

# Leisure Information Behaviours in Hobby Quilting Sites

## **Abstract:**

This qualitative study examines hobby quilting Web sites and blogs, asking how creativity, virtual community, and expressed motivations are involved in creation of information resources. Findings are placed with serious leisure, ELIS, and interface design contexts, indicating ways to motivate employees in work settings to contribute to electronic information repositories.

## **Résumé:**

### **1. Introduction**

The purpose of this project was to investigate how personal creativity can influence the voluntary development of an information resource. The information resources chosen for study were quilting Web sites created by quilting hobbyists, because they are an holistic, interactive mechanism through which individuals are motivated to express their creativity. These sites will be referred to as “hobby sites”, because they are Web sites created as information resources by quilters for non-commercial purposes.

The research problem asks what information features indicative of personal creativity characterize the Web sites and what reasons site owners (i.e., those who have created and developed the site content) give for the sharing of personally developed information structures. The study explored why these sites are constructed and how creativity and motivation generated in personal leisure time can be harnessed and brought into play in LIS information design. Principles were then extrapolated from the findings which, when applied, could be used to encourage individuals to build and maintain information repositories within professional settings.

The findings validate some established theory, and in other places, notably with ELIS, show that established scholarly theories may not fully represent hobbyists’ information activities. By studying the quilting community through its communications and information structures, the study provides insight into the information sharing practices of hobbyists to better inform LIS theory. By studying an online community through its Web sites and blogs, insight can be gained into how and why communities form, and what role information sharing plays within the community dynamic from the perspective of the information owners, gatherers, and distributors. Virtual quilting communities are particularly interesting to study (as opposed to computer gamers or professional associations, for example) because they have a long-established ethic of cooperation and communication in real-time/physical life. How that community dynamic is affected by the technology, distance, and anonymity of the internet can provide insight into current theories about the possibilities for interface design and its role in supporting and fostering work life information sharing within professional communities.

## 2. Methodology

In light of the extensive history behind quilts and quilting and the potentially broad context of the project, the term “quilt” was given a very specific definition for the purposes of this study. Quilts were defined as those physical objects created for decoration and comfort in the home; quilters as those people who create quilts for such a purpose. Quilting Web sites, although defined here as hobby sites created for non-commercial purposes, may include some commercial elements, such as advertising space, if used only for the expressed purpose of helping to pay for the site or to promote its use by the public. Hobby sites are those sites created for the purpose of self-expression and not primarily for financial gain or to promote any cause save that of the leisure pursuit of quilting.

Data collection began in October of 2007 and finished in March of 2008. Twenty-five Web sites and blogs were collected. All the materials studied resided in the public domain and only that content made publicly available (i.e., where no memberships or passwords were required to view content) was examined.

Discourse elements were identified in order to secure data samples that would speak to the research questions. The research questions asked about motivation, creativity, and community, and sampling elements identified each of these issues. The three approaches of domain analysis used in the study: bibliometric, epistemological, and discourse, informed the development of seventeen sampling criteria. Sampling criteria included elements that addressed quilter demographics (gender, location, etc), quilter discourse, and site features (tutorials, images, etc). Purposive sampling was done with use of snowball sampling. Research questions to be answered with this methodological framework included questions about expressions of personal creativity, motivations to create information resources as expressed by site owners, and an examination of communication strategies, including how site owners encourage the visitors to their sites to also acquire quilting skills.

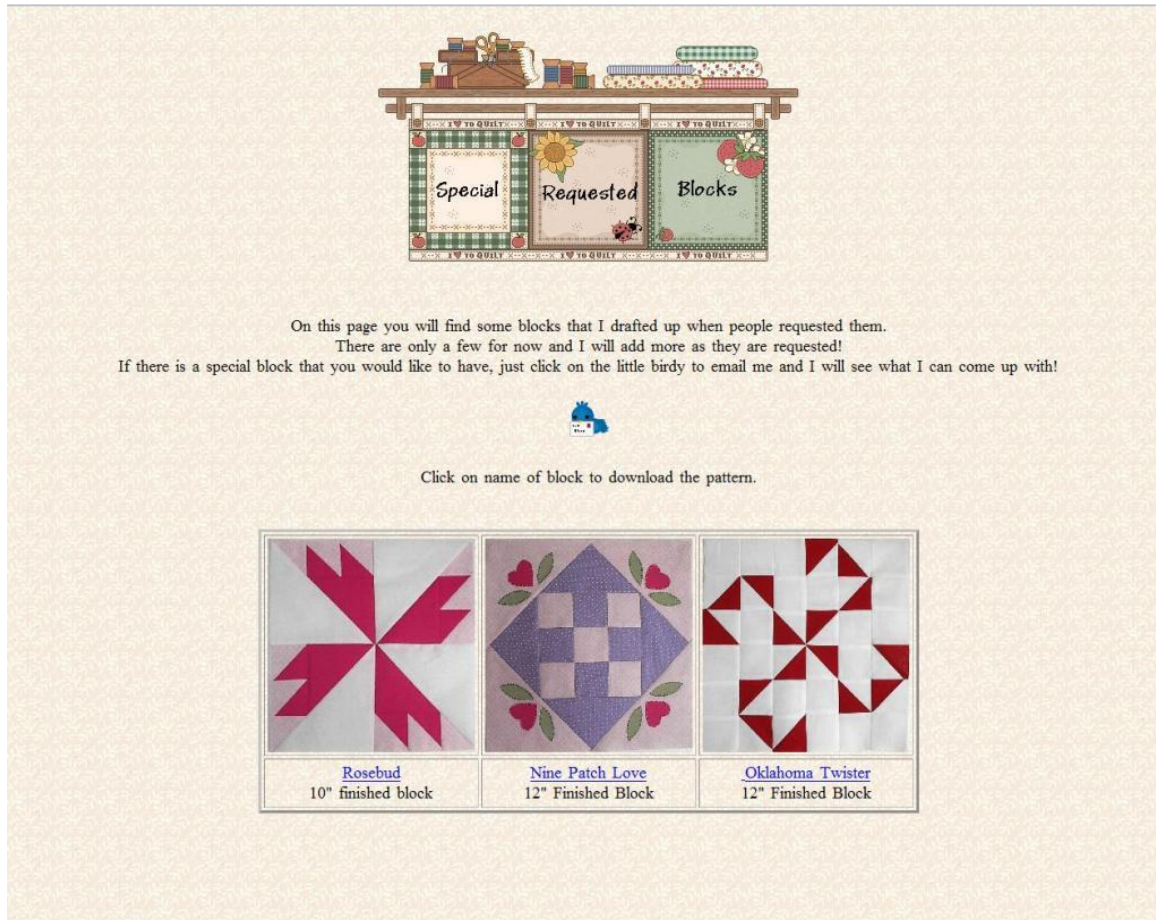
The data were then examined in relation to the research questions. The texts were mined with a grounded theory approach to explore how they represent various aspects of personal creativity, motivational statements, statements regarding creativity, teaching elements, and aspects of community building strategies.

Domain analysis was chosen as the analysis method for this research because it addresses the fact that the nature of information itself varies from one subject to the other and its resultant wide variety of approaches (Hjørland 2002). Domain analysis is a “social paradigm” which tries to understand the external effects and the internal processes of information and communication, in the belief that the best way to understand information behaviour is to observe what takes place within communities of discourse (Hjørland and Albrechtsen 1995, 400). As Jenna Hartel has pointed out, domain analysis’ holistic approach is uniquely tailored to the needs of LIS researchers exploring hobbyists and their communities of interest (2003).

Using the methods of domain analysis while treating each Web site and blog as a text offered insight into issues of online community that are specific to this group. Using a grounded theory approach then allowed the research to point out directions and highlight themes in the data as they were collected.

### 3. Lit Review

By linking three research areas: library and information studies; sociology's serious leisure; and computer science/design's interface design for communities, this research is able to investigate issues that cross the sometimes rigid boundaries of scholarly disciplines.



**Figure 1. One example of the helpfulness site owners display in teaching the public.** Special Requested Quilt Blocks, *The Golden Thimble*, <http://thegoldenthimble.com/specialrequests.html> (accessed Feb 29, 2008). Permission to use these images has been granted by Rebecca Kuck of The Golden Thimble.

Quilting was chosen for this study as the activity of quilting brings with it certain social expectations, activities, and traditions that together help to create the quilting culture. Quilting research shows that this culture is frequently generative, tying generations of family through the quilts. Quilting bees, a unique creation of the “New World” frontier life, reflect the now-traditional socializing around quilts and the expectations that a quilter will teach others to quilt (Piercy and Cheek 2004; Kiracofe 1993). This expectation has crossed over into virtual communities, as seen in Figure 1. As a result, within this context quilting is about social networks and the sharing of information. Sharing personal creativity and the fostering of the craft are core values within quilting communities, which encourages quilters to continue those teaching and sharing activities online.

By analyzing the content of hobby Web sites, this study provides insight into how quilter-hobbyists structure and visualize online information while voluntarily seeking and sharing learning experiences. Such insight is valuable because it examines voluntary and amateur aspects of online communities within serious leisure and everyday life information seeking contexts. The emphasis on leisure activities places the study within library and information studies' (LIS) examination of informational issues in the sociological field of serious leisure. "Serious leisure", a subset of sociology's leisure studies, is defined as voluntary activity that provides some measure of pleasure or satisfaction that is vigorously pursued and regularly cultivated over time with the intent to develop skill in its practice (Stebbins 2007). Everyday life information seeking, or ELIS, provides a second context for this project. It refers to an area of study within library and information studies that investigates how people, outside of their careers, function as seekers of information in everyday settings. This area of research has the benefit of addressing social and cultural factors in information seeking, and makes provision for hobby-related activities (Savolainen 2005) such as quilting.

While many scholars have studied leisure activities through various theoretical lenses (e.g., Piercy and Cheek 2004; Turkle 2004; Rojek 2002; Gelber 1997), few LIS scholars have investigated serious leisure information behaviours (e.g., Prigoda and McKenzie 2007; Hartel 2006, 2003), and none have yet studied serious leisure information behaviours (the ways, tools, and strategies people use to locate leisure information) online. The lack of research in this area, and the unique information structures characteristic to individual hobby groups generally and quilters specifically make this a valuable area for discovery. It is hoped that this study will begin to highlight some areas of interest in ELIS as it relates to hobby-related information seeking. ELIS theory, as indicated by Savolainen (1995, 2005) and Huotari and Chatman (2001), still needs development. Studies examining the principles and information behaviours of everyday life information seeking within hobby and leisure contexts have been called for as a way to further develop the ELIS model.

LIS research into leisure studies, as indicated by Hartel (2006) in reporting her domain analysis research into hobbyist gourmet cooking practices, is significant because it examines ELIS behaviours that are rich in distinct informational practices that are frequently understudied by LIS scholars. It is a field highly pertinent to the millions of people who engage in serious leisure, and it merits study and examination. This is a very new area, as evidenced by the literature, of which very little reviews serious leisure practices online, and this mandates research. The online texts which are proposed here as a subject of research offer tangible clues to how this group of hobbyists make sense of their craft in terms of practical and cultural knowledge (Borgman 1999), as an entrée to social worlds (Unruh 1980), and as an act of civil labour to help novices to the craft and to preserve knowledge (Rojek 2002).

Interface design has analyzed ways in which online communities can be prompted and encouraged to contribute information and thereby make the communities viable and dynamic. This research, although it does not always speak directly to the informational practices of hobbyists' virtual communities, provides a necessary background for the findings of this study. Interface designers are exploring how to support and build communities online, constantly building on existing theory to explore new practices. While there is a body of research in this area (e.g., Chewar, McCrickard, Carroll 2005; Erickson and Kellogg 2000), the focus is frequently on the programming needed to

support communities, or the professional working contexts of communities, with emphasis on “community building”. The LIS perspective is often narrowly focused on the imperative to connect the information seeker with information needed (e.g., Quint, 2007; Tang, 2007). Both of these perspectives are brought together here, since this study addresses the concept of community from an LIS perspective. The study investigates the community’s supportive, networked strategies for growth that are motivated not by salary, but by pleasure, creativity, and altruism. The study simultaneously investigates how those aspects of community cultivate information exchange.

The impact of empathic behaviours on information sharing/seeking in online communities, namely that of emotional support, is of particular interest as it relates to the quilting community with its traditional value for and focus on family and social bonding. In 2000, Gary Burnett called for additional research connecting information to social-emotional activities on the internet. While there are scholars investigating the connection between emotion and information behaviour (see Nahl and Bilal 2007), scholarly research into the relationship between emotion and information behaviour on the internet is still scarce, as is discussion regarding personal development activities and their attendant information behaviours (Kari and Savolainen 2007).

#### **4. Findings and Discussion**

As the sites were analyzed in an effort to answer the research problem, the findings of this study show that there is a typology of quilting Web sites, namely, galleries, information portals, and teaching sites. In each type of site, evidence can be found of the traditional values of quilting communities, though there are changes and circumlocutions that mark an adaptation to the technological restrictions and possibilities of the internet.

As the days and years have gone by, I am still humbled by the enormity of this thing we call the World Wide Web and more so by the incredible, giving nature of quilters all around the world. To share seems to be second nature to quilters and this is expressed in the enormous amount of quilting information that is shared and enjoyed by so many on a daily basis. It has been my supreme pleasure to point someone to the information source needed to help them complete a project, make a special gift for a special person, or to help them discover the world of quilting. To all of those wonderful people who have taken a moment to share their knowledge with the world via the Internet.....Thank You!” (Noblin, About Block Central)

The idea for this study was generated in response to personal work life/leisure time experiences on the part of the author. Many companies in many industries are struggling to retain employee knowledge, to see that it is appropriately distributed and available for new employees to access (Brown and Duguid 2001). They spend a great deal of money and time on software and databases to try and capture that knowledge and make it accessible, and yet many employees feel unwilling, for various reasons, to record their knowledge for their employers (Ardichvili, Page, and Wentling 2003). In contrast, quilters and other hobbyists will come home from work at the end of the day and spend their leisure time creating information repositories for public access—and they do it without any expectation of financial reward. The Noblin quote above, from the quilting

site *Block Central*, perfectly illustrates the Canadian/American quilting culture and how it is reflected within the online quilting community, as typified by its willingness to share information. This contrast gave rise to the questions: is there something going on in this hobby community that is fueling a willingness to share and teach? And, can this be transferred to the workplace?

As the data were collected for this study, themes quickly began to emerge. The Web sites contained specific information structures that produced their own typology. The bibliometric, epistemological, and discourse domain analyses of the sites showed that a desire to teach the craft of quilting is the great underlying motivator in the creation of these information repositories.

The study discovered that there is a clear typology of hobby quilting Web sites, breaking into five types. These are:

1. Gallery of work: a display of quilts made either by the site owner or others. Images are frequently accompanied by comments regarding why fabrics, designs, etc. were chosen, and how the quilt was made.
2. Teaching: tutorials, free patterns, and instructions on how to make quilts. Typically created and presented by the site owner.
3. Assembly of resources: this could also be described as an information portal. The site owner has listed online and print resources, often with links and subdivided by theme, which viewers can use to find information about quilting and on how to quilt.
4. Journaling: the site owner writes about personal experiences and emotions.
5. Commercial: the site is used not only as a hobby pursuit, but also to notify people about other projects that generate income, such as an etsy site or provides something on the site that generates income, such as advertising.



**Welcome to My Web Site**

*My name is Ena Flynn and I enjoy a variety of leisure activities among them golf and cooking, but most of all quilting. I had been sane quilting about 8 years before discovering crazy quilting. I began by collecting embellishment packages but had no idea how to start. I was afraid to cut the fabric for fear of making a mistake. Then my quilt guild came to the rescue by offering a workshop with Jan Benander of Rhode Island and nothing has been the same since.*

**My Crazy Quilting Projects**

[Evening Star Sampler](#)  
[In the Year of the Hare](#)  
[My Victorian Garden](#)  
[Play Ball](#)  
[Francine and Wilhelmina](#)  
[Save the Children](#)  
[Small Projects](#)  
[Color Play Round Robin](#)

**Links to Crazy Quilting Supplies**

[Pepperell Pepper Patch](#)  
[The Caron Collection](#)  
[Vintage Vogue](#)  
[EQulter - Online Fabric Store](#)  
[Flights of Fancy Boutique](#)  
[Victorian Cottage Treasures](#)  
[Evening Star Designs](#)

**Links to Crazy Quilting Information**

[Quilting Arts Magazine](#)  
[Online CQ Magazine](#)

I hope you enjoy this work in progress site as much as I did creating it.  
I will hopefully be updating it often. So come back again soon.

I'd love to hear from you. Click [here](#) to send me your comments.

© 2002, Ena Flynn  
This Page was last updated on 11/20/2003

**Figure 2. An example of a “hybrid” quilting hobby site and how it combines elements of the typology.**

Home page for *Ena's Crazy Quilt Page*, <http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Farm/9138/>.  
Permission to use this image granted by Ena Flynn of Ena's Crazy Quilts.

Most of the sites were a hybrid of two or more of these elements (see Figure 2). It was apparent through the sampling process that hobbyist quilters interested during the past couple of years in creating online information repositories are now more likely to create blogs than Web sites. Information sharing within the sites is likely to contain information noise with ad space, informational subthemes, and neglect. The ads detract from the message without giving anything in return to the community. The informational subthemes, on the other hand (typically of a domestic nature), appear to be valued by the community as an inherent and expected part of community values, reflecting the community's expectations for information behaviours (Kari and Savolainen 2007, Kim

2000). The sampling process showed that there is a frequent abandonment of sites by site owners, where the initial extreme efforts to create useful resources are not sustained.

Although the need for neutral chat within online communities has been noted by researchers such as Sean Googins, James Laffey, and I-Chun Tsai (2007) it needs to be amplified in view of the discourse seen in the quilting sites. As has been noted, the quilting sites reflect values of the quilting community around issues of generativity, family and personal life. Discussion around these issues and how they impact the creation of quilts and the quilting process was bound up in the teaching features and information on the sites, a part of this group's cultural context which impacts their information sharing, and is directly related to the quilters' quests for self-improvement and acquisition of skills (Kari and Savolainen 2007). This revealing and personal approach amongst hobbyists might indicate why, in work settings, so much more success is seen in geographically-based online communities (Fisher and Bennion 2005; Baker and Ward 2002). Employees do not want personal information committed to a permanent work record when online, so exchange of personal information in a work context takes place in face to face interaction. The need for off-topic discussion (as shown in the quilting sites) and for privacy (as shown in work settings), which conflict in the online workplace, has to be resolved for non-geographically based communities to function optimally.

The findings also indicate the need in professional information repositories to accommodate employee creativity. The emotionally charged conversation in the quilting sites (statements such as "quilting brings feelings of peace and joy") indicated how important it is for these site owners to be free to explore, represent, and discuss their creativity. It also indicates a relationship between expressing creativity and willingness to supply information and teaching resources. Several of the information repositories included in this study were the direct result of someone seeing a need and voluntarily moving to fill it, such as Gwen Magee, who created the *Quilt Ethnic* site. By providing features that permit members of the community to discuss a need and take steps to fill that need, doors are left open for initiative and creativity to occur. Successful experiences when creatively filling information needs should then positively motivate them to repeat such efforts (Csziksentmihalyi 1997).

Quilters online showed that they still value community and community building just as they do in real-time physical interactions (Stalp 2006, King 2001). They also actively work to recruit new quilters. Quilting is still a very gendered activity, though male quilters are to be found who provide an interesting comparison and contrast to the average female quilter and female quilting aesthetics. Both genders value generativity, the caring and nurturing aspects of quilting that ties family and friends across generations through the quilts themselves (Piercy and Cheek 2004). This emphasis on family is one of the ways in which the emotional aspects of the hobby manifest themselves, as does the repeated emphasis placed on the emotional state the creativity of quilting provides to the quilter. Because of that value, many quilters look to teach others how to quilt so that they can experience the same positive and creative emotions. The efforts of the sites to provide teaching elements underscore the qualities of community and generativity within the group, and the apparent belief that part of quilting is to teach (Prigoda and McKenzie 2007). That desire to teach is claimed as a primary motivator for site owners to create their sites, and is enabled due to the accepting environment of the quilting community



which promotes a sense of confidence in those who would make contributions (Hsiu-Fen 2007; Ardichvili, Page, and Wentling 2003).

When motivations were expressed, they were fully reflected in the site content. The almost unanimous motivation site owners claim for creating these information repositories is to teach. Their willingness to teach speaks to their confidence in their abilities (Hsiu-Fen 2007), their belief that the community will value their contributions (Ardichvili, Page, and Wentling 2003), and their belief that the activity of quilting includes teaching others to quilt. While some quilting resources have teaching elements such as tutorials on technique, others simply want to share their quilts with the public, which is another way to teach. By showing what they are doing, explaining why they are doing it, and providing links to resources that can teach novices about quilting, they are in effect providing a teaching resource. In both cases, the teaching and the sharing sites contain an invitation to others to quilt.

Although no site owner in the data set explained fully why teaching others to quilt is important, the primary embedded message is that quilting is a pleasurable activity, and as a result these quilters want others to experience the positive emotional states of quilting and the values of the quilting community, so that they in turn can have the pleasures of quilting in their lives. Other sub-purposes for creating information repositories were to join in the blogging community since everyone else was doing it (Ingalls, *Début Hesitant*), to organize one's thoughts and projects (McGuire, *First Blog*), to fulfill an information need (Magee, *Quilt Ethnic Mission Statement*), and to possibly create a commercial site that would provide income (Kuck, *The Golden Thimble*).

Site owners encourage site viewers to participate in quilting in four ways. They provide examples of their own creativity, or examples of other quilters' creativity, through galleries of images, accompanied by discussion of the creative process, with the implicit invitation to join in such a rewarding and satisfying hobby. Supportive and sincere language is a constant in these sites, which include not only reassuring statements as to the easiness of quilting but occasional offers of personal assistance to any site visitor with language like this: "You can also email me with any questions. I'll do my best to set you on the right path. After all, your success is my success. Right?" (Massard, *Learning Quilting*). Teaching elements abound in the tutorials written on quilting techniques and history, the free designs offered, and recommended resources compiled for additional reference. The fourth strategy is closely welded to the quilting values of community and family. That strategy is community, expressed and made available through structural and technical elements in the sites, and through discourse around such items as guild and listserv memberships, and family activities connected to quilting. In these expressions of community there is explanation of the accepted context of quilting and the openness that exists to recruiting new membership who are thereby assured that they will "belong" if they choose to join in this activity.

The sample set not only provided data that might answer the research questions, but it raised additional questions: why do site owners abandon their sites after putting so much effort into them? Are site owners more likely to already be, or to become, optimistic-cognitive in their mastery of life? Can gender affect the approach an individual takes to undertaking a leisure pursuit and yet not impact their information seeking strategies or eventual adoption of community values? Are quilters more or less

likely than other serious leisure groups to exhibit the information behaviours described above?

## 5. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate how personal creativity influences the voluntary development of an information resource, with the intent that the findings inform interface design in support of online community development of information repositories. To that end, the study explored why hobby quilting Web sites are constructed and what role is played by creativity. Such a study is interdisciplinary in nature, touching on ELIS, serious leisure, and interface design. This interdisciplinary approach, and the nature of the data to be examined, mandated qualitative research methods.

The themes of this community are benign, cooperative, generative, and contain a high motivation to teach. In some way the quilt object is vested with this value system (Prigoda and McKenzie 2007). Part of learning to quilt seems to be an acceptance of these contextual values, and that of family and generativity, as seen in this quote:

The best thing about making your own quilt is that once it is finished you get to share it with your family and friends! A quilt can be used by someone on a day-to-day basis and serve as a constant reminder of the love, care and attention to detail that went into making it. For this reason many quilts are cherished and kept as heirlooms to be passed down to future family generations. (How to Make a Quilt)

Community building efforts are to be seen not only in the promotion of these values, but in the technological structures of the sites and the discourse strategies used to build community through teaching and fellowship. The community values of acceptance, support, nurturing, and generativity, seem to be a large factor in site owner's willingness (and the willingness of their site visitors) to share information of various kinds (Ardichvili, Page, and Wentling 2003, 70).

The activities of quilting hobby site owners confirm ELIS' claim that knowledge exchange is a social practice. All of the quilting sites are framed by the values of the quilting community, and the construction of these information resources seems to be a manifestation of the community's value placed on teaching and sharing. Context in this instance is so closely aligned to the motivations of these site owners to provide information that it seems to indicate territory not yet mapped by ELIS (Kari and Savolainen 2007, Kim 2000).

A finding of this study was that the quilting sites divided themselves into a clear typology, consisting of galleries of work, teaching, assemblage of resources, journaling, and commercial. Such typology could inform the roles contributors would play in the building of an online information repository within a work context, by indicating potential (exchangeable) roles for contributors to the repository. Galleries of work would allow contributors to showcase their contributions and easily index them. In this way employees are motivated to contribute work done so as to be able to show supervisors that performance goals have been met and efforts made to support the company's information needs (Hsu 2006, 337). Teaching roles would permit supervisors and

employees to fill perceived needs for newer employees, and with the assistance of a corporate librarian such materials could be further developed into company records, workshops, and online tutorials, filling ongoing information needs (Baker and Ward 2002). Assemblage of resources could work as a Web 2.0 tool, with company-wide generated tag clouds and bookmarks, providing the interactivity and flexibility demanded by members of online communities (Teo et al. 2003; Malhotra, Gosian, and Hars 1997). Journaling could be a private or public feature, offering the ability to track goals, project stages, and items for discussion within groups, and might help to create an environment of support, where employees do not feel that to discuss their work runs the risk of ridicule or “losing face” (Ardichvili, Page, and Wentling 2003). Commercial elements could be provided with contractors and consultants being allowed to post availability and specializations, possibly with recommendations from departments they have worked with in the past, thereby creating another valuable resource to company managers. Such features would meet functional demands, while supporting two established factors in cultivating employee motivations to contribute to information repositories: a performance management system that would reward contributions, and establishing information sharing as a standard part of organizational culture (Hsu 2006).

The success of such interfaces long-term is of course dependent on the community membership feeling that their contributions are valuable and important to the community at large (Erickson and Kellogg 2000; Chewar, McCrickard, and Carroll 2005). The constant focus on sincere and positive language within the discourse of the quilting sites studied indicated that this community sets a priority on helping its membership feel accepted and valued, part of the “giving nature of quilters” (Noblin, About Block Central). One more essential feature of the community interface hypothesized here is that it should provide activity statistics, not only for viewings of contributed material, but of individual employees’ contributions in various areas, so that efforts can be noted and rewarded (Erickson and Kellogg 2000). In this way, with positive reinforcement, employee contributors will feel that their work is valued and necessary to the community (Hsu 2006).

Other possible application for the findings includes development of the ELIS and the serious leisure models, and application for developing the next generation of interface design for community-informed information repositories, while they point out possible directions for future research. The study findings clearly mandate more research into ELIS issues within varying contexts, and serious leisure information behaviours across various hobby activities, ideally by interviewing some of the hobby quilting site owners to see if they agree with the findings of this study, and how they would amplify its findings.

This project was begun believing that the practical application of this research would offer insight into how to tap into employee knowledge and expertise in professional work settings, and encourage the sharing and archiving of that knowledge in electronic community-operated databases. The research indicates that flexible roles, accommodation of off-topic discussion, and opportunities to creatively seek to fill perceived needs, if placed within a positive work-community environment, will help to stimulate employee contributions to electronic knowledge repositories.

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