

Guest Editorial

Management and the Future of Open Collaboration

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Introduction

Open collaboration gained prominence as a practice with the advent of Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) communities in the 1980s. Since then, technological advances have enabled individuals, firms and communities to implement applications relying on large-scale, open collaboration. Open collaboration research is a field of rapid growth in organizational theory and innovation. Initial work in this area has focused on the management and governance of FOSS projects as well as on a wide range of user communities in fields as different as sports, scientific equipment users and manufacturers, library information systems, computer games, and medical equipment. Another research stream has focused on open innovation from a corporate perspective, studying the ways in which traditional organizations can harness the power of communities to innovate, or on the creation of 'boundary' or 'hybrid' organizations that facilitate collaboration between open-source communities and firms. Yet another stream has examined open collaboration platforms, particularly the online encyclopedia Wikipedia, assessing participation processes and collaboration outcomes in this particular setting. Finally a more critical stream of research has characterized open collaboration both negatively, as 'prosumption' in which labor is transferred from workers to consumers, thereby generating new means of exploitation; or positively, as the 'germ form' of a post-capitalist society where exchange value will disappear altogether.

The role of open collaboration in organizations and communities has been showcased in numerous research studies. However the wealth of practical and theoretical development has progressed hand in hand with a lack of conceptual clarity. Phenomena as diverse as open innovation, FOSS, wikis such as Wikipedia and other collaboration platforms, social networks such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and CouchSurfing, game environments such as FoldIt, and online review sites such as Yelp! and Virtual Tourist, have been variously described as crowdsourcing, mass customization, co-creation, social, peer and collaborative production, user-generated content, wikinomics, open innovation, participatory culture, produsage, or as the wisdom of the crowds. The social consequences of the rapid development of new modes of collaboration have been described in highly contrasting terms. Even relatively minor terminological differences, e.g., distinguishing between open collaboration communities and virtual communities of practice, indicate deep divisions in interpretations of similar processes.

With this Special Issue we aim to present a multi-faceted portrait of open collaboration practices within organizations and communities, highlighting the prevalence and significance of this phenomenon in our social and economic lives. The purpose of this issue was to further the conceptual mapping of these phenomena by examining a variety of open collaboration structures and proposing a classification scheme for these organizational forms in relation to existing structures. Taken together, the five papers selected for publication in this issue address this goal through a diverse range of contributions in terms of research setting and conceptualization of open collaboration.

Bazaar Governance and the Advantages of Open Collaboration Models

An important question is the evolving relationship of open collaboration to existing business models. This question is provocatively addressed in this issue's first article, "The capabilities of Bazaar Governance: Investigating the Advantages of Business Models based on Open Communities". Benoît Demil, Xavier Lecocq and Vanessa Warnier adopt a theoretical perspective on open collaboration by comparing and contrasting business models based on open communities or "bazaars" - an organizational form defined as having low incentives and controls - with those based on markets, hierarchies, or networks. The authors propose a fine-grained approach to the capabilities of each of these governance structures, and analyze them with respect to value creation, value capture and economizing. The paper highlights the benefits and challenges of the bazaar model in comparison with the other three governance structures.

Hackathons and Open Collaboration for Production

In the second article, entitled "Performing Hackathons as a Way of Positioning Boundary Organizations", Anna Seravalli and Luca Simeone employ ethnographic methods to present, in a comparative case study, two "boundary organizations" oriented towards open production. Boundary organizations such as foundations are usually established in order to facilitate communication and collaboration between open collaboration projects and firms. In this instance, the authors examine two organizations created by the same research institute as a setting for innovation and design by local citizens, and where academic researchers and local businesses gather to collaboratively develop software or building objects within a brief, 24-48 hour interval. The post-hoc examination of how these organizations set up and communicate

their boundaries during their opening Hackathon events enables the authors to highlight cultural differences in open production and collaboration in these two spaces, and to evaluate the success of the focal organizations' strategies. Seravalli and Simeone suggest that boundary organizations established as sites for collaboration among different types of actors should match structure and event agenda to stakeholder expectations, while clearly communicating their own mission and goals to potential participants.

Dilemmas within Commercial Involvement in OSS and Open Collaboration

In the third article, titled “Dilemmas within Commercial Involvement in Open Source Software”, Malgorzata Ciesielska relies on mixed methods and a case study approach to examine six levels of commercial involvement in open source software and the tensions inherent at each of these levels. The author pays particular attention to the multiple logics circumscribing open source involvement, and examines how the interplay of economic, technological and social logics affects the allocation of benefits from open source software, as well as firm autonomy and innovation patterns. The author concludes that the uppermost three levels of involvement represent a high-risk high-reward strategy, whereby firms can reap the benefit of community involvement provided they succeed in building trust and legitimacy in open source projects. This study contributes to our understanding of the porous interface between the “copyright” and the “copyleft” worlds by highlighting how organizational strategies emerge in settings governed by multiple logics.

Wikis and Open Collaboration in Firms

The fourth article deals with “Innovation from Open Collaboration in Organizational Contexts: The Facilitative Role of Wiki-Enabled Digital Options”. Anand Simha and Larry Sanders study the relations between emerging innovations and open collaboration. They focus on wiki-based systems of knowledge storing, sharing, and distribution. Combining the literature on organizational innovation, digital options and tools, with that on wiki-driven systems, enables them to take a fresh approach to the study of knowledge reach and knowledge richness. They conclude that increasing knowledge reach is suitable for the emergence of radical innovation. However, increasing knowledge richness, according to the authors, fosters incremental innovation.

Wikipedia Strategy Setting and Open Collaboration

In the final article, entitled “Wikimedia Movement Governance: The Limits of A-Hierarchical Organization”, Dariusz Jemielniak examines the distributed governance model based on his ethnographic, long-term, participatory experience in the Wikipedia community. The author offers a detailed picture of two decisions made by local Wikipedia communities on an ad-hoc basis, in the absence of a central decision-making authority, and discusses the contestation processes that accompany such decisions. These examples highlight the costs and benefits of the Wikimedia Foundation abstaining from serving as a decision center or as an information coordinating hub for Wikipedia. His analysis underscores lengthy negotiations, the overturning of decisions after a minority group consensus, and a general volatility of all agreements as the main shortcomings of a-hierarchical governance. Jemielniak concludes that the open, participatory and democratic

character of Wikipedia governance, coupled with the semi-anonymous character of some of the members' identities, render the community more empowered but also more belligerent. This paper extends current understanding of organizational dynamics and governance in open collaboration organizations, and exposes the shortcomings of this model as the inevitable tradeoff of its indisputable benefits.

Differences and Similarities

The five articles in this Special Issue explore open collaboration at the level of the organization as a whole, which is ideally suited for case-study based approaches. The authors examine organizations both offline (Seravalli and Simeone) and online (Jemielniak); the challenges for firms involved in open source software (Ciesielska) and, conversely, the decision-making challenges of open collaboration organizations themselves (Jemielniak); the management and implementations of open collaboration in existing firms (Simha and Sanders) and organizations looking towards the “future of organizations,” predicated on open collaboration (Seravalli and Simeone). Acknowledging the still nascent state of research in this area, two of the studies also advance taxonomies of the open collaboration phenomenon, one proposing a systematic classification of governance structures (Demil et al.); another, of the levels of firm involvement in open source software communities (Ciesielska).

Throughout this issue, we invite you to explore inter-related themes such as the advantages and challenges of open collaboration, firm strategies in engaging in open collaboration within, and outside the organization, and the importance of matching organization strategy and processes

with the goals and expectations of potential participants. The following table summarises some of the main perspectives developed by the authors.

Open collaboration organizations: Research Focus

Firm strategic outlook	Open governance structures	Open collaboration location
Costs and benefits of firm engagement (Ciesielska, Demil et al)	Bazaar (Demil et al)	Within firms (Simha & Sanders)
Boundary organization management (Seravalli & Simeone)	A-hierarchy (Jemielniak)	Outside firms (Demil et al, Jemielniak)
Knowledge practice and innovation (Simha & Sanders)	Mixed (Seravalli & Simeone)	Firm-supported events: “hackathons” (Seravalli & Simeone)

We hope that you will find the five articles in this special issue enjoyable and interesting, and that they will inspire and stimulate further academic conversation and research on management and the future of open collaboration.

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Further Reading

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