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UNDERSTANDING KNOWLEDGE SHARING WITHIN COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

A Study of Engagement Patterns and Intervention within Community of Practice

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Understanding Knowledge Sharing Within Communities of Practice

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my brother Mosbah who has died in tragedy car accident in

October 2003.

Acknowledgement

I owe much gratitude to my parents who constantly keep me in their prayers. without whose care and support I could not be here. They mean the world to me, always have and always will.

To my friends and colleagues in Bradford, thank you for your help, support and inspiration. Special thanks to Moutushi for your endless support.

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List of Publications:

K. Hafeez and F. Alghatas (2007) Knowledge management in a virtual community of practice employing discourse analysis, Electronic Journal of Knowledge Management, (E-JKM), Vol 5. Number 1.

K. Hafeez and F Alghatas (2006), Knowledge Management in a Community of Practice, SCM Journal of Indian Management, 3(4), pp. 68-80. ISSN 0973-3167.

K. Hafeez and F Alghatas (2006), Knowledge Dynamics in Community of Practice, 7th European conference on knowledge management, Budapest- Hungary, 4-5 Sep. 2006, ISBN: 978-1-905305-29-2 CD/Booklet.

ABSTRACT

Key words: Virtual community of practice, knowledge management, online engagement, discourses analysis.

Online Communities of Practices (CoPs) is emerging as a major form for knowledge sharing in this era of information revolution. Due to the advancement of technology and ease of internet access in every part of the world, people began to get more and more involved in online CoPs to share knowledge. The defining characteristic of a Community of Practice is the interaction between members in order to jointly determine and embrace goals, eventually resulting in shared practices. Crucial to the success of a Community of Practice is the engagement between community members. Without engagement, a Community of Practice can not share knowledge and achieve its negotiated goals. To that end, there is a need to examine, why do people engage in an online discussion, what role domain experts play to keep on-line discussion alive and how to develop a "right intervention" to maintain and stimulate participants for engagement in on-line community.

This thesis studied eight Communities of Practices that are being deliberately formed to facilitate knowledge sharing in the online community and describes an exploratory study of knowledge sharing within Communities of Practices (CoPs) by investigating eight CoPs –Start up Nation, All nurses, Young Enterpener, Teneric, SCM Focus, Systems Dynamics, Mahjoob and Alnj3 CoPs. The CoPs under investigation shared the following characteristics: permanent life span, created by interested members (i.e. bottom-up rather than top-down management creation), have a high level of boundary crossing, have more than 700 members who come from disparate locations and organizations, have voluntary membership enrollment, high membership diversity, high topic's relevance to members, high degree of reliance on technology, and are moderated. Data were gathered on the eight CoPs through online observations and online questionnaire survey. Results show that in each of the case study the most common type of activity performed by members of each CoP was sharing knowledge, followed by socialsing. Regarding the types of knowledge shared, the most common one across all CoPs was practical and general knowledge. The types of practical knowledge, however, varied in each CoP.

The study also discovered that storytelling extensively enhances knowledge transfer and participants' interpersonal communications in eight communities under investigation. What were also notable in this study were the stories discussed in a CoP remains in the archive, what are more likely to generate interest and curiosity on the topic among inactive members who ultimately facilitates knowledge transfer.

In this study it is also evident that successful topics with successful conclusion (in terms that the original query was answered) will not necessary get high responses and vice versa. An analysis of selected topics in the eight case studies has shown that some successful topics have few replies and vice versa, where many topics ended with open

conclusion or they were unsuccessful in terms that the original query was not answered satisfactory. Therefore, it is not necessary that successful topic will get high number of responses as there are some successful topics which have limited number of replies. Overall, it is found that, topic may play a major role in the success of online discussion. It is observed in the study that members normally use short messages rather long messages and usually discusses more than one topic within one thread. Practical implications for knowledge sharing in online communities of practice were discussed, along with some recommendations for future research.