Chapter 9

Trying to Go Open: Knowledge Management in an Academic Journal

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ABSTRACT

Theoretically, open source solutions are a good match with the resource scarce organization such as a young academic journal to make the publication process and the knowledge shared explicit to the participants in the system. This paper uses a case study approach to investigate how the decision to have such a system depends on a myriad of factors, and tracks how the editorial team decided to adopt an open source journal management system for their knowledge management issues. The study argues that these components should not be taken in isolation by showing how the previous decisions can become a hindrance as these components change over time. The results show that some factors, though initially thought to be unimportant, can become major forces as the journal matures, and a more holistic approach could help to side-step the problems faced.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-0905-9.ch009
INTRODUCTION

Recent years saw an increase in number of scientific journals (Larsen & von Ins, 2010). This has been to large extent facilitated by the increased use of information technology (IT), not only because IT enabled easy access to information and dissemination channels, but it also made possible to connect to people – reviewers, authors, editors more easily than before. IT has also enabled the creation of systems for knowledge management and handling of the information flows that previously necessitated expert knowledge and other resources not easily attained through these systems.

An academic journal, though how small and young it may be, consists of several parts that need to be managed with rather tight schedules, and often without visible gains for those involved with the work. Most of the work, if not all, is done voluntarily, with commitments of those people to other institutions taking precedence over the journals’ needs. Though these invisible rewards may bear fruit in the long run, i.e. if the journal becomes and remains successful, usually the editors and the management of the journal are occupied with the short run survival of the journal. They need to attract papers, review them, send them for peer-review, assess these reviews, reject/accept the papers based on these reviews, ask for copyright and check if all the copyright laws are followed in the accepted paper and finalise the editing. All these tasks necessitate that the editors and managers have the required information to perform accordingly, and these tasks themselves generate knowledge to be used either directly later in the process, or to be used for future volumes. The papers generated are the products of the journal, to be used by the academia – their main customer – while at the same time, the papers also play the role of input for the authors for their future evaluations, and for other research that will use these papers in one form or another. Thus, the rather seemingly simple act of publishing a scientific journal (see Figure 1 for a basic workflow of a submission derived from the case organisation) actually is a complex combination of various actors and factors.

IT and information systems (IS) come at this stage to play several roles. Most of the mentioned tasks and the input and output of these tasks take place in a virtual setting, rendering the IT and IS that are used as a form of infrastructure. On the other hand, IT and IS also play the role of a platform where the knowledge necessary to run the journal is collected, created and shared, which serves as the focus of this chapter. The issues related to this role have become to the forefront of the case organisation’s (to preserve anonymity, hereafter Business Journal) editors’ and managers’ minds as they have gone through a growth phase in the Business Journal. This growth phase highlighted the shortcomings of the existing ad-hoc ways of
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