Designing a Successful Collaborative Wiki: The Choice between Outcome Quality and Online Community Needs

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ABSTRACT

Designing a collaborative platform that produces project outcomes of high quality and allows for wisdom of the crowds to come together in the achievement of a common goal can be a challenge. Literature often addresses the interplay between designing for online community needs and outcome/product quality as coexistence, where design implementations in one positively affect the other. However, Human-Computer Interaction research has shown that performance and satisfaction need not be dependent on each other. This paper performs a theoretical analysis of the literature on the topic and identifies design gaps for collaborative projects. Findings derived by this theoretical analysis challenge existing design perspectives by demonstrating that there is often a tradeoff between designing for online community needs and outcome quality for these projects. Claims were developed that lead to research questions identifying the most important elements and design considerations are provided along with potential future directions for advancing the understanding of this relationship.

KEYWORDS
Collaborative Project, Community Design, Online Community Needs, Outcome Quality, Wikipedia

1. INTRODUCTION

Lü Buwei (291-235 BCE), counselor-in-chief of the Qin Ancient Chinese state, has been said to have recruited three thousand scholars that utilized their collective knowledge to generate one of the first encyclopedias in the world that was a product of a large group of authors. The result was Lüshi Chunqiu, which became an encyclopedic Chinese classic text, whose components remain almost unchanged for thousands of years. At the time it was produced, gathering a large group of people and assigning them to compile a work that will stand the test of time was no small feat. However, little is known on the processes and design that lead to the project’s success. Lü had to deal with satisfying his scholars and also meet the goals that were set for his encyclopedia. Were the two objectives aligned or did he had to tradeoff one for the other? Similarly, in today’s Web 2.0 world, our knowledge on what contributes to an online collaborative wiki project’s success from a design standpoint is limited. Should design proactively promote satisfying community needs and expect that
performance will be influenced indirectly through this process or are the two elements not mutually beneficial and under what conditions?

Over the course of the past decade we have seen social media and collaborative projects fill every aspect of our lives (Jiangnan, Chunling, & Miao, 2014; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Lai & Yang, 2014; Yang & Lai, 2011). Collaboration has become diverse and is not just limited to encyclopedic editing but also tasks such as programming, activism and citizen journalism. Organizations are attempting to employ collaborative projects in order to become more efficient. However, historically some social media projects have been more successful than others (Boyd & Ellison, 2007) and the same applies for collaborative wiki projects. Investing human labor as well as finances towards a collaborative project is a timely as well as an expensive endeavor. Organizations, managers and designers need to make accurate decisions which affect the structure of a collaborative project in order to ensure its success. Therefore, since some collaborative projects are more successful than others, it is important to identify what design elements can enhance success in the context of serving online community needs while attempting to achieve project objectives.

There has been an extensive amount of research on the most prominent collaborative wiki project, Wikipedia. However, none of the previous literature studies have attempted to identify the design elements in order to address the interplay between community needs and outcome quality. As such this paper attempts to answer the research question of how one addresses design considerations between community needs and outcome quality.

In this paper, outcome quality refers to the quality of deliverables as mandated by a collaborative project’s objectives. In the context of Wikipedia, that would be the quality of an article based on Wikipedia’s article quality scale. For example, literature exists in building online communities (Kim, 2000; Kraut & Resnick, 2012) where it is often assumed that satisfying community needs will affect the success of project objectives and outcome quality. This paper introduces a theoretical analysis of literature that demonstrates that this is not always the case. I identify the most prominent design points that can have the largest impact on the quality of work conducted on collaborative projects as well as enhance the sustainability and performance of online communities. The goal is to offer a counter perspective compared to literature. That is, a mutual benefit does not exist when project objectives and community needs are satisfied. A general background is provided discussing how collaborative projects are situated in the overall domain of social media as well as collaboration technologies. The literature is then divided into the parts that make a collaborative project; organization & technology and users. The topics selected are not meant to be inclusive but rather representative for the purposes of highlighting the gap between project objectives and community needs. Finally, design claims are developed that introduce impact on quality and community depending on a designer’s decisions. They introduce areas in which community needs and performance become mutually exclusive under design considerations as well as areas that the two concepts become antagonistic to each other. An overview is provided along with future challenges for researchers as well as designers of collaborative wiki projects.

2. METHOD

Literature was obtained and analyzed based on the respective topics based on community needs and quality of outcomes as they relate to wikis. The aim was to find literature gaps that would identify a tradeoff relationship between the two topics rather than a mutually beneficial relationship. Literature was identified through major scholar venues and search engines (ACM, IEEE, Google Scholar). The paper utilizes a perspective on Wikis as socio-technical systems. As such, the importance of topics
Humans as Hunter-Gatherers
www.igi-global.com/chapter/humans-as-hunter-gatherers/78800?camid=4v1a