Chapter 5
Online Communities of Practice and Web 2.0

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ABSTRACT

In contemporary Knowledge Management, communication and collaboration play very significant role. Knowledge exists within the stakeholders of an organization. Such knowledge, when extracted and harnessed effectively, can become an extremely valuable asset to achieve organizational goals and objectives. This knowledge, embedded in the people, must be properly released through an appropriate channel to make it usable. Through dialogue and discussions, using online tools, this release and reuses of knowledge can be made possible. The Community of Practice (CoP) is a useful organizing concept for enhancing collaboration, sharing knowledge, and disseminating best practices among researchers and practitioners. This chapter explores the concept of Communities of Practice and how Web 2.0 technologies can facilitate the transformation from a conventional community of practice to online community of practice for better and effective online communities of practices.

INTRODUCTION

According to Wenger (2006), a community of practice (CoP) is a group of interested parties that come together to collaborate, and hopefully learn from one another. CoP share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.

The impact of the Internet on our lives has been pervasive. People are increasingly turning to the social interaction available on the Internet to satisfy their needs, whether these are professional or personal. The Internet offers users fast access to social contacts such as online chat groups and discussion lists to make connections with others. Richness and vitality are important components to ensure that people continue to actively participate in such a phenomenon. Online communities have their roots firmly in the 1960's Counterculture movement (Goldberger, 2003; Matei, 2005; Sun, Rau, & Ma, 2014) which

advocated authenticity, deeper social involvement, egalitarian ideals, individualism, less prejudice and more emotional satisfaction (Matei, 2005). From the general meeting place of people who shared ideas grew subject-specific communities and professional communities.

Online communities are being increasingly used by for professional support, guidance and inspiration (Bond, 2004; Chen & Chen, 2002; Cornu, 2004; Matei, 2005; Sun, Rau, & Ma, 2014; R. Jamali, Russell, Nicholas, & Watkinson, 2014). These have been organized around subject areas and offer participants the opportunities to develop both personally and professionally. The current popularity of online communities means that it is necessary to examine these communities and determine what characteristics are necessary for them to function effectively. The objective of this chapter is to explore how Web 2.0 technologies can facilitate developing better and effective online communities of practices. The chapter will explore the concept of Communities of Practice and the transformation from a conventional community of practice to online community of practice. . The barriers and motivations for contributing to such communities will be analyzed. The chapter will then move on to assessing how the Web 2.0 technologies facilitate Communities of Practice.

COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Knowledge Management System (KMS) is also a collaborative tool. KMS can be used to create virtual Communities of Practice (CoP) (Wenger, 2006; Tsai & Bagozzi, 2014). Community is a principle feature of collaboration and sharing (Wang, Noe, & Wang, 2014). According to Rao (2002), successful knowledge management heavily relies on "groups of people who work on business-relevant topics across organizational boundaries" (p. 2). The creation of conversations among groups of interested people leads to enhancement of knowledge and business practices (Bolger, 2009). A CoP develops a "shared understanding of what it does, of how to do it, and how it is related to other communities and their practices – in all, a 'world-view' … (CoP's) are a sensible focus for Knowledge Management initiatives (sharing) some common language, purpose and ways of acting" (Walsham, 2001, p. 601). In the collaboration among like-minded people, the one idea that permeates is that multiple brains are better than one. CoPs also provide learning opportunities. As Sinclair (2006) puts it "we learn from our communities" and from our experiences "spending much of our lives learning from others and sharing our experiences and lessons learned with them in exchange" (p. 601). Such community learning promotes dialogue and development of concepts. This dialogue and concept building supports the transformation of tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge (Adams, Brock, Gordon, Grohs, & Kirk, 2014).

Most commonly, a "community of practice" (CoP) refers to a group of people united by a common goal, usually the sharing of professional knowledge or practices (Wenger, 1999; Cox, 2005). This ideal permits a community to persist over time, despite changes in the composition of the community's membership (Cox, 2005). A primary aspect of a CoP involves the cultivation of relationships between experts possessing practical knowledge of interest to the group as a whole, while a secondary concern involves the socialization of newcomers to the group. The social relationship between these two groups—established practitioners and novices—facilitates the transfer of knowledge and ensures continuity within the community (Jin, Wen, & Gough, 2010; McWilliam, 2012).

Originally for an online strategy for business, a CoP also refers to a group of individuals who share experience, comprehension, information, and resources about an area of common interest. It could be defined further as a group of individuals who share common causes, capabilities, or problems within

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