Chapter 2
Success Dimensions of the Online Healthcare Communities of Practice:
Towards an Evaluation Framework

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ABSTRACT

The existing studies on online Communities of Practice (CoPs) in healthcare organizations have not adequately focused on the factors affecting KM initiative success and acceptance. Thus, establishing an evaluation framework has become essential for the advancement of research and practice in this area. In online communities of practice, the process of measuring and developing an evaluation framework has become quite complicated and challenging due to the intangible nature of the knowledge. Moreover, the lack of standards and studies, related to online CoPs measurements and evaluation frameworks, respectively, triggers the need for intensive studies in this area. In this context, this chapter reviews on-line CoPs success factors and identifies the gaps in our understanding. The authors classify the existing studies based on the area of evaluation, such as health and non-health domains. The chapter concludes by proposing a conceptual framework to measure the success of online CoPs in the healthcare sector.

INTRODUCTION

This book chapter provides an overview of the pertinent literature of the online communities of practice (CoPs), where the development, main characteristics and dimensions of online CoPs measurement, which are considered in the online CoPs literature have been examined. Moreover, this book chapter has reviewed past empirical studies related to online CoPs success and acceptance that have highlighted the major themes and criteria of online CoPs measurement; in addition

to the earlier online CoPs success and acceptance models have also been reviewed. The output of this review has identified the most critical dimensions that constitute towards the success and acceptance of online CoPs.

Online CoPs have emerged as a new robust interactive channel using available social media, by supporting all characteristics used as part of the knowledge management system (KMS) (Tseng & Kuo, 2014). According to Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002), online CoPs help knowledge management by capturing and sharing the expertise of members and by imparting skills, ideas, problems, innovations, talents, and experiences. Members of online CoPs are held together by a common purpose and require information on what others know (Wenger et al., 2002). However, the importance of measuring the effectiveness of online CoPs has been recognized by practitioners and researchers in the knowledge management (KM) field as supportive of knowledge sharing (Alali & Salim, 2013; Kankanhalli & Tan, 2005; Tseng & Kuo, 2014). Measuring the success of online CoPs includes the process of assessing their value in managing knowledge by identifying success and acceptance factors (Alali & Salim, 2013; Nistor, Schworm, & Werner, 2012).

Success measures of online CoPs support organizations in different ways, such as suggesting approaches to improve usage and operation of online CoPs. Furthermore, success measures of online CoPs can enhance decision-making related to online CoPs and KM projects investments (Ho et al., 2010; Wenger et al., 2002), as well as instruments to be used as benchmarks for future measurement and enhancement of online CoPs. Fundamentally, literature review helps researchers to determine the missing gap that can be compensated in the future (Fernandez, Gonzalez, & Sabherwal, 2004; Kankanhalli & Tan, 2005). From the theoretical perspective, the wide implementation of online CoPs in various industries with high levels of success had been reported by Wenger and other scholars, in con-

trast to the limited studies that evaluated online CoPs in the healthcare sector. In addition, these existing limited studies are descriptive, and hence have motivated this book chapter to review and to compare the literature pertaining to healthcare online CoPs and that of various industries. Ultimately, this book chapter aims to identify the main dimensions that determine the success of online CoPs. We have analysed and synthesized successful literature of online CoPs to identify the main taxonomy related to their success.

Theoretical Background

Evaluating online CoPs is a vital aspect, especially for measuring the effectiveness of CoPs. The evaluation might ensure the accomplishments of CoPs, particularly in supporting healthcare practitioners in their knowledge sharing activities (Alali & Salim, 2013; Kankanhalli & Tan, 2005). Online CoPs evaluation refers to the process of assessing their value in managing knowledge by defining determinants of success and acceptance. Success measures of online CoPs should support healthcare organizations in various ways, such as providing suggestions to improve the design, implementation, usage, and operation of online CoPs, by addressing and understanding the main factors that affect their success and acceptance (Alali & Salim, 2013). Furthermore, success measures of online CoPs can enhance their investment decisions and KM initiatives, as well as aid in the development of instruments to be used as benchmarks for future evaluation and comparison. In addition, online CoPs evaluation provides researchers the opportunity to determine and address missing gaps that can improve online CoPs in the future (Fernandez et al., 2004; Kankanhalli & Tan, 2005; Tseng & Kuo, 2014).

In evaluating online CoPs, researchers and practitioners must consider information technology, which is a component of online CoPs (Nistor, Schworm, & Werner, 2012; Alali & Salim, 2013). According to Wasko and Faraj (2005),

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