

Preface

Online communities are among the most obvious manifestations of social networks based on new media technology. Facilitating ad hoc communication and leveraging collective intelligence by matching similar or related users have become important success factors in almost every successful business plan.

This special issue addresses the virtual communities and collaboration among virtual participants currently proliferating across the world. Many online communities have been created to facilitate communication, enhance or express relationships, work in a common cause, seek entertainment, and network or mentor others. Others have been formed to facilitate tasks already being performed but now needing to be done virtually. Such communities and online groups span various boundaries and include networked employees, videoconferencing, gaming setups, and electronic community groups pursuing such diverse activities as friendshipping, planning, information sharing, collaborating, system developing, having fun, and advertising. Various technologies are involved, from Facebook and Twitter to teleconferencing to mobile phones and PCs.

Researchers are just beginning to understand virtual communities and collaborations. Many issues need further study, including group dynamics and outcomes, social networking implications, technical support features, group coherence and loyalty, and how organizations can better utilize the potential benefits of such communities in both internal operations and in marketing and new product development. What leads to participation and effective collaboration in these communities needs further study, as do the issues of how and why knowledge is shared among participants. Much additional research in this area is needed.

This new book presents studies from leading researchers and practitioners focusing on the current challenges, directions, trends, and opportunities associated with virtual communities and their supporting technologies.

This new book will be an excellent source of comprehensive knowledge and literature on the topic of virtual communities, social networks, and collaboration.

All of us who worked on the book hope that readers will find it useful.



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