

DOI: 10.17626/dBEM.ICoM.P00.2015.p051

## COOPERATION IN THE DIFFERENT WORKPLACES – FORMAL ORGANIZATIONS AND INFORMAL SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

*Sebastian SKOLIK, Elżbieta ROBAK*

*Częstochowa University of Technology, Częstochowa, Poland*

*E-mail: przykuta@gmail.com*

**Summary:** Interaction of people in the work environment is a complex social process and depends on many different factors. Both, managing modern organizations, as well as the social environment, researchers are trying to answer questions about the basis for the people and the factors determining its effectiveness.

As it is more and more common to take initiatives based not on formal structures, but on an informal network of communities, particularly in the area of Internet, thoughts about the problem becomes a matter of comparison and to determine the differences between working in organizations and often forming ad hoc communities aimed at the production of goods or for mutual provision of services. In a digital environment, its specificity is largely a different way to communicate and make decisions, usually asynchronous, as well as another dimension of the various types of dysfunction.

Coordination and control of human behaviour in cooperating groups is associated not only with the system of authority, formal and informal norms of group, but also with confidence. Cooperation requires trust and may contribute to the development of trust. Affecting the confidence of cooperation is a factor for more flexible operations, effective learning processes, establishing enduring relationships and forming a network of mutual obligations. To determine the conditions of cooperation in two different environments decided to adopt a number of research methods - interview survey in the case of formal organizations and participant observation and content analysis for informal social movement, generating a number of different communities activities.

**Keywords:** cooperation, confidence, human interactions, workplace

### 1. Introduction

One of the key aspects concerning functioning of an organization is the subject of cooperation between people in the context of common realization of a goal. Taking into account formal organization, it may be assumed that reaching the goals by the organization is dependent on the efficiency of the task forces (Robak and Sierpińska, 2009, p. 210). Nevertheless, together with the appearance of the phenomenon of global sharing information and knowledge via the Internet, informal communities of action began to develop (Bendkowski, 2009). Within this informal movement, the shaping networks of cooperation do not require to be managed by managers, which is important in case of formal organizations. In order to have the task force in the companies working effectively, the manager should be communicative, open to various problems, treat co-workers as partners and support initiatives presented by the members of the team. (Robak and Sierpińska, 2009, p. 211). In case of the projects created by the members of informal social movements, openness, partnership and cooperation appear almost autonomously and automatically, nevertheless it is possible to cooperate between such type of movements and formalized organizations (Tapscott and Williams, 2008, pp. 141-145). Such kind of cooperation autonomy was defined especially for social movements creating project by the Internet and the meaning of the term „autonomy” seems to be insufficient for describing the sources of cooperation. It is still an open question, to what extent such way of

cooperation could be transferred into the ground of formal organizations. Maybe such interpersonal relationships in these two work environments, different in terms of the technical means of communication, are intransferable, in relation to each other.

## **2. Identification of the sources of cooperation within the work environment**

The prerequisite for each type of cooperation is the possibility of effective communication between the people participating in the certain project. With reference to the environment of the Internet it is highly debatable, that media, including mainly Internet, in case of the information society, contribute to manipulation of the recipients, which decreases their reliability (Golka, 2008, pp. 129-132). Because of the fact, that information society at the same time becomes consumer society, the flow of information that everybody can use, unifies „the participants around the same values and tasks” (Golka, 2008, p. 133). Communicating therefore is not synonymous with communication. As shown on the basis of the experimental research, people not knowing each other in person, but communicating via the Internet have poorer ability to assess emotions of the partner in this interaction. (Wallace, 2003, pp. 26-27). The research was focused on the initial interactions, and it may be assumed that personal acquaintance does not require direct face-to-face contact. The phenomenon of presumption has to be taken into account, which becomes an alternative towards generated by the industrial society division into producers and consumers. Presumption occurs while the difference between producer and consumer disappears, because the last ones share the produced goods with the others (Gulik, 2013). It may be concluded that where the goods are produced together, cooperation may be forced, regardless the environment. Hofmokl (2009) presents a list of conditions, providing coordination of activities towards common-pool resources:

- designated boundaries for the individuals using the resources;
- adaptation of the rules of using the resources to local conditions and needs;
- possibility of modifying (reinterpretation) of the rules by most of the members belonging to a given community;
- respecting by the superior (authorities) the rules created by the members of society;
- the possibility to monitor the action within the system created by the society members;
- access to inexpensive methods of solving conflicts (Hofmokl, 2009, pp. 40-41).

Existence of the common resources, which become both goals and values of given societies, taking into account the use of given methods, may be defined as the next source of cooperation. It is worth mentioning that the rules and the ways of its sanctioning should be, by the members of society, divided fostering building of trust among each others. Some of the authors claim that informal rules, are often more favourable for cooperation, than formally established norms. (Kulesza, 2010, pp. 52-58). It seems that in such cases cooperation is possible only if it works together with sharing the mutual assets. In case of enterprises, usually (not taking into account enterprises in a form of cooperatives) the members of the teams are employers, therefore participating in the produced goods by obtaining them in the same way as other consumers do.

Consumer is only a passive participant on the market of the cultural goods (both tangible and intangible). This kind of culture Lessig describes as Read-Only Culture, with opposing Read/Write Culture, in which the individuals actively participate in a process of creating the text. (Lessig, 2009). Not only the access to common assets, but also participation in the process of its creation, may strengthen cooperation. Commonly produced goods are values, towards which the individuals may have the sense of common goal and sense of cooperation. Towards such already produced values, they constitute various types of social movements, e.g. functioning in order to promote access to public assets, or creating Project such as Wikipedia, which millions of users participate. At the same time, they become historically the

greatest projects, in which people can cooperate in the global scale (Jemielniak, 2013, p. 16). In case of the enterprises, which most often work in the local scale, the equivalent of cooperation within global movement may be informal structure, in which significant elements are: „customary behaviour code, informal leader, system of values setting informal goal of a given group, informal sanctions influencing behaviour of the members of given group according to the intentions of this group (Robak and Bylok, 2009, p. 60). It is an open question, to what extent the way of functioning of an informal leader, who in case of small venture is the owner, is similar to spontaneously (bottom-up) appointed leaders within the global networks of cooperation. What is connected to that, whether the system of sanctions and the ways of solving problems, which is being created spontaneously, may be adopted to organization with the already existing, formalized structure? The structure of formalized movement is closer to the market on which goods are being exchanged, and the participants of this exchange do not create plans for realization of an enterprise (Raymond, 1999).

The last source of cooperation may be a mixture of various factors, which lead to emergent qualities. Such situation is described by Tapscott and Williams (2008), defined as *wikinomics*. According to them, in the modern business the following values should be rejected: focus on the client, protecting of intellectual properties against being accessed by other subjects, focus on controls conducted by the managing staff, and local action with global thinking. At the same time there should be assumed the four rules of *wikinomics*: openness understood as sparing data concerning the company; partnership meaning resignation from hierarchical management style; sparing assets- in this case it means e. g. resignation from the full protection of intellectual assets and acting to global scale (Tapscott and Williams, 2008, pp. 40-55). In order to make the global cooperation possible, all of the above-mentioned rules have to be fulfilled. It may be assumed, that the main, initiating source of cooperation is here mainly the global scale and mass scale of engaging into various types of the enterprise.

### **3. Methodological perspective of the research**

In order to compare the problem of cooperation within two various work environments- in the area of informal social movement and in the area of formal organization – it would be difficult to define methodology, that would be in both of this cases equally successful. The conclusion is that formal organizations are rather closed forms, also with reference to the researchers, who could conduct a participant observation. On the other hand, social movement seems to be such an object, that may be examined more effectively by means of the technique, because of the openness towards „the strangers”. It may be also assumed that conducting the research with the use of separate methods should allow to collect data possible for comparative analysis.

Because of the fact that one of the most active social movements cooperation- oriented while creating goods are volunteers focused around the projects of Wikimedia Foundation, environment worth examining may be one of the local project of this foundation. In some specific language versions Wikipedia, belonging to the group of such projects, there work several to several thousands of volunteers. Because almost all action and interactions between the users of these projects are taken explicitly, the data collected as a part of a long-term participant observation, as well as analysis of the websites created by the users. The shares on their own websites (homepages) often present information concerning themselves and their attitude to the enterprise, in which they take part in. Additionally, on the dedicated websites – talkpages – the interactions while solving common problems may be observed. It seems to be more organizationally difficult to have the questionnaire study conducted. Frequent using the technique of questionnaire study causes an effect of saturation and the users take part in the next surveys less enthusiastically. (Kozinets, 2012, pp. 114-115). In order to illustrate specific

situations connected with cooperation, there may be conducted the analysis of particular case studies.

On the opposite, in case of formal organizations, conducting the research is more difficult, especially with the use of the method of participant observation. Because of that, it is more effective to use the method of questionnaire study. (Gruszczyński, 2001, p. 7). Apart from the presence of an observer among the employees, it cannot be hidden, what is possible in the Internet Project. In this case, it is also a problem to define the research sample. People taking part in the wikimedia movement do not originate from any specific environments, and joining the Project for them is often accidental. Nevertheless, because of the fact that among the active users of Wikimedia are mainly students, it may be assumed to have the questionnaire study conducted among working students.

In order to have the possibility to mark the differences and possibilities of transferring the ways of creating cooperation, in the research the following questions should be answered:

- Is there any difference in the type of cooperation with reference to their sources?
- Is the atmosphere of trust a necessary condition of cooperation, or maybe it is an effect of cooperation, if many network initiatives is based on trust, how about people, who did not have any contact so far?
- Which conditions have to be met in order to make cooperation leading to emotional, subjective perceiving everything as a source of pleasure and fun, which seems to be characteristic for the Internet action communities?
- Do the values, with which the organization personnel are identified, help to create the atmosphere of cooperation?
- What determined trust to the rules within various work environments?

#### **4. Challenges and limitations of the presented research perspective**

In the light of the existing research (Jemielniak, 2013; Skolik, 2012; Skolik, 2014) many hypotheses may be assumed for the questions included above, referring them to the environment of volunteers actively involved in the projects of Wikimedia Foundation:

- the users are prosuments, creating the common goods, and the problems with cooperation are caused by lack of knowledge of the rules and problems with communication;
- cooperation is possible without full trust only until a conflict appears;
- cooperation may be treated as fun, if the adopted rules are not violated;
- identification with the values is necessary for creating the atmosphere of cooperation.

With reference to the traditional organizations, it is hard to hypothesize. Therefore, for there were no such questions concerning the subject of cooperation within formal organizations? Such point of view may seem to be unilateral. Cause there exists a temptation to look for a new solutions and create new research orientations with reference to enterprises, that have succeeded through the last years. Nevertheless, the research results presented through many years, concerning cooperation within the work teams became inadequate to the reality of modern information society. Here the answer for the researchers may be the conclusion concerning cooperation within the environment of programmers, formulated in a poetical way by Raymond (1999) „If you have the right attitude, interesting problems will find you”.

## References

1. Bendkowski J., (2009): Społeczne aspekty tworzenia systemów zarządzania wiedzą opartych na wirtualnych wspólnotach działań, in: Komputerowo zintegrowane zarządzanie, ed. R. Knosala, Oficyna Wydawnicza Polskiego Towarzystwa Zarządzania Produkcją, Opole, pp. 88-95.
2. Gulik E., (2013): Konsument, prosument, produser transformacja podmiotu wymiany rynkowej w społeczeństwie sieci, „Kultura i Historia”, nr 24. URL: <http://www.kulturaihistoria.umcs.lublin.pl/archives/5040> (accessed 29 April 2015).
3. Golka M., (2008): Bariery w komunikowaniu i społeczeństwo (dez)informacyjne. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa.
4. Gruszczyński L., (2001): Kwestionariusze w socjologii. Budowa narzędzi surveyowych, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice.
5. Hofmokr J., (2009). Internet jako nowe dobro wspólne, Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, Warszawa.
6. Kozinets R.V., (2012): Netnografia. Badania etnograficzne online, PWN, Warszawa.
7. Kulesza J., (2010): Ius internet. Między prawem a etyką, Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, Warszawa.
8. Jemielniak D., (2013): Życie wirtualnych dzikich, Poltext, Warszawa.
9. Lessig L., (2009): Remiks, Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, Warszawa.
10. Raymond, E. (1999):. The cathedral and the bazaar, „Knowledge, Technology & Policy”, 12(3), p. 23-49.
11. Robak E., Sierpińska M. (2009): Trening kompetencji społecznych jako forma doskonalenia umiejętności menedżera w zakresie kształtowania efektywnych zespołów, in: Psychologiczne i socjologiczne aspekty zarządzania zasobami ludzkimi, eds F. Bylok & M. Harciarek, Wydawnictwo Politechniki Częstochowskiej, Częstochowa.
12. Robak E., Bylok F. (2009): Grupy w organizacji i ich wpływ na zachowania ludzi, in: Zachowania ludzi w organizacji. Wybrane zagadnienia. eds F. Bylok & E Robak, Wydawnictwo Politechniki Częstochowskiej, Częstochowa.
13. Skolik S., (2012): Rola użytkowników końcowych w prosumenckim modelu tworzenia oprogramowania MediaWiki, in Wykorzystanie wybranych technologii komunikacyjnych w zarządzaniu wartością organizacji, ed. L. Kiełtyka, Wydawnictwo Politechniki Częstochowskiej, Częstochowa.
14. Skolik S., (2014): Przemiany w systemach wartości w środowisku nieprofesjonalnych pracowników wiedzy. Studium przypadku polskojęzycznej Wikipedii; in: Nowe kierunki w zarządzaniu współczesnymi organizacjami, eds Ł. Skiba, A. Czarnecka, Wydawnictwo Wydziału Zarządzania Politechniki Częstochowskiej, Częstochowa.
15. Tapscott D., Williams A.D., Wikinomia. O globalnej współpracy, która zmienia wszystko, Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, Warszawa, 2008.
16. Wallace P., (2003): Psychologia Internetu. Rebis. Poznań.