

Chapter XV

User Culture, User–System Relation and Trust: The Case of Finnish Wikipedia

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter the open-source based collaboration model of Finnish Wikipedia is examined from the perspective of user culture, which is the fundamental basis of Wikipedia's project management. The concept of user culture in a mediated collaboration project is introduced and the user culture of Finnish Wikipedia is analyzed in terms of this concept. Also the concept of user-system-relation is presented and the relation between users and the socio-technical system of Wikipedia is examined. This analysis considers the crucial factors in the process of building a trusting relation between the user and the Wikipedia system. From the perspective of user-system-relation, the relationship of trust between the user and the system is much more important than the trust relations between individual users. This article explains the role of user culture and user culture design in a collaborative Web community and considers the nature of a trusting user-system-relation. Examination of one functional example of open information management gives understanding of management tools for open peer-collaboration in general.

INTRODUCTION

The social uses of information and communication technology (ICT) have rapidly developed in recent years. More and more people are using the Internet as a social tool. A large number of collaborative web communities have emerged, and peer-modification and horizontal networking have become part of our everyday life.

A new kind of collaboration model emerged as a consequence of the pervasiveness of ICT. This collaboration model was first used in software development, but has since been adopted in content production as well. Wikipedia, for example, uses the same kind of operation model as technology-oriented open-source projects (e.g. Linux development). In these kinds of projects, development is based on voluntary peer-collaboration and peer-review. In order to keep the project thriving in changing circumstances, the peer-developers must have possibilities to modify and redesign the operational structure and the goals of the whole project. Thus in open-source projects the parallel development of the activity must be enabled. In Wikipedia this has been made possible by emphasizing the importance of cultural codes and rules. I will argue that not only the technological development and the user interface design, but also the user cultures and their design and management should be taken into account. For this reason I use the concepts of *user culture* and *user culture design*. Along with the new collaboration model we also have the pivotal trust relationship, which is no longer a relationship between persons, but between the whole enabling infrastructure and the individual user. The concept of *user-system-relation* is developed to explain this trust relationship.

Wikipedia's management model is very open. This article examines it as a functional example of open information management. Examination of one working management model gives understanding of open peer-collaboration management tools in general.

BACKGROUND

User-System-Relation and Trust in the Social Media

In a collaboration-oriented Web community, users do not necessarily know the other participants. There can be thousands of members in such a community, so a new user may not recognize any individuals at the beginning. For example, in Wikipedia the outcome of collaboration is often displayed anonymously (or at least the user's individual share is not emphasized), so the process of becoming acquainted with other users takes time. It is obvious that there are also social bonds and interpersonal relations within the Wikipedia community, but the relation between the user and the whole socio-technical system is more crucial.^a I call this relation the User-System-Relation (USR). In mediated voluntary-based collaboration the user's trust in the fairness and functionality of the socio-technical system is the precondition for a successful co-project. Various things affect the USR. I will explicate these factors in the case of Finnish Wikipedia and draw wider conclusions about the relationship of trust in mediated collaboration communities. If the user sees benefits in participating and does not question the expressed goals of a socio-technical system, her motivation, commitment and initiative become deeper. In this way he or she can consider becoming intensely committed to the project.

The Concept of User Culture

We find user cultures in relation to any use of technology, but in mediated collaboration projects using the logic of the open-source production model there is an absolute necessity to design and manage these user cultures. For most normal Web services restrictions on the use of the service can be put in place using technical means or user interface design, but in projects where participant action orientation is rather freely organized, limitations cannot be very strict. In these cases the role of the user culture and its design is remarkably important.

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