Smarter Innovation: Emergence of the open collaborative community *(Abstract)*

Editor's note: Karla Phlypo's open collaborative community (OCC) is a model of externalizing innovation where the innovation convener catalyzes collaboration among innovation participants. She gives a compelling case study of how General Electric successfully used OCCs for small-scale consumer "telematics" (consumer goods and their interfacing technologies). Phlypo goes further to describe the personas that inhabit these communities, and the facilitation processes essential to make them thrive.   *-- Katrina Pugh, Columbia University*

A key leadership responsibility is to grow innovative capacity. There are many options that can be considered. They can buy, partner or develop their own R& D projects. There is, however, another alternative. Why not leverage external innovators and inventors to collaborate on your innovation projects? One might say, "That's crazy, no one would ever open their patents to an external community." The very idea is not so crazy after all. General Electric has partnered with newcomer Quirky to leverage Quirky's open collaborative community (OCC).

Quirky is the brainchild of Ben Kaufman who conceived of the organization because of his own frustrations with the inventing process. His organization is enabled by OCC. The community members provide product inventions; Quirky supports development, manufacturing and distribution.

General Electric has partnered with Quirky by opening a block of their telematic patents to the OCC to see what they could develop. GE openly admits that within their conventional organization they don't possess the flexibility or the level of creative capacity that is being exhibited by the OCC and Quirky.

What would one need to know about starting such an open endeavor? To begin, it helps to understand the values and persona of those communities that you will attract, as well as to know what motivates them. I conducted a case study in 2013 to gain understanding of some of the values and "personas" of those involved in OCC's and in the organizations that leveraged them. The outcomes of the study identified four primary personas:

1. The Communal,
2. The Cognitive Self-Expressive,
3. The Narcissistic Individualist, and
4. The Absolutist.

A few examples: Those of the Communal persona tended to make decisions in a group through consensus, and they valued group equity, integrity and transparency. The Cognitive Self-Expressives were by far the most prolific problem solvers, providing a vast amount of solutions. They valued flexibility, thriving in ambiguity, and had a systems focus. The Narcissistic Individualists were logical, but driven by fame or rank. For them. problem solving was mostly driven by self-interest. Sponsor organizations that successfully use OCCs tend to emulate compatible persona and values.

Is your organization limited by existing internal persona, structures and values? Communities, or networks, are rich in the array of insight they are willing to offer. Having insights into how different persona manifest in an organization is a key to determining how to envision, structure and facilitate OCCs and to improve innovation capacity.

Karla Phlypo is a contributing faculty member at Walden University School of Management. Karla is also President of Knowledge & Innovation Consulting and Coaching Inc. She earned her Ph.D. in Applied Management and Decision Sciences. Her area of concentration was Knowledge and Innovation Management, with a dissertation: "Emerging Forces of Innovation: Bridging Enterprises and Open Communities of Practice."