

It is what one does: why people participate and help others in electronic communities of practice.

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The Journal of Strategic Information Systems

Volume 9, Issues 2–3, September 2000, Pages 155-173

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M. McLure Wasko ... S. Faraj ¹

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[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0963-8687\(00\)00045-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0963-8687(00)00045-7)

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Abstract

Advances in information and communication technologies have fundamentally heightened organizational interest in knowledge as a critical strategic resource. However, organizations are finding that members are often reluctant to exchange knowledge with others in the organization. This paper examines why. We review current knowledge management practices and find that organizations are treating knowledge as a private good, owned either by the organization or by organization members. We propose that knowledge can also be considered a public good, owned and maintained by a community. When knowledge is considered a public good, knowledge exchange is motivated by moral obligation and community interest rather than by narrow self-interest. We provide support for the public good perspective by providing results from a survey examining why people participate and share knowledge in three electronic

communities of practice. The results indicate that people participate primarily out of community interest, generalized reciprocity and pro-social behavior.



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Keywords

Knowledge management practices; People participation; Electronic communities

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Molly Wasko is a PhD candidate in the Department of Decision and Information Technologies at the University of Maryland, College Park where she teaches primarily in the area of strategic applications of information technologies. Prior to returning to graduate school, she worked in production and operations management. Her research interests include knowledge management, the development of on-line knowledge communities and computer-mediated communication. Her work has been presented or is forthcoming in the Journal of Strategic Information Systems, the Academy of Management Conference, INFORMS and the International Conference on Information Systems.

Samer Faraj is an assistant professor in the department of Decision and Information Technologies at the University of Maryland, College Park where he teaches primarily in the electronic commerce area. He received his doctorate in MIS from Boston University's School of Management and holds a MS in Technology and Policy from MIT. Prior to getting his doctorate, he spent a decade working in a variety of consulting and IS positions. His research interests include expertise coordination and its impact on software team performance, the development of on-line knowledge communities, and the role of IT in high reliability organizations. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in journals such as: Information Systems Research, Management Science, and the Journal of Computer Mediated Communication.

¹ Tel.: +1-301-405-7053.

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