

The role and limitations of managed communities in contributing to organizational performance
Knowledge Sharing: A Gender Approach

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This paper reports on a study of the effects which managed communities have on organizational performance. In particular, the focus of this paper is on the role which leadership plays in moderating these effects. In doing so, it draws on an initial analysis based on qualitative data from on-line communities in the UK health care sector. Respondents included not only community members, but also community leaders and coordinators, and senior managers.

Our analysis suggests that leadership is an important feature of the development of successful communities – and its absence is often a cause of failure. In this context, though, leadership is less a form of personal power than a result of multiple leading activities. These may be distributed across a number of different people, and more or less formalized roles, including community coordinator, subject matter experts, thought leaders, and so on. As such, leadership in communities is less about the personal power exercised by one individual and more about creating and exploiting alternative, non-hierarchical sources of influence, including technical expertise, networking activities and the trust-building effects of face to face interaction.

The paper draws on qualitative data from our study to outline the contribution of these different leadership activities to the development of communities, and to draw out the implications for our understanding of these communities within an organizational context.