



Community Building in Virtual Organizations

Georges Belinga
Mari-Klara Oja



Definitions

Virtual Community

- groups of people with common interests and practices that communicate regularly and for some duration in an organized way over the Internet through a common location or mechanism –

- 1. critical mass of members**
- 2. notion of permanence of members**
- 3. true social interaction**



Virtual Teams & Collaboration

Advantages:

- no time and space constraints
- possibility to merge different expertise
- more innovation

3 types of virtual teams:

- intra-organizational teams
- inter-organizational teams
- inter-organizational distributed teams

Factors for success of virtual teams:

- degree of reliance on ICT
- the availability and the proficiency of the users

Barriers:

- technology (interoperability, connection)
- language
- culture
- time-zones, etc



Virtual Teams: Disadvantages

- non-verbal communication
- missing social cues that are there in offline teams
- team-building:
 - life-cycle is important for team-building
 - short term teams are more difficult to form
- lack of trust and cohesion
- development has been technology-driven
- neglecting aspects like knowledge sharing, combining expertise and dividing tasks



Virtual Teams: Performance

Performance of virtual teams:

- effectiveness
 - sustainability of the group (long-lasting)
 - vitality and continuity of the group
- quality of group processes
 - communication
 - cooperation, coordination, learning, reflection and team building
 - remote cooperation and social interaction need to be more structured
- quality of group depends on characteristics of context
 - task of the team, tools, members characteristics, team structure, culture, time and space settings
- development and adaptation
 - group should adopt the tools and adapt to them



Virtual Teams: Questions

- How can the effectiveness of teams be measured?
- How to structure teams for them to be successful (leadership, etc)?



Social Networks

Business-focused virtual communities – directly sponsored by a firm or managed by an individual.

- Involve:
 - interactions directly between multiple businesses (B2B)
 - interactions between businesses and consumers (B2C)
 - interactions between individual consumers (C2C)

- becoming more important in a global marketplace
- attract new customers at the lowest possible cost per customer
- more competition will increase the need for differentiation among virtual communities
- differentiation will be the key to success or failure
- provide truly helpful information and other resources to customers



Social Networks: Future

- business decisions can be based on information gathered from virtual communities
- virtual community based research methods

Future trends:

- greater dependence on advanced knowledge management capabilities.
- knowledge generated within a customer driven virtual community is harder to categorize, document and understand – free-form.
- automatic knowledge discovery in texts (KDT) – innovative approach to gain accurate information about the knowledge residing in virtual communities



Social Networks: Questions

- How to extract valuable knowledge for a company from a free-form business-focused virtual community?
- What is the best way for a company to benefit from a virtual community without over-guiding it?