COGNITIVE SCIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT SERIES

Information Systems for Knowledge Management

Edited by
Inès Saad
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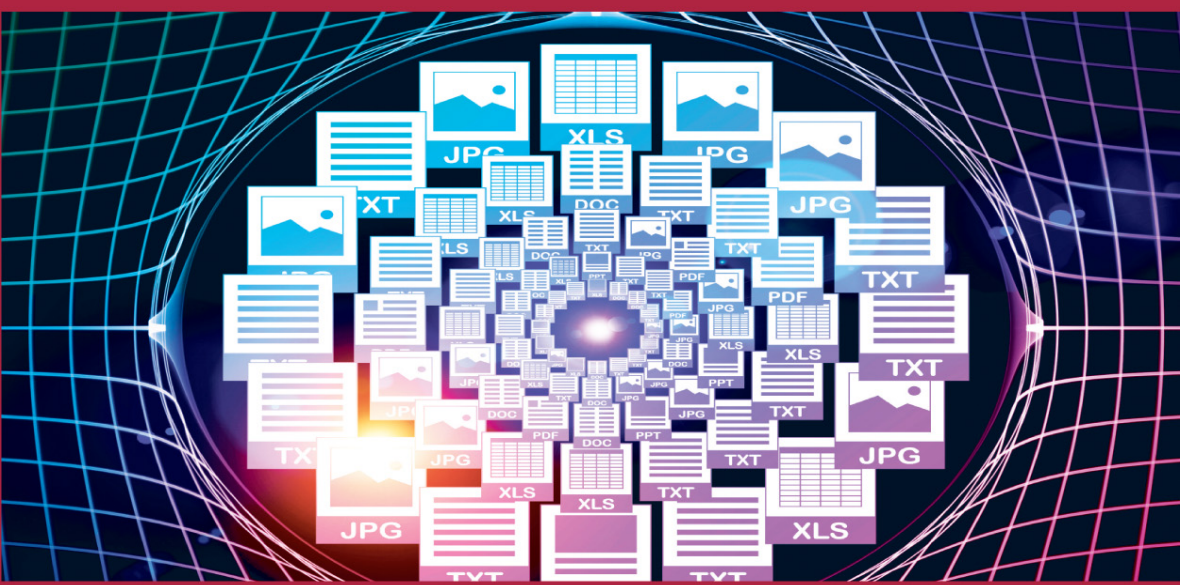
Faïez Gargouri



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Chapter 1

Assessing the Community Maturity from a Knowledge Management Perspective

Knowledge is considered as a strategic resource in the current economic age. Strategies, practices and tools for enhancing knowledge sharing and knowledge management (KM) in general have become a key issue for organizations. Despite the demonstrated role of communities in sharing, capturing and creating knowledge, the literature is still missing standards for assessing their maturity. Even if several knowledge-oriented maturity models are provided at the enterprise level, few are focusing on communities as a mechanism for organizations to manage knowledge. This chapter proposes a new Community Maturity Model (CoMM) that was developed during a series of focus group meetings with professional KM experts. This CoMM assesses members' participation and collaboration, and the KM capacity of any community. The practitioners were involved in all stages of the maturity model's development in order to maximize the resulting model's relevance and applicability. The model was piloted and subsequently applied within a chief knowledge officers' (CKO) professional association, as a community. This chapter discusses the development and application of the initial version of CoMM and the associated method to apply it.

Chapter written by Imed BOUGHZALA.

1.1. Introduction

Knowledge is considered as a key competitive advantage [PEN 59], therefore several knowledge-intensive organizations are investing in methods, techniques and technologies, to enhance their KM, among others through communities. The community-based KM approach has become one of the most effective instruments to manage organizational knowledge [BRO 91]. Indeed, Wenger [WEN 98] argues that knowledge could be shared, organized and created within and among the communities. He posits that communities of practice (CoPs) are the company's most versatile and dynamic knowledge resource. They form the basis of an organization's ability to know and learn. From practical and theoretical perspectives, we can find several types of communities (of practice (CoPs), virtual CoP (VCoP), of interest (CoIN), of project, etc.). Furthermore, since they mostly deal with knowledge, Correa *et al.* [COR 01] call them knowledge communities (KCs) and consider them as a key KM resource through socialization [NON 95, EAR 01].

Nowadays, due to the increasing use of communities in the professional context and the exponential growth of social networks and online communities [RHE 93], it is more important than ever for modern organizations to assess the quality of their outcomes, and to understand their role in intra- and interorganizational KM settings. To establish such an understanding, many questions need to be answered, including but not limited to: how do we determine the type of a community? Under which conditions are communities more productive and useful for organizations? How they can be beneficial to KM: knowledge sharing, capturing and co-creation? Which attitudes and capabilities should individuals develop to better involve themselves within communities? What kind of facilitation means do they need for operating better? Are there different levels of quality that can be recognized and that communities should aim for? Which role should knowledge and collaboration technologies play to foster productivity? How can we measure the impacts of communities on organizational performance? Therefore, it is clear today that organizations urgently need guidance on those issues and on how to take advantage from the KCs' production and to efficiently use and manage them for better sharing, learning and innovating.

Several scholars have proposed models and approaches to assess communities [VER 06, MCD 02]. One way to assess the overall characteristics, management, evolution and performance of a community is

through a maturity model approach with a KM-oriented perspective. Maturity models have been used extensively in quality assurance for product development [FRA 02].

Few efforts have been reported on using maturity models to assess communities, especially from a KM perspective. Most of the KM models proposed in the literature (such as Global Knowledge Management Maturity Model (GKMMM [PEE 06]), Knowledge Management Assessment Project (KMAP [GAL 08]), Model for General Knowledge Management within the Enterprise (MGKME [GRU 08]) and Knowledge Navigator Model (KNM [HIS 09])) are either very generic at the enterprise organizational level and/or not enough specific to assess communities. Very few community-oriented KM maturity models have been proposed [GON 01, LEE 10]. Even if these examples of models present an interesting theoretical perspective, little is reported on their application and evaluation. They are not specifically KM oriented and most of them focus only on CoPs. This chapter is an attempt to address this gap and to propose a new model for assessing communities from a KM perspective sufficiently generic to be applied to any community or social network. It addresses the following research question:

How do we determine the maturity level of a community from a KM perspective?

This question can be divided in two subquestions:

– What characteristics describe a community's maturity?

– What steps need to be taken to measure a community's maturity in terms of KM?

This chapter advances a CoMM that was developed in cooperation with a focus group consisting of professional KM experts. The CoMM is intended to be usable by practitioners for conducting self-assessments. This chapter first discusses the development of the initial version of the CoMM and the associated method to apply it, and second an application and evaluation that provide evidence of proof of value and proof of use in the field. The purpose of this chapter is to further serve as a starting point for future research in this area.

The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows. We first present the theoretical background related to maturity models. Next, we introduce