

## Chapter 3

# Is *Urgent Evoke* a Digital Ba?

## How a Game Can Make Space for Knowledge Creation

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### ABSTRACT

*Web 2.0 brought a participatory potential with it, prompting organisations to ask themselves how to design social media platforms that can engage external stakeholders in the organisation's process of knowledge creation and innovation. This chapter presents an analysis of the data from a case study of such a platform, the World Bank's online game Urgent Evoke, which has been designed with the purpose of engaging citizens in developing innovative solutions for sociopolitical problems like poverty. The analysis is based on Nonaka's concept of Ba, which means "place" and is described as a platform for advancing the creation of knowledge. The analysis suggests that, in order to create a digital Ba, the design should not only facilitate the four characteristics of Ba that Nonaka has described –socialization, externalization, combination, and internalization. The design should also allow multiple forms of participation, as well as recognise external stakeholders' contributions to the process of knowledge creation and innovation.*

### INTRODUCTION

When Web 2.0 was born, the social possibilities online were strengthened. This development enabled the creation of a new media landscape, which, since then, has been dominated by social media platforms, such as Facebook, YouTube, and Wikipedia.

In this landscape, a new communication culture, characterized by open access and co-creation, emerged, and a participatory optimism was ignited. An optimism that, among other things, was based on the idea that social media would enable organisations not just to communicate to or with their external stakeholders, but to turn their clients, customers, and audiences into an ever-ready crowd of cocreators and prod-users (Bruns, 2008). A crowd expected to be equipped with permanent Internet access via their smart phones, tablets, and laptops eager to contribute to the shared pool of the organization's collective

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intelligence with the ultimate goal of creating better services and products (Benkler 2006; Jenkins 1992; Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013; Leadbeater 2008; Lévy & Bonomo 1999; McGonigal 2011; Shirkey 2008).

However, over the years, the participatory optimism has become more tempered, as it has become clear that having access to social media does not guarantee that Internet users at large are willing, feeling qualified or having the time to engage in a process of collective knowledge creation online (Fuchs 2015; McGonigal 2008; Preece, Nonnecke, & Andrews 2004; van Dijck 2013).

Already in 1996, in the early Internet days, Kollock and Smith (1996) pointed out that, even though a growing number of people found their way into the cyberspace, most Internet users were just looking at the content, which was created by others online. Kollock and Smith found the behaviour of this group of users problematic and named them ‘lurkers’.

Ten years later, the ‘lurkers’ were still prevailing, as the bloggers Ben McConnell and Jakie Huba underlined by coining the popular term ‘the 1% rule’<sup>1</sup>. The term referred to the fact that in most social media platforms the original content was produced by 1% of the users. Another 9% spent their time curating the content others produced, whereas the remaining 90% were still keeping to the role of spectators.

In 2012, research made by BBC Future Media showed that the 1% rule had been broken, at least in the UK, and only 23% of the British population online could now be defined as pure spectators. Still, it was just 17% of the online population who could be characterized as ‘intense users’ producing original content for the world to see. Thus, even though the majority of the online population had started to use the creative opportunities of social media, they were only sharing their creations with a closed circle of existing friends and family (Goodier, 2012). This short historical view on the use of social media illustrates that making people engage online as creators in a process of collective knowledge creation is maybe not as effortlessly done as the discourse surrounding social media implies. As a result, new ways of designing social media platforms need to be developed, analysed, and discussed if organisations are to fully enjoy the participatory potential of Web 2.0.

In this chapter, the Wold Bank’s social network game Urgent Evoke will be presented as an example of a new approach to social media design that can facilitate collective knowledge creation. The game was developed and played for the first time in 2010 and the aim of the game was

*to empower players to: investigate the most pressing challenges around the world, collaborate to generate innovative and creative solutions, and act to turn ideas into reality within their own communities and beyond (Gaible & Dabla 2010, p. 9).*

Urgent Evoke is a social network game intended to be played by a massive number of players together simultaneously, and it therefore belongs under the umbrella term ‘social media’. The game makes an interesting case when one is discussing online collaboration and communication in contemporary organizations, because games like Urgent Evoke – designed by a large international organization to facilitate player-driven knowledge creation and positive social change - are relatively new and few. Furthermore, even though knowledge creation in virtual spaces has received extensive attention in the academic literature (von Krogh & Geilinger, 2014) very little research has been done on the type of social space that games form and their effect (Connolly, Boyle, MacArthur, Hainey, & Boyle, 2012). Therefore, this chapter will present an analysis of the game design and the players’ experience of playing the game.

The analysis is based on the Japanese organizational researcher Ikujiro Nonaka’s concept of Ba and his heuristic model of knowledge creation, called the ‘SECI model’ (Nonaka, Hirose & Takeda 2016; Nonaka & Konno, 1998; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Nonaka, Toyama, & Konno, 2000). Nonaka is chosen

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