INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR BEHAVIOURAL BUSINESS RESEARCH

Online Communities Research

Online communities are groups of people who operate and interact at least in part using Internet technologies. Typical technologies used to facilitate this interaction include email, wikis, instant messaging, and virtual worlds.

Information technology has powerful impacts on the ways in which people interact and businesses transact with consumers and other business. Transactions are costly in terms of identifying trading partners and negotiating, monitoring and enforcing their compliance with the trading agreement, especially when information is scarce and the scope for opportunistic behaviour great. The easy recording, storage and transmission of information in digital business and the Internet economy helps this process. In addition to e-commerce, online communities are increasingly being used by businesses internally as a means of encouraging group work and for support.

Understanding issues surrounding organising employees in this way such as conflict resolution, control, efficiency and effectiveness of communication is becoming more important. A commonly seen example of the latter is a business turning to an online community to provide support for the open source software it uses.

On the other hand, information technology can also hamper transactions. As consumers and firms increasingly interact anonymously, physical signals and proximity that can promote trust and cooperation between trading partners in physical environments begin to disappear.