An Exploratory Study of Communicative Ethics within a Virtual Community

John Campbell
Dubravka Cecez-Kecmanovic

School of Management
Griffith University
e-mail: j.campbell@griffith.edu.au

School of Information Systems, Technology and Management
University of New South Wales
e-mail: dubravka@unsw.edu.au

Abstract

This study explores the changes in moral orientation and the communicative practices that are used within a virtual community during discussion regarding the prospects of a listed Australian company experiencing abnormal volume and stock price activity. The results indicate that communicative practices and moral orientation change markedly over time and are associated with changes in market volume and share price volatility. Our analysis highlights how a financial Internet discussion site is used for both communicative and strategic action, and how these acts relate to apparent attempts by community members to make sense of conflicting information in an uncertain and dynamic decision-making environment.

Keywords

Internet discussion sites, virtual communities, communicative practices, moral development, communicative ethics

INTRODUCTION

The Internet has become a core component of the communication infrastructure for major financial markets around the world. The low cost and ease-of-access offered by Internet technology has given rise to a whole host of online investor services that are now provided by stock exchanges, brokerage firms, banks and investment advisers. The impact of ubiquitous access to online information is epitomised by the rapid growth in the number of online trading accounts during the past five years (Tumarkin and Whitelaw 2001). Apart from being a conduit for "official" information from authorised or other trusted sources, the advent of the Internet has also given rise to a variety of Internet Discussion Sites (IDS) where investors and traders can share information and learn from others through active or passive participation in forum discussions. Typically these financial IDS are virtually organised groupings of individuals who share ideas and information across a diverse range of topics, but largely those issues concerned with the trading of shares in publicly listed companies.

Financial IDS can be an important source of knowledge on a broad range of topics relating to securities and securities trading. They empower private investors by supporting synchronous and asynchronous digital conversations on key securities related topics including trading strategies, tax implications, comparative assessments of stockbroker services and private research. These forums offer participants the experience of a community and provide objects in text that support the impression of an "imagined" community through commonality, connectedness and deep play (see Pollner 2002, Anderson 1983). Unfortunately, the organisation and structure of many IDS can also enable some individuals to systematically cultivate and exploit the uncertainty or enthusiasm of others. However, outside this type of endeavour, prior research has linked an increase in IDS posts with increased stock market activity. For example, different studies undertaken by Wysocki (1998, 2000) and Tumarkin and Whitelaw (2001) each found that increased IDS posting activity preceded significant changes in next-day trading volume and share price returns. More recently, an Australian study by Joyce et al. (2003) found that companies nominated as takeover targets in IDS discussions were, on average, associated with subsequent positive abnormal returns. This paper reports the results of exploratory research investigating web-mediated communication as a social interaction process. Models of communicative practice and moral development are used to empirically analyse interpersonal interactions concerning abnormal stock price/volume and IDS activity. New understandings from our approach might suggest areas of improvement for the design, development and regulation of web-based communication forums by incorporating a cultural understanding into the management and development of information systems in socially situated business communities.
IDS DISCOURSE AS SOCIAL INTERACTION

Internet forum environments generally challenge the limits of interactions experienced in face-to-face situations. While social forms of communicative distortion can still be practiced, the presence of such distortions is more visible to the participants. Moreover, a Web-mediated collaborative environment is more amenable to the analysis of communicative practices based on the text by-product of the online communication process. Individuals participating within a financial IDS typically pursue the aim of being or becoming successful stock investors and traders. At the same time they portray a particular image of themselves to make an impression on other forum participants and sometimes to manipulate and exert power in relation to others. As a result, their involvement in the communicative practices of forum discourse reflects the aims as well as the strategies they adopt to achieve those aims. For example, a forum participant whose primary goal is ethical investing may adopt a strategy of strictly following IDS rules so as to publicly demonstrate a high regard for other community members. On the other hand, another participant concerned only with maximising investment returns may not be so concerned about complying with IDS rules or community norms. We may draw a tentative conclusion here that different aims and the consequent strategies used to achieve them, produce different communicative practices that, in turn, contribute to the success of an IDS.

Communicative Practices in IDS

Collaboration within virtual communities is primarily mediated by language. Communication or linguistic acts function as social interaction mechanisms building up collaborative knowledge building processes. An examination of the interacting role and constitutive power of linguistic acts in establishing and maintaining knowledge is therefore necessary in order to gain deeper insights into collaboration within IDS. The prerequisite for this examination is the understanding of the performative meaning of linguistic acts explained by speech act theory. Apart from having a literal meaning, a speech act also has a performative meaning. That is, not what is said but what the saying enacts (Austin 1962, Searle 1979). In this study, we investigate and classify linguistic acts as constitutive of social processes involving knowledge creation processes.

Linguistic Acts Constituting Social Processes

IDS participants exchange linguistic acts in order to develop understanding and construct knowledge in the subject matter domain. They also use other types of acts to refer to norms and rules assumed to govern their interaction and the process of discourse itself. They may, for example, dispute some norms or rules, provide arguments to change them, and seek agreement from others. In all these instances, participants are referring to a particular kind of knowledge that is defined by norms and rules. Individuals will use yet another type of linguistic act to express their expectations, attitudes and feelings about forum communication and their satisfaction with the IDS collaborative processes.

Different types of linguistic acts refer to different domains of knowledge and are used for different purposes. Cecez-Kecmanovic and Webb (2000) proposed a formal classification of linguistic acts according to knowledge domain. That is, knowledge about (1) the subject matter, (2) norms and rules governing the process of collaboration and (3) the personal experiences, desires and feelings related to communication. The characteristics of linguistic acts of a particular domain are therefore defined as:

(a) Speech acts addressing the subject matter and the topic of discussion
   - raising claims, providing arguments, reasons, grounds
   - disputing claims, providing counter-arguments and grounds
   - seeking understanding either by sharing, expressing or imposing beliefs
   - seeking clarification
   - interpreting meaning

(b) Speech acts addressing norms and rules governing the process of collaboration
   - organising, regulating and directing the process of interaction
   - establishing or disputing rules of conduct and speech (normative regulation of the process of interaction)
   - claiming that some norms or rules are violated (acts that relate practical discourse to accepted norms or rules)

(c) Speech acts addressing personal experiences, desires and feelings
   - expressing personal views about, assessment of, or expectations from the communication process
   - expressing an individual reflexive perception of the communication process
   - expressing personal attitudes to cooperation and respect for others (heedful interrelating, intention to influence others, wish to dominate and exert control, etc.)
Social Processes and Goal Orientation in Discourse

Speech acts cannot be fully explained by reference to knowledge domain only. To understand the performativemeaning (i.e., what saying enacts) we have to focus on the orientation of forum participants within thecollaborative process. Using Habermas’ (1984) communicative action types as a guide, it is possible toinquire the action orientation of IDS participants in the communication process (Forester 1992). CecezKecmanovic and Webb (2000) identified three dominant action orientations:

(a) Orientation to knowledge sharing and creation - manifested as a wish to interact with others to increasemutual understanding and discuss and test alternative or new ideas and concepts.

(b) Orientation to achieving an end - manifested as an intention to succeed. For example, to trade and investsuccessfully or better than other forum members.

(c) Orientation to self-presentation - manifested as achieving an impression on others, portraying a particularimage of self

Model of Communicative Practices

The communicative practices model presented in Table 1 integrates the two levels of communicative analysisinto a representation describing the knowledge domains of linguistic acts (subject matter; norms and rules; andpersonal experiences) along one dimension, and the dominant action orientation (knowledge creation; achievingends and self-presentation) along the other. This model can be used to investigate any linguistic act in terms ofwhat and how it contributes to the construction and maintenance of collaborative processes. The communicativepractices model of collaboration can be used to assess the conditions necessary for the development of the idealcommunication environment for IDS communities. It can be seen that these conditions are progressively betterapproximated from the bottom level of the self-presentation orientation towards the top level of the knowledgecreation orientation as shown in Table 1.

Distortion of communication by an individual orientated to self-presentation may for example involve ignoranceof others and over-insistence on personal views and opinions; disregard for the desires and wishes of others;instrumentalisation of trust and relationships among group members; and the relegation of the forum to aplatform for personal promotion. The kinds of distortion by individuals oriented to achieving goals includelinguistic acts aimed at influencing the opinions and beliefs of others, and maintaining relationships with others toserve their own particular goals, etc. The presence of these communicative distortions usually disruptscollaborative processes and, if persistent and severe, may even cause a complete breakdown of communication ona forum. On the other hand, individuals predominantly oriented to creating and sharing knowledge do so in acooperative way. Guided by the force of better argument, they seek to establish mutual understanding and respect for others with different viewpoints. However, in any particular forum thread, we cannot expect a naturalinclination towards an ideal communicative environment or even a natural evolution towards such a situation.Rather we have to be sensitive to all kinds of distortions of communications that take place, either in an overt orcovert way, that prevent cooperative knowledge sharing and construction, trust building and self-realisation.

The communicative practices model of collaboration can help us better understand the ways that forumparticipants interact, exchange linguistic acts and construct text-based virtual communities. This model can leadus to see beyond the words and towards comprehending the performativemeaning embodied within the speechacts. The text transcripts from IDS provide well-preserved conversational footprints of collaborative processes andthereby the data necessary to analyse communicative practices.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge Domains</th>
<th>Subject Matter (1)</th>
<th>Norms and Rules (2)</th>
<th>Personal Experiences, Desires and Feelings (3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge Creation and Sharing (A)</td>
<td>• Raising claims related to the subject matter in order to establish mutual beliefs;providing arguments and grounds for a claim aiming at knowledge sharing</td>
<td>• Acts establishing mutually acceptable norms and rules regulating, organising anddirecting the process of interaction</td>
<td>• Acts expressing personal views, assessment of or expectations from the communicative process aimed at mutual understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Testing and disputing claims with reasons, providing counter-arguments and grounds with the aim of reaching understanding</td>
<td>• Acts of disputing (assumed or accepted) norms and rules seeking cooperative resolution</td>
<td>• Acts expressing an individual reflexive relation to the forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Argumentation guided by</td>
<td>• Acts of cooperative assessment of legitimacy, social acceptability and</td>
<td>• Acts expressing personal attitudes to cooperation, respect for others and their</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Achieving Ends (B)

- Raising or disputing claims and providing arguments, with an intent to frame attention, influence others and achieve goals
- Particular (manipulative) re-interpretation of meaning of the comments made by other forum participants
- Acts of influencing organisation and normative regulation of the interaction process that suit particular actor interests
- Acts of influencing the change of norms and rules so as to better suit achieving personal goals
- Maintaining interpersonal relationships for the achievement of goals
- Acts expressing intention to influence others
- Acts expressing an individual reflexive relation to the communication process in relation to personal success
- Acts expressing personal disrespect for others or paying attention only to the extent that serves a participant’s aims

Self-Promotion and Representation (C)

- Seeking understanding with others through the acts of performing
- Raising, disputing and resolving claims perceived not as argumentation leading to shared knowledge but as a stage for personal representation and promotion, a performance in which some win and others lose
- Acts of organising and directing the process of interaction that demonstrates participant’s leadership qualities, interpersonal relations etc.
- Acts that relate practical discourse to accepted norms or rules; eg. claims that some norms or rules are violated for the sake of focusing attention and establishing oneself as a particular type of personae (eg., fair, just, correct)
- Acts aimed at projecting a certain impression to others
- Acts revealing manipulative self-presentation aimed at dominating and controlling a situation or others
- Disregarding the interests, wishes and desires of others

Table 1. Model of Communicative Practices (adopted from Cecez-Kecmanovic and Webb, 2000, p. 315).

Stages of Moral Development and Social Orientation

Previous research has linked ethics and ethical behaviour to an individual’s stage of moral development (Rest 1986, Kohlberg 1969 and 1976). Kohlberg’s stages of moral development model are the basis of numerous studies of ethics and ethical behaviour and are described in Table 2. Kohlberg held that individuals progressed in their moral reasoning through a series of stages. He believed that there were three identifiable levels of moral development with each level consisting of two stages.

“At the conventional level the rules and values of one’s group, the laws of one’s society, and the commands of the legitimate authority are considered to be the basic moral criteria. At the preconventional level moral expectations are not understood as intrinsically valid and are confused with one’s self-interest. At the postconventional level the established morality is recognised as derived from more fundamental and universal concerns and thus as providing legitimate and yet limited criteria ... One can legitimately expect that preconventional individuals will not conform to socially accepted moral rules when these contrast with their self-interests, if it is safe to do so; one should also expect that postconventional persons will resist the pressure to modify their individually acquired principles in the direction of established norms or will refuse to change their morally determined course of action for the sake of public expectations, deference to authorities, and social acceptance” (Blasi 1980, p.35)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moral Development</th>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Social Orientation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-conventional (K1)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Obedience and punishment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Individualism and instrumentalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conventional (K2)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Interpersonal accord and conformity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Law and order, social accord</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-conventional (K3)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Social contract and individual rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Principled conscience, universal ethical concerns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Relationship between Kohlberg’s classifications of moral development and an individual’s social orientation.
At the pre-conventional level of moral development, individuals behave according to socially acceptable norms because they are told to do so by some authority figure (for example, parent or teacher). In the first stage of the pre-conventional level of moral development, individuals behave according to socially acceptable norms because they are forced to do so. The second stage of this level is characterised by a view that right behaviour means acting in one's own best interests. Although the threat or application of punishment is seen to compel obedience at this level, pre-conventional individuals may also be encouraged to take some course of action based on their expectation of an agreeable outcome.

Kohlberg believed that individuals could only progress through these stages one at a time. That is, progress is incremental and individuals could only come to a comprehension of a moral rationale one stage above their own. Thus, according to Kohlberg, it was important to present individuals with moral dilemmas for discussion that help them to see the reasonableness of a “higher stage” morality and encourage their development in that direction. The last comment refers to Kohlberg's moral discussion approach. He saw this as one of the ways in which moral development can be promoted through formal education. Kohlberg believed, as did Habermas, that moral development largely occurs through social interaction and that individuals develop as a result of cognitive conflicts posed at each stage that help lead individuals to higher stages of moral development.

METHOD

A mixed methods approach is employed in this study. An interpretive ethnographic analysis was used to provide the basis for interpreting the lived experience of the research subjects and to identify the data set used in this study (Atkinson 1990, Myers 1999, Trauth 2001). In general, the long-term experience of one of the authors in observing the forum culture made possible the identification of exemplary events that encapsulate the sentiments and experiences of the group at a broader level. The expertise and sensitivity of the investigator to the research context further informed this process.

Information event analysis is used to frame and interpret quantitative aspects of the forum conversation. Event studies have long been used in finance research to assess how capital markets respond to the release of reports containing new accounting information (see, for example, seminal works by Fama 1965, Ball and Brown 1968, Fama et al. 1969). The approach provides an appropriate research method for this study given its emphasis on the importance of the relationship between information and market behaviour.

DATA

The data analysed in this study consisted of text-based dialogue from a virtual community situated at a popular Australian IDS. The IDS has been in existence since 1995 and at the time the data was collected claimed more than 20,000 registered members and generated between four million and six million page impressions per month. Forum participants included amateur investors, day traders and professional brokers all of whom, despite their diversity of expertise, shared a common interest in stock market investment. Members were able to post messages on a range of financial topics in a bulletin-board style. Guidelines were provided to help participants conform to government regulations regarding investment advice and also to form the basis for moderating forum behaviour. A standard disclaimer notice was attached to every message posted to the forum. The disclaimer reminded the reader that some claims might not be accurate and to seek professional advice before taking any action.

The conversation data was identified through the emergence of highly evocative posts about a particular company. These posts were accompanied by considerable abnormal market activity (see Campbell 2001). The company at the centre of the conversation had not attracted any notable mention prior to this event. In fact, the investigator had monitored this site for several years and during that time had not observed any mention of the company. In all, the captured conversation involved 126 posters contributing more than 600 messages over a period of 48 days during April and May 2000. Each post was coded based on the communicative practices and social orientation schemas as described in Tables 1 and 2. The data collected and analysed in this study is considered to be of high quality and a particularly useful data set for the following reasons:
• The absence of any comment about the company in other forums or mass media prior to and during the initial stages of the forum conversation and anomalous market activity.
• The duration of the study period in which the posts were tracked and compared with market activity.
• The number of forum identities who participated in the conversation and the relatively large number of posts made during the study period.
• The absence of official company announcements that might explain the market and/or forum activity.

ANALYSIS

Figure 1 displays the volume and price range data (high, low and close prices) for the company of interest over an extended period of time. Share price volatility and traded volume increased markedly during the three days from trading day zero to two – the period labelled escalation in Figure 1. If investors differ in the way they interpret IDS rumour, time will elapse before consensus is reached and trading volume and price volatility will be higher than normal (Bamber et al.1999). This phenomenon is consistent with findings from earlier IDS studies (for example, see Wysocki 2000, Tumarkin and Whitelaw 2001, and Joyce et al. 2003). Share price variability and volume remained relatively high but in decline for several more days until returning to pre-event levels around trading day eight – the period labelled consolidation. This was followed by a period of steady price depreciation lasting approximately five trading days – the period labelled contraction.

Figure 2 shows the number of company specific posts per day against the share price intraday high. There had been no recent discussion on the IDS about the company prior to the anticipatory message which was posted on day zero. The most active period of posting occurred from posting day one to posting day seven. This pattern roughly coincides with the very large volumes and share price volatility identified earlier in Figure 1. However, there was a significant drop-off in the number of messages posted after posting day seven (see position of marker "A" in Figure 2). As forum activity takes precedence, it was decided to focus primarily on the period from posting day zero to posting day two compared against the period from posting day three to posting day seven.

![Figure 1. Event phases based on trading volume and intraday price range during the study period.](image-url)
Our focus in this study is to look for any structural shift in the moral ethos and communicative practices of the IDS community correlative to the *escalation* and *consolidation* phases of the share price and volume activity highlighted in Figure 1 and IDS activity highlighted in Figure 2. Understanding such shifts will provide important insights into the social dynamic of virtual communities and of how communal knowledge is created and managed in dynamic decision-making environments.

**Comparison between Escalation and Consolidation Time-Periods**

Communicative practices and the social orientation of posted messages during *escalation* and *consolidation* stages are presented in Table 3. The comparisons reveal that goal orientation toward knowledge creation and sharing (A1, A2 and A3) in period two increased significantly (from 25 percent to 37 percent) while the incidence of linguistic acts aimed at self-promotion and representation (C1, C2 and C3), and achieving ends (B1, B2 and B3) decreased overall. Despite the fall in the proportion of posts concerned with norms and rules (A2: from 22 percent to 17 percent), there was an overall increase in the amount of posts concerned with knowledge creation and sharing. This effect was due to a slightly larger increase in the number of comments referring to the subject matter knowledge domain (A1: from 41 percent in period one to 44 percent during period two).

Overall, the achieving ends category (B1, B2 and B3) remained the most frequent goal orientation of all linguistic acts despite a decline from 65 percent during period one to 58 percent during period two. However, the proportion of linguistic acts oriented towards achieving ends that dealt with the norms and rules (B2) and subject matter (B1) domains fell substantially in period two (from 32 to 22 percent, and from 38 to 33 percent respectively). Conversely, the number of achieving ends oriented acts that dealt with personal experiences, desires and feelings (B3) rose substantially between the two time-periods (from 30 to 45 percent).

There was a surprisingly low number of self-promotion and representation oriented posts (C1, C2 and C3) especially given the research context and the type of forum being studied. Overall the proportion of self-promotion and representation oriented acts fell from ten percent during period one to six percent during period two.
two. However, there were significant proportional differences within the knowledge domain dimension of posts displaying the self-promotion and representation orientation. In particular, the proportion of posts concerning norms and rules (C2) fell from 17 percent in period one to four percent during period two while the proportion of posts relating to personal experiences, desires and feelings (C3) rose from 54 to 65 percent.

In terms of Kohlberg's model of moral development and social orientation, the study data displays a substantial shift in the overall proportional pattern of moral reasoning between periods one and two. Although the comparative ranking of the levels moral reasoning remained constant between periods, the relative frequency of posts exhibiting pre-conventional and conventional reasoning changed significantly. The proportion of posts displaying a conventional social orientation (K2) fell from 73 percent in period one to 63 percent in period two. Correspondingly, the proportion of posts displaying pre-conventional social orientation (K1) increased from 22 percent in period one to 32 percent in period two. The proportion of posts displaying post-conventional social orientation (K3) remained constant at a relatively low five to six percent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Communicative practice</th>
<th>Stage of Moral Development</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coding #'s</td>
<td>A1 B2 C1 B3 C2 C3 K1 K2 K3</td>
<td>Coding #'s 79 31 68 93 61 128 8 1 17</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within</td>
<td>41% 22% 37% 38% 32% 30% 29% 17% 54%</td>
<td>Total posts (0-2) 92 179 15</td>
<td>274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% between</td>
<td>10% 5% 9% 25% 21% 20% 3% 2% 5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% A, B or C</td>
<td>- 25% - - 65% - - 10% -</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Primary time-period analysis based on the pattern of posts between posting days 0 to +2 in comparison to posting days +3 to +7.

Table 4 displays the ranking of communicative practices by the different stages of moral development displayed in all conversation posts between posting day 0 and posting day +7. Clearly the achieving ends goal orientation dominates both the pre-conventional and conventional stages. However, for those posts displaying post-conventional moral development, there is a greater focus on knowledge creation and sharing with an emphasis on all three knowledge domains – subject matter (A1); norms and rules (A2); and personal experiences, desires and feelings (A3). The pattern within the data suggests that there is an interaction effect between communicative practices and moral development. This result is of important theoretical interest and will be explored further in future research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage of Moral Development</th>
<th>Pre-conventional</th>
<th>Conventional</th>
<th>Post-conventional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ranking</td>
<td>Communicative Practice</td>
<td>Frequency n (%)</td>
<td>Communicative Practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>B3</td>
<td>77 (43%)</td>
<td>B3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>B1</td>
<td>55 (31%)</td>
<td>B1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>B2</td>
<td>25 (14%)</td>
<td>B2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total contribution</td>
<td>157 (88%)</td>
<td>304 (58%)</td>
<td>45 (90%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Communicative practices ranked by Stage of moral development displayed in posts between posting days 0 to +7.

DISCUSSION

Financial IDS can be used for both communicative and strategic action purposes. However, unlike other computer-mediated environments, the structure and focus of financial IDS can facilitate manipulation through the use of multiple messages and/or identities and by the very nature of the type of communication that takes place in these online environments. A preliminary analysis of the finance forum data using a communicative practice framework has revealed several communication patterns of interest. As expected, the communicative acts across both study periods were mostly focused on an achieving ends (B) goal orientation with the contents of the message texts distributed almost evenly across all knowledge domains. In contrast, communicative acts oriented towards knowledge creation and sharing (A) favoured issues concerned with the subject matter. While
self-promotion and representation (C) oriented text consistently favoured the personal experiences, desires and feelings knowledge domain.

There were some interesting differences between study periods one and two that warrant particular mention. For example, the overall increase in knowledge creation and sharing (A) and decrease in the other two goal orientations (B and C) would suggest that the IDS participants were attempting to make sense of their situation. Within the knowledge creation and sharing (A) oriented posts, there was a notable increase in subject matter discussion (A1) and a substantial decrease in discussion about norms and rules (A2). Apart from the overall decrease in achieving ends orientation (B) between periods, there were significant drops in both subject matter (B1) and norms and rules (B2) - but a substantial increase in personal experience, desires and feelings (B3). Which once again would suggest that IDS participants are being reflexive about their circumstances and attempting to make sense of the situation. An analysis of the data using kohlberg’s stages of moral development was also very revealing. The increase in pre-conventional morality and the decrease in conventional morality during the consolidation period are indicative of IDS participants re-affirming a community ethos of self-interest – a result that is not unexpected in this particular type of IDS environment. Finally, the interaction effect between communicative practices and moral orientation is of great interest and requires further investigation.

REFERENCES


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