educational institutions.

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INTRODUCTION

The clear boundary between creators and consumers of online content has blurred in the past decade because of the enormous expansion of a new culture - the participatory culture. Jenkins et al. (2006b) define the participatory culture as one in which members believe their contributions matter, and feel some degree of social connection with one another. Community and knowledge management are two features that online environment can do much better than its physical counterpart (Chen & Tsai, 2009). The Web 2.0 is an information space through which people can communicate by sharing their knowledge and ideas in a common pool and find items shared by others. Network technologies allow geographically dispersed users in companies, organizations, and communities of practice to communicate, share their knowledge, cooperate, and collaborate online in order to work or learn together (Bouras, Giannaka, & Tsiatsos, 2009).

As a response to a key social value of participatory literacy at the 21st century workplace, educational practitioners, and researchers have demonstrated a growing interest in developing pedagogical practices enhancing a participatory culture in all levels of education (Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear, & Leu, 2008). Differing from the traditional whereby compulsory and higher education are based on lectures and individual assignments; the emergence of a participatory culture at schools, colleges, and universities changes the focus of literacy from individual expression to collaboration and community involvement (Jenkins, 2006a).

Mediated collaboration is not limited to computer mediated communication (CMC). Kock, Davison, Ocker, and Wazlawick (2001) suggested a broad definition of e-collaboration as “a process of collaboration among individuals engaged in a common task using electronic technologies”. According to Kock and Nosek (2005), not only computers, but many other electronic technologies can be used to support collaboration among individuals engaged in a common task.

A variety of electronic technologies now enable different types of coordination and knowledge exchange. First this paper will make the distinction between the different forms of knowledge exchange through information technologies. Following that, different ways of exchanging knowledge in networks - within, between, and without institutions, as well as their implications on networked economy and society will be discussed. Motivation for contributions will be presented and e-collaboration through networked systems which will be examined from different perspectives - synchronous versus asynchronous knowledge exchange, continuous versus one-time contribution, active community involvement and content contribution versus lurking. The paper concludes with an example illustrating how the ideas discussed could facilitate knowledge exchange in companies, organization or educational institutions.

SHARING, COOPERATION, AND COLLABORATION

Some authors use the term “knowledge sharing” in a broad sense – as the process of mutually exchanging knowledge and jointly creating new knowledge (van den Hooff & de Ridder, 2004). However, exchange and creating knowledge through information technology have different forms and it is important to make a distinction between the processes of knowledge sharing, cooperation, and collaboration. Knowledge sharing is the provision or receipt of task information, know-how, and feedback regarding a product or procedure (Hansen, 1999), “an activity where agents - individuals, communities, or organizations - exchange their knowledge - information, skills, or expertise” (Ireson & Burel, 2010, p. 351). Examples of knowledge sharing through information technology are Flikr and YouTube where participants contribute pictures or video clips to the system and other users can retrieve
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