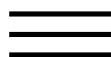


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â€œIt is what one doesâ€: why people participate and help others  
in electronic communities of practice

M. McLure Wasko ... S. Faraj <sup>1</sup>

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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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