Sociability and Usability for Active Participation

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PARTICIPANTS AND POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTORS

An online community is identified as a group of people who come together for a particular purpose guided by policies and supported by Computing Technology (Preece, 2000). Some community members act as invisible observers of synergetic activities and never cross the threshold of observation. Research has been conducted on these observers or lurkers, as it is considered to be a common phenomenon. Sproul and Faraj (1997) refer to an 80% lurking, Preece from 46% to 82% (2000) and Lambropoulos 97% (2004). Efforts for defining inactive contributors were made in order to portray the silent but mentally active involvement in discussions, “copying” creatively active members. The terms Potential Contributors and Contributors are introduced here, after Andrews, Preece and Nonnecke (2003) suggested that lurkers actually never participate in the discussion. Potential contributors are mainly the newcomers and the ones who might exhibit a wish for contribution and lurk before taking part in the discussion. The terms describe past and real-time situations, depending on the time viewpoint of analysis, since it is not possible to predict the individuals who will lurk or contribute.

The challenge was to investigate whether Informal Learning (IL) could result in Community Knowledge Building (CKB) for Communities of Interest (CoI). Deutsch (1949), in his theory of social interdependence, stressed the importance of promotive interaction that occurs as members encourage and facilitate each other’s efforts to help the community. There is a need to understand each other to a sufficient degree in order to build common knowledge. Awareness for understanding is another concept within the theory of social interdependence. In an IL framework, group-generated text and CKB are created by the active members. Dialogues increase the capacity to say to one’s self by means of words or symbols, what one has done or one will do (Bruner, 1995). The more advanced member acts as the leader, while there is no demonstration of his/her behaviour, but the waste of it in the abstract form of knowledge. Non-structured group messages taken out of CMC in a focus group might better:

- test a specific question
- obtain greater depth and breadth in responses compared to individual opinions
- verify plans or findings
- extract patterns and themes of agreement or disagreement as knowledge units
- enhance the reliability of responses

As a result, activities in an online discussion forum are not anthropologically strange. Common dialogues as conversational material contain stocks of knowledge based on common understanding, revealing patterns as a “cookbook recipe for actions.”

METHODOLOGY

Twenty eight members from the E-mint Association for Online Community Managers participated in an online focus group study on lurkers for 20 days. CoI focus group discussion provided the data, and ATLAS.ti was used in content analysis. Content analysis (Bauer, 2000) was conducted based on a) Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (Herring, 2001) and b) empirical linguistic analysis (Herring, 2001). Codes Analysis Network created the tree of the theory, and the final matching of Preece framework was made. As a result, the following chapter was extracted from informal learning discussion as part of CKB for the Community’s Knowledge Database.

SOCIABILITY:

PEOPLE, PURPOSES, POLICIES

People

There are different types of communities and different types of participants and potential contributors. As such, two basic issues define the nature of an online community: (1) the individual as a social being (community building (CB)) and (2) the natural tendency of the human being to learn (CKB). The actual decision on registering in a CoI indicates the most important drives for an individual, the intention and motivation for sharing