UTILIZING FIRM-HOSTED ONLINE COMMUNITIES:
Research Challenges and Needs

The 1st International Workshop on Social Software Engineering and Applications (SoSEA)
September 15, 2008, L’Aquila, Italy

Sami Jantunen
Lappeenranta University of Technology

NEW TECHNOLOGIES CREATING NEW POSSIBILITIES

Web 2.0
1. To introduce new research project focusing on the challenges and opportunities with Firm-Hosted Online Communities (FOC)

2. To present early results of company interviews illustrating research challenges and needs
EXISTING PURPOSES OF USE FOR WEB 2.0

REAL-LIFE CHALLENGES FOR COMPANIES

How can I take advantage of Firm-Hosted Online Communities (FOC) in order to succeed in international:
• product business?
• collaborative product development?

How should I establish a Firm-Hosted Online Community so that it:
• achieves its objectives?
• adds value and is attractive to the members
• avoids unintended consequences?
Research Questions:

1. How to create an attractive and value-adding online community?

2. How FOCs can be utilized in Firm’s real-life activities?
   a) In terms of product business
   b) In terms of product development
VP 1: SOCIAL INTERACTION IN USER ONLINE COMMUNITIES

Motivation:
• To understand user needs and personal motivations for participating and contributing in online communities.

Goals:
• To provide information on how to create and maintain an attractive, value-adding and successful online community to end-users.

Research Questions:
• How do online communities evolve and become attractive?
• What motivates user participation and contribution?
• How to support sociability, participation and sense of community with the design of User Interface?
• How the success of online communities can be increased by improving users’ self-expression and identity-building in computer-mediated environment?

VP 2: METHODS FOR FIRM-HOSTED ONLINE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Motivation:
• Preece has given valuable guidelines and techniques for the development of online communities (often referred as Community-Centered Development, CCD). However, the work with CCD is still on-going and the challenge of defining an efficient and effective methodology for the development of online communities still remains to some extent.

Goals:
• To continuously develop, experience and refine methodology for the development of online communities in the context of product related activities.

Research Questions:
• How can firms’ efforts of developing online communities be supported in terms of practical guidelines, heuristics and methodologies?
Motivation:
• To investigate how online communities can be utilized in product-related activities

Goals:
• To understand what are the opportunities with online communities and how the potential benefits could be achieved in product-related activities.

Research Questions:
• How FOCs can be utilized in Firm’s real-life activities in terms of product business or product development?
MULTI-DISCIPLINARY RESEARCH CHALLENGE

INDUSTRIAL PARTNERS

TARGETED STAKEHOLDERS

Co-developers (external resources)

Own internal resources

Product Development

Nature of objectives

Business

Company 1

Company 2

Company 3

COMMUNITY-BASED PRODUCTS

BRAND BUILDING

INTERNALEVALUATION

DISTRIBUTED PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

PRODUCT MAINTENANCE AND PEER SUPPORT

USER INVOLVEMENT

OPEN SOURCE PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

TARGETED STAKEHOLDERS

Users
PROFCOM LITERATURE REVIEW
http://www.citeulike.org/group/4664/

http://tbrc-community.lut.fi/ocr/

ONLINE COMMUNITY RESEARCH
Observations, Experiences and Guidelines

Popular content
Real-life cases of fsn-hosted online communities

Read more

Recent comments
Jenny Preece's seminar
Jenny Preece is going to visit TBRC (Technology Business Research Center) in September and she will give a talk in a seminar. You are all welcome, more information can be found here:
http://www.civiltaa.helsinki.fi/online/2010/jenny_preece/
1. To introduce new research project focusing on the challenges and opportunities with Firm-Hosted Online Communities (FOC)

**SOME RESULTS:**

Research challenges and needs

2. To present early results of company interviews illustrating research challenges and needs

**DATA GATHERING:**

- Kick-off meetings with each of the 3 industrial partners in order to probe companies’ research challenges and needs with respect to FOCs
  - Each meeting lasted for approximately 2 hours
  - In total 6 researchers and 8 company representatives attended the meetings
  - Written notes were taken and reviewed by everyone participating in the meeting

**ANALYSIS:**

- Identification of research challenges and needs from the written notes
- Categorization of identified challenges and needs by 2 research team independently
- Final categorization through a dialogue between the two research teams
• How to prepare own resources for online participation?
  – Should they be trained and motivated?

• How to assign community-related responsibilities within a company?
  – What are the company’s responsibilities?
  – How to organize the work internally?
  – How to draw a line between internal and public discussions?

• How company’s real-life activities can be supported with online communities?
  – How communities can be utilized in own product development?
  – How communities can be utilized in supporting partner’s activities?
**CULTURE**
- How to create and maintain a collaborative culture?
  - How to support collaborative activities?
  - How to promote peer support?
  - How to promote the creation of sub-groups?
- How roles and responsibilities affect community’s culture?
  - How to organize activities and responsibilities within the community?
  - How to find balance between the end users and the company?
  - To what extent moderators are needed?

**TECHNOLOGY**
- Technology and user experience
  - How can User Interface support users' motivation?
  - How to support sociability and communication?
  - Which are the most applicable tools (blogs, wikis etc.) in each case community and how to utilize them?
- Technology, features and platforms
  - What is the need of mobile services in community development?
  - How to bring together best practices of different types of online communities (social networking, learning environments, games...)?
INDIVIDUAL USERS

• Understanding users’ desires and needs
  - What attracts users to join and participate?
  - What motivates users to contribute?
  - How does the sense of membership develop?

• Building identity through profile
  - How the user identity evolves over time and experience?
  - How to support self-expression in different types of communities?
  - What are the preferred practices e.g. in creating and sharing user profiles and communicating with other members?

CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

• What happens to sense of community when changes occur in the community?
  - How to predict users’ reaction to changes in the community?
  - What happens to the sense of community when:
    - new functionality is introduced?
    - the audience is changing?

• What is online community’s relation to real life?
  - How to integrate a community with real life?
  - What external factors makes a community a success?