

Chapter XLIII

Value, Visibility, Virtual Teamwork at Kairos

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ABSTRACT

This chapter proposes an analytic for the assessment of sustainability and success of virtual workplaces. This analytic considers value, visibility, and infrastructure as key factors required for success, and suggests that an assessment of sustainability must include methods for evaluating current and possible mechanisms for securing or distributing social capital, exposing the degree to which the tasks and interactions of workers are made visible, and assessing the administrative and technological infrastructure with regard to support of communication, cooperation, and collaboration. This analytic is applied through a case study of the virtual workplace of the online scholarly journal Kairos: Rhetoric, Technology, Pedagogy.

INTRODUCTION

The editors, editorial staff, and editorial board of *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, Pedagogy* have successfully produced a well-regarded peer-reviewed academic online journal since 1996. The production work for the journal takes place almost exclusively online, with geographically distributed authors, editors, and editorial board members working as, in effect, virtual teams. Over the decade of experience we have had producing the journal, we have learned the importance of constructive autonomy for distant workers and the requirements for developing a

sustainable enterprise. This chapter will discuss three key aspects of virtual workplace practices that have played important roles in the success of the journal: providing mechanisms for associating work with value (operating through the accrual and distribution of what Pierre Bourdieu calls “cultural capital,” rather than solely through wage compensation), making sure that the work that takes place is made visible to all of the actors in the workplace (because, especially for virtual workplaces, the work that gets done is often invisible, and thus either misunderstood and/or undervalued by other team members), and developing technological and administrative sup-

port structures that both facilitate and privilege cooperation, collaboration, and the sharing of both responsibilities and resources by all of the stakeholders in the institution.

The approach taken in this chapter assumes that the kinds of work that take place in virtual environments are representations of knowledge work and that, as Deborah Brandt (2005) notes, “writing is at the heart of the knowledge economy” (p. 166), as well as understanding that the knowledge economy is associated with “processes of learning, communication, and social networking, almost always technology enhanced” (p. 167). The production of an online journal like *Kairos* represents an ideal case study for examining the practices of knowledge work both because that is its explicit purpose (to develop, distribute, and circulate knowledge) and because the core processes of production are tied to writing, learning, communication, and social networking.

KAIROS: RHETORIC, TECHNOLOGY, PEDAGOGY

Kairos is a refereed online journal exploring the intersections of rhetoric, technology, and pedagogy. Each issue presents varied perspectives on special topics such as “Critical Issues in Computers and Writing,” “Technology and the Face of Language Arts in the K-12 Classroom,” and “Hypertext Fiction/Hypertext Poetry.” *Kairos* was specifically conceived as a venue for the publication of academic “Webtexts,” which are texts authored specifically for publication on the World Wide Web. These Webtexts include scholarly examinations of large-scale issues related to special topics, individual and collaborative reviews of books and media, news and announcements of interest, interactive exchanges about previous *Kairos* publications, and extended interviews with leading scholars.

In 1996, the journal had an average monthly readership of 1,447 individuals who visited the

site, but since the first issue, overall readership has steadily risen; the journal currently serves over 45,000 readers per month. In addition to the increase in readership, there has been a shift from a primarily U.S. audience to a much more international audience. A little over 80% of our readers come from the U.S., which means that about 20% come from elsewhere—the logs have recorded visitors who hail from 190 different country codes, from Belize, Belarus, Botswana, and Brazil; from Vietnam, Venezuela, and the Ukraine. And that 20% is now over 9,000 readers per month, thus establishing *Kairos* as an “international” scholarly publication venue.

Mick Doherty (1996), the first editor and publisher of *Kairos*, explains that the name of the journal was selected after careful consideration: “Kairos, the ancient Greek term that can roughly be interpreted as a rhetorical combination of understood context and proper timing, carries exciting new implications in our developing rhetorics of hypertext and online communication” (start.html). In a knowledge economy, finding the opportune moment and the appropriate processes to meet the needs of users as they develop at specific intersections of cultural practice and technological capability greatly contributes to the success or failure of Internet ventures; however it is not simply recognizing the right moment that is important—selecting the right media and networks for user interaction are equally critical. Eric Charles White (1987) explains the relationship of time and action embedded in the notion of “kairos”:

Kairos is an ancient Greek word that means “the right moment” or “the opportune.” The two meanings of the word apparently come from two different sources. In archery, it refers to an opening, or “opportunity” or, more precisely, a long tunnel-like aperture through which the archer’s arrow has to pass. Successful passage of a kairos requires, therefore, that the archer’s arrow be fired not only accurately but with enough power

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