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Change, rebellion, or else? Wikimedia movement governance

Dariusz Jemielniak, *Kozminski University*



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Dariusz Jemielniak

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Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to describe the unique governance model of the Wikimedia movement, so far not covered by the literature on organization and management studies, as well as the current dynamic changes occurring to it, and to analyze the open collaboration management system, for the benefit of the general management field.

Design/methodology/approach

The research design relies on netnographic, long-term, participative study of Wikipedia community at large. Methods used rely mainly on discourse analysis and interviews. The study benefits from the unique participant immersion of the researcher (who spent 6 years going native in the studied community, making over 5 edits each day on average, and was elected to several positions of highest trust in it).

Findings

The findings show that the open, participative and democratic character of organization, in theory oriented at sustainable solidarity, as well as the semi-anonymous character of some of the member identities, make the community more empowered, but yet much more belligerent, too. Also, the entirely open and flat governance model makes establishing stable leadership consensus more difficult.

Originality/value

The paper extends our understanding of organizational dynamics and governance in open collaboration organizations, and exposes the shortcomings of this model, which are an inevitable tradeoff of its undisputable pros.

Keywords

Wikipedia, online governance, open collaboration, distributed management, participative management

Article classification

Research paper

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Introduction

Wikipedia started in 2001 and became an instantaneous success. It is currently visited by nearly half a billion unique visitors monthly¹. The total number of edits on all Wikimedia projects as of December 2012 exceeds 1.7 billion². Currently it has over 4 million articles in the English Wikipedia alone³. Yet, the sheer number of encyclopedic articles is just the tip of an iceberg: the total number of all pages on the English Wikipedia exceeds 28 million⁴. They include page redirects, categories, and other technical pages, but also large amounts of discussions on article content, rules, policies, and participant interaction. Wikipedia projects, irrespective of the language, are filled with textual accounts of community life and culture (Wikipedia community relies almost entirely on written discourse as means of social communication and interaction), by far larger in size than the encyclopedia itself.

The community of the English Wikipedia is enormous as well: as many as 300,000 people edit every month. With such a huge population, and a meritocratic aim, it is essential that the project is developed with many rules and regulations; and indeed there is a huge para-legal side to Wikipedia (the total number of policies, rules, guidelines, and behavioral essays reaches 2000, with the total word-count in millions). While the phenomenon of spontaneous bureaucratic regulation is interesting in itself, in this paper I would like to focus on the issues of the movement governance and management, as they are unique, interesting and useful for comparisons with the brick-and-mortar organizations.

¹ <http://reportcard.wmflabs.org/> (all addresses were visited in December 2012)

² <http://toolserver.org/~emijrp/wikimediacounter/>

³ http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/List_of_largest_wiki

⁴ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special:Statistics>

Wikimedia⁵ movement, unlike many other virtual communities relying on the leadership of a few representatives (Butler et al., 2007; Lessig, 1999), uses entirely democratic and participative governance. The very rhetoric and culture of Wikipedia relies on equality, and even if this equality is illusionary in some cases (as power differentials naturally emerge informally), the formal structure and governance are fully participative. Sustainable solidarity is considered to be an important part of the organizational culture. All rules can be challenged by any participant, and decision-making is based on a consensus principle, that is instead of voting users are expected to try to persuade each other, until they reach a high level of agreement (typically, around 80%).

Additionally, Wikimedia movement is voluntary, and all participants do their share without any financial remuneration, and even without any professional recognition, which is otherwise typical for other open collaboration projects, especially in the field of open source software (Wasko and Faraj, 2005; Von Hippel and Von Krogh, 2003). They do so by their free will, as well as without direction or coordination (all editors are free to choose their interests and to develop Wikipedia the way they see fit, and can be challenged only if other editors object). Also, participation in Wikimedia does not require regular editors to disclose their identity and many editors participate anonymously. All these phenomena result in the fact that Wikimedia forms a nearly perfect example of a spontaneous collaborative organization (Shirky, 2009). When its size is taken into consideration, it is unprecedented and incomparable to any other social movement. Therefore it is a great object of study of grassroots governance and self-organizing communities.

⁵ Wikimedia is an umbrella organization for many projects: beside Wikipedia, there are also Wikiversities, Wikinews, Wikiquote, etc.

In this paper I am going to describe the managerial and group decision-making practices on Wikipedia and discuss the governance issues among the main stakeholders. I am going to show the high level of conflicts and common disagreements in the community, which in the same time is strongly collaborative and also entirely voluntary (and as such does not create strong incentives to stay, when discord persists). I am going to explain that the highly querulous character of interactions is actually a part of the governance system, relying on sustainable solidarity, and allowing to vent all doubts and encouraging disputes, in lack of fear of hierarchy and punishment. Yet, I am also going to show that this system, while sustainable, is also making establishing leadership much more difficult, and decision-making and coordination more chaotic.

Research methods

This paper results from a six-year ethnographic project on Wikipedia, conducted 2006-2012. It is a qualitative account, gathered by an organizational ethnographer (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Schwartzman, 1993; Kostera, 2007; Krzyworzeka, 2008), and relies on participative inquiry (Van Maanen 1988; Schultze 2000)(Denzin and Lincoln, 2007): the researcher was immersed in the studied culture and “went native” during the process of the study. Such an approach is one of the legitimate strategies for anthropological projects (Sperschneider and Bagger, 2003; Gatson and Zweerink, 2004; Van Maanen, 1988/2011). Although in traditional qualitative studies it was occasionally criticized by some authors as risky (Leach, 1982: 124; Walsh, 2004; Lobo, 1990), in some approaches, such as e.g. action research and performative studies of cultures it is considered to be superior to non-participant and disengaged approach (Reason, 1988; Jemielniak, 2002; Greenwood and Levin, 1998; Jemielniak, 2006). Also in mainstream anthropology going native has been considered as

sometimes justified by the benefits it brings (Tresch, 2001; Hayano, 1979; Sperschneider and Bagger, 2003). Additionally, in the studies of virtual communities, where “natives” are never born, but always encultured, going native, while keeping an “anthropological frame of mind” (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992) is particularly useful, when understanding the proper context of discussions, viewpoints, ideas, and organizational meanings (Magala, 2009; Dobosz-Bourne and Kostera, 2007; Krzyworzeka and Krzyworzeka, 2012) is indispensable, while difficult to achieve by a stranger.

Over 6 years the researcher logged into Wikipedia practically every day (mainly on Polish and English Wikipedia, but also on other projects), and made a five-digit total of edit counts. The researcher was elected one of about 100 administrators and later one of seven “bureaucrats” on Polish Wikipedia, and later also one of approx. 40 stewards for all Wikimedia projects, as well as served as one of seven ombudspersons for the whole movement, and eventually became the chair of the Funds Dissemination Committee of Wikimedia Foundation. The fact that the researcher is conducting an academic study of open collaboration virtual communities has been made explicit.

The main research method used for the paper has been participant observation (Flyvbjerg, 2001; Denzin and Lincoln, 2003), which in the case of netnographies (Kozinets, 2010) combines elements of observation and discourse analysis (Grant et al., 1998), as almost all interactions and behaviors are inherently textual and have to be analyzed narratively (Boje, 2001; Jemielniak and Kostera, 2010). The study has been also supplemented by 26 interviews with Wikipedia editors and 5 with Wikimedia Foundation employees. In terms of practical presentation of the interpretation of the observed processes for this paper, representative cases

and quotes were selected, to exemplify processes considered typical for the studied community, chosen from many similar others.

Although the paper does draw from grounded theory heritage (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) in terms of creating categories and systematizing the material, it is an organizational ethnography and relies more on anthropological reflection (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992; Clifford and Marcus, 1986) than on coded categorizations. For the purpose of this paper only, the number of relevant discussion-, talk-, and comment pages, which were carefully analyzed and interpreted, exceeds 150,000 words of field material⁶.

Decision-making rules on Wikipedia

Wikipedia is created through entirely voluntary contributions of editors, who have no financial benefits to participate. There is a plethora of studies of motivations to participate in Wikipedia (Forte and Bruckman, 2005; Ciffolilli, 2003; Yang and Lai, 2010; Baytiyeh and Pfaffman, 2010; Kuznetsov, 2006; Lee and Jang, 2010). For the purpose of this paper it is sufficient to acknowledge that some people are eager to spend significant amounts of time developing Wikipedia, and they often perceive their contributions as a fun hobby or play, rather than work, which is not unusual for knowledge-intensive environment (Hunter et al., 2010; Huizinga, 1949; Sørensen and Spoelstra, 2012).

Since all contributors have the right to remain anonymous and can edit under nicknames, the issue of trust, characteristically for open-collaboration organizations (Ciesielska, 2010;

⁶ For the convenience of the reader, all references to Wikipedia rules are given in the format typical for internal Wikipedia links. Getting a full URL is very easy, since the syntax is stable. For example, whenever I refer to [[WP:Policies and Guidelines]], I reference the link http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Policies_and_guidelines

Ciesielska and Iskoujina, 2012; Latusek and Cook, 2012; Latusek and Jemielniak, 2007), becomes highly important. In the case of Wikipedia, interpersonal trust is substituted by trust in procedures (Jemielniak, 2012), and the internal order of collaboration is partly sustained by the trust endowed in policies and their execution.

As a result, the number of policies, rules, and other regulations on English Wikipedia is tremendous: including essays and advisory notes, there are more than 1200 regulatory documents, and the word-count of just the main 50 policies is close to 150 thousand words. This phenomenon is interesting in itself (Jemielniak, 2013; Konieczny, 2009), yet for the purpose of this paper it is important mainly to describe the core rules guiding the process of decision making on Wikipedia⁷.

One of the main policies of Wikipedia describes the way how disputes should be resolved, and it refers to consensus ([[WP:Consensus]]):

When agreement cannot be reached through editing alone, the consensus-forming process becomes more explicit: editors open a section on the talk page and try to work out the dispute through discussion. Here editors try to *persuade others*, using *reasons* based in policy, sources, and common sense; they can also suggest alternative solutions or compromises that may satisfy all concerns. The result might be an agreement that does not satisfy anyone completely, but that all recognize as a reasonable solution. Consensus is an ongoing process on Wikipedia; it is often better to accept a less-than-perfect compromise – with the understanding that the page is gradually improving – than to try to fight to implement a particular "perfect" version immediately. The quality of articles with combative editors is, as a rule, far lower than that of articles where editors take a longer view.

⁷ For practical purposes I'm referring to English Wikipedia regulations, without describing all nuances of local projects (each of them establishes their own rules). Yet, most of the rules are shared, with minor variations, across all Wikimedia family.

Similarly, as one of the fundamental Wikipedia policies ([[WP:What Wikipedia is not]]) describes:

Wikipedia is not an experiment in democracy or any other political system. Its primary (though not exclusive) means of decisionmaking and conflict resolution is editing and discussion leading to consensus — not voting. (Voting is used for certain matters such as electing the Arbitration Committee.) Straw polls are sometimes used to test for consensus, but polls or surveys can impede rather than foster discussion so should be used with caution.

In general discussions consensus is typically considered to be reached if at least 80% of the good faith disputants agree (bad faith comments and votes are ignored).

There are many essays and instructions on how consensus can be reached. Voting is perceived as the last resort, best avoided at all. One of the Wikipedia adages states that “voting is evil”. In the same spirit, a behavioral guideline on English Wikipedia says ([[WP:Polling is not a substitute for discussion]]):

Wikipedia works by building consensus. When conflicts arise, they are resolved through discussion, debate and collaboration. While not forbidden, polls should be used with care. When polls are used, they should ordinarily be considered a *means* to help in determining consensus, not an end in itself.

All these rules are not unusual for other organizational models relying on egalitarianism and solidarity, such as for the Search Conferences (Trist, 1983; Williams, 1979) or action research approaches (Oels, 2002; Crombie, 1985; Jemielniak, 2006), and in general for industrial democracy designs (Bass and Shackleton, 1979; Greenwood et al., 1991). They are also quite commonly used in contemporary knowledge-intensive organizations e.g. in IT project management (Koch, 2004; Marks and Lockyer, 2004). Without doubt they fall right into the

postulates of cooperative and participative management theories (Bass and Shackleton, 1979; Kim, 2002; Canet-Giner et al., 2010) oriented at the benefits of employee empowerment.

Yet, the effects of an a-hierarchical and consensus-oriented organization design are amplified in an environment where identities can be created freely, and personas enacted on the spot. The already known phenomena take different forms in a virtual organization environment. In online communities, such as Wikipedia, although credentials have to be built gradually, and trust gained through extended presence in the community, the separation of professional, regular life persona from the fluidly created online one, encourage expressing open dissent even more, as the consequences in terms of organizational power relations are much smaller, and all consequences are related to the virtual persona.

Thus, in this paper, I am going to exemplify the typical trajectories of group decision-making on Wikipedia, emphasize its democratic and open character, but also expose the dysfunctions it entails.

Governance and decision-making in practice

Three cases, which will be briefly (due to reaching the word-count limit) presented here to portray the practical problems with fully egalitarian governance in virtual communities, have been chosen from many similar ones, and are considered very representative to the described phenomena.

The first incident took place in December 2011. Jérôme Hergueux, a talented Ph.D. student of economics from Paris, following a research study Berkman Center for Internet and Society at

Harvard University on dynamics of online interactions and behavior⁸, wanted to engage Wikipedia community in an experiment. His research was carried out under the supervision of the European Research Council and the French ethics committee, and he requested comments and support for the project from Wikipedia community months ahead of time, discussed it in the so-called administrators' noticeboard⁹ since March 2011, was able to get both the Wikimedia Foundation and the Wikimedia Research Committee formal support¹⁰, and even publicly discussed the project on the foundation's mailing list in April 2011¹¹.

Yet, when a banner, which was used to invite potential candidates to participate in the survey, was published on the English Wikipedia in December 2011, a community's uproar¹² within several hours led to the banner being taken down¹³, although it was far from getting enough respondents. Most of the protests were against using the banner space for any reason other than fundraising¹⁴, and the main immediate reason for taking the banner off Wikipedia was a mistaken assumption of one of the administrators that the banner is shown to all logged-in visitors (it was not, as it relied on a special algorithm, and was displayed only to users matching some chosen criteria)¹⁵.

Apparently, even though the banner was discussed in the community in general, it did not reach the ones who were puzzled by it. Clearly, the omission of a reminder about the study a

⁸ See: http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Research:Dynamics_of_Online_Interactions_and_Behavior

⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Administrators%27_noticeboard/Archive222#Researchers_requesting_a_dministrators.E2.80.99_advices_to_launch_a_study

¹⁰ http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Research_talk:Dynamics_of_Online_Interactions_and_Behavior#RCom_review

¹¹ See: <http://lists.wikimedia.org/pipermail/foundation-l/2011-April/065229.html>

¹² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Administrators%27_noticeboard/IncidentArchive731#Harvard.2FScience_Po_Adverts

¹³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Requests_for_comment/Central_Notices

¹⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Wikipedia_Signpost/2011-12-12/News_and_notes

¹⁵ http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Research_talk:Dynamics_of_Online_Interactions_and_Behavior#Banner_temporarily_disabled

day or two before it started was quite grave. Also, the incident started a wider discussion whether any banners not related immediately to fundraising should be allowed at all, even if they are not really commercial ads. The whole discussion led to a rather puzzling conclusion that it is not even clear, in the social and not legal sense, who “owns” the banner space, as the Foundation assumed it has the community’s mandate to use it for the purposes it deems valuable, and many in the community believed that it is the community that owns it in principle, and the Foundation is only allowed to use it to raise funds.

Another, somewhat typical example of how decisions are made and internal governance enacted comes from Italian Wikipedia. Its community wanted to protest against a bill discussed in the Italian Parliament, which according to many interpretations imposed a requirement on all websites operating in Italy to correct any content that some party considered to be detrimental to his or her image. Such amendments were supposed to be published within 48 hours, without a possibility to comment, and not adhering to the regulation was to be penalized by a fine of up to 12 thousand Euro¹⁶. After a discussion in Italian community, from October 4 to October 6, 2011 Italian Wikipedia was blacked out (its content was inaccessible to the general public). It was the first time in history when any Wikimedia project protested this way.

Interestingly, from the point of view of internal communication, governance and decision-making, any discussion within the international Wikimedia community started only later¹⁷. The information on the protest reached the Foundation mailing list as late as on the first day

¹⁶ The full text of the protest manifesto is available at: http://it.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Comunicato_4_ottobre_2011/en&oldid=43993454

¹⁷ See http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Wikimedia_Forum/Italian_Wikipedia#Close_the_Italian_chapter and the discussions here: <http://lists.wikimedia.org/pipermail/foundation-l/2011-October/thread.html>

of the protest¹⁸. Moreover, even though unsurprisingly all major world media considered the situation as a piece of news worth covering, and many contacted the Foundation to ask for comments and a reasoning for the protest, the Foundation was informed that the blackout had been planned only several hours before it started¹⁹. Apparently, none of the Italian editors and the local leaders of the protest even thought that it may be a good idea to contact the Foundation with advanced notice, not to mention consulting such a major move, affecting the whole Wikimedia community.

It should be noted that the Foundation immediately expressed official support for the blackout²⁰, yet quite clearly the spontaneous and democratic style of decision-making resulted in amplifying the informational chaos.

Both examples show that many decisions within Wikimedia movement are made ad-hoc, and without a controlling body. Although the Foundation serves as the main organizational backbone of the movement (as it owns the domains, the servers, and runs the fundraising campaigns), it does not serve not only as a decision center, but also neither as information coordinating hub.

There are many reasons for this phenomenon: one is the radical empowerment ideologically followed within the movement, as Wikipedia denounces formal hierarchies and, at least on a rhetorical level, attempts to reduce them to a minimum, and consequently all editors are supposed to be treated with equal voice. Rejection of all hierarchies may go in pair with rejecting information flow coordination as well. Also, within the movement there are stakeholders who sometimes minimize the influence of the Foundation on the decision-

¹⁸ See: <http://lists.wikimedia.org/pipermail/foundation-l/2011-October/069191.html>

¹⁹ See: <http://lists.wikimedia.org/pipermail/foundation-l/2011-October/069258.html>

²⁰ See: <http://blog.wikimedia.org/2011/10/04/regarding-recent-events-on-italian-wikipedia/>

making (for instance, some local chapters perceive their role as taking over some of the responsibilities and resources, to better address the movement's mission locally). Yet, what is quite clear, such governance and decision-making models result in higher contingency and uncertainty of organizational actors.

Discussions similar to the described above take place all the time. For instance, the Wikimedia Foundation is often criticized for spending too much money on non-technical expenses and for being overstaffed. In the same time, it is criticized for spending too little money on staff and has to justify the salary levels as fair, when it is suspected of underpaying its employees²¹. The open and a-hierarchical mode of decision-making, as well as focus on a consensus often result in stalemates and lengthy discussions without a resolution.

This was the case of the discussion on some forms of image filtering. In a large, international poll the majority of the Wikimedia community expressed support to allow controversial content filtering (drastic or nude images used for educational or artistic purposes on Wikipedia) in 2011²². The Board of Wikimedia Foundation passed a resolution, supporting developing tools that would allow users to opt into some form of such content filtering²³. Yet, the strong opposition of smaller groups of editors in local communities, and in particular on the Spanish Wikipedia²⁴ (79% against), the French Wikipedia²⁵ (81% against), and the German Wikipedia²⁶ (85% against) made the changes impossible to implement, due to a lack of consensus. The continuing debate effectively blocked any solution: even though the Board has the formal authority to introduce policy changes, and even though it did have a majority

²¹ See: <http://lists.wikimedia.org/pipermail/wikimedia-l/2012-December/123194.html>

²² The referendum engaged over 24 thousand voters, it is clear that there is a support for some form of image filtering. See: http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image_filter_referendum/Results/en

²³ For discussions on controversial content see e.g.: http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Controversial_content

²⁴ http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Encuestas/2011/Sobre_el_filtro_de_im%C3%A1genes

²⁵ http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikip%C3%A9dia:Sondage/Installation_d%27un_Filtre_d%27image

²⁶ http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Meinungsbilder/Einf%C3%BChrung_pers%C3%B6nlicher_Bildfilter

mandate in this particular case, they did not dare to push it. A strong and disciplined group of dissenters, eager to spend their time debating the issue, and aware of wide support coming from some of the leading Wikimedia communities (German, Spanish and French Wikipedias), was able to torpedo the change. Additionally, a mainly theoretical, but still verbalized threat of forking²⁷, made it clear that the editors opposing content filtering are very determined to preserve the status quo. The discussions on how could controversial content be tackled with both respect for those who would not like to see it, and also for those who perceive any form of limiting access to it, even when conscious and voluntary, as censorship went on and took hundreds of thousands of words²⁸.

In fact, such lengthy debates are the heart and soul of Wikipedia experience. Organizational policies, encyclopedic rules, or even the content of encyclopedia articles are all disputed, and the arguments grinded *ad nauseam*. Even the most insignificant topics become the bone of content. For instance, between April and June 2012 a discussion on English Wikipedia took place to decide if Mexico actually has any official language²⁹. Reliable sources were exchanged, links posted, quotes given, and the whole discussion totaled to over 17 thousand words, without reaching a clear consensus though. Deciding whether the proper spelling for the article name should be “yoghurt” or “yogurt” took ten large debates, and many conflicts between editors, in the time between November 2003 and December 2011 when it was resolved in a more permanent way³⁰. One of the largest conflicts on English Wikipedia community (Ayers et al., 2008; Anderson, 2011; Lih, 2009) took six years, 400 thousand words of debates and consultations, and came down to deciding if the current Polish city of Gdańsk should be described under its name, or rather its former German one (Danzig),

²⁷ <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Wikipedia-Fork>

²⁸ See e.g. http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Controversial_content/Brainstorming or http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User_talk:Jimbo_Wales/Personal_Image_Filter

²⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Mexico#RfC:Does_mexico_have_an_official_language

³⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Yogurt/Archive_6#Move_page_to_yogurt

possibly more familiar to English speakers and more frequent in older history textbooks. All in all, often the discussions are longer than the articles they are related to (Forte et al., 2009). Effectively, experienced editors who stay on Wikipedia are the ones who either enjoy disputes and quarrels, or the ones who are indifferent to most of the discussions. This may very well be one of the reasons for extreme gender gap on Wikipedia (according to different estimates, as little as 16% of editors may be females, although the methods of measurement may partly affect the results, see: Lam et al., 2011; Hill and Shaw, 2013), widespread in the free culture movement in general (Reagle, 2013).

The three described cases represent what Wikipedia decision-making and governance model relies on:

- lengthy discussions (everybody is welcome to express their opinion at any stage, a debate goes on until a consensus is established),
- expressing one's opinion is encouraged and the level of fear of hierarchy and power distance is low (in fact, Wikimedia luminaries are often more criticized, due to their bigger exposure),
- most decisions are heavily debated and even when there is a common agreement, they are likely to be criticized anyway,
- there is no clear coordination center for decision-making, users take on leadership positions ad hoc and execute decisions as they see fit (e.g. by turning the described banner off),
- communities of editors have strong ownership of their decisions and of the websites they perceive as their own, to the extent that they do not necessarily bother to inform other stakeholders about the consequences and a possible impact of the decisions (as was in the case of Italian Wikipedia blackout).

Summary and implications

The fluid leadership and chaotic governance model of Wikipedia definitely adds to its attractiveness (Skolik, 2012). Yet, as can be seen, it results in delaying the decision-making processes.

While Wikipedia governance epitomizes the consensus-oriented organizational design, heavily propagated as beneficial for traditional, business organizations (Drucker, 1993; Pursuer and Cabana, 1998), and often portrayed as the future of organizational governance (Castells, 1996), it also clearly exposes the deficiencies of this model, when it is applied fully.

“Democratic hierarchies” address the issues of ownership, authority, and leadership much more often than in regular organizations (Viggiani, 1997). On Wikipedia not expressing dissent is in fact treated as agreement, and since fear of hierarchy does not mitigate the participants, most topics result in heated debates. As Clay Shirky observes (2012):

Open systems are open. For people used to dealing with institutions that go out of their way to hide their flaws, this makes these systems look terrible at first. But anyone who has watched a piece of open source software improve, or remembers the Britannica people throwing tantrums about Wikipedia, has seen how blistering public criticism makes open systems better.

Yet, such a design, besides the obvious advantages of full democracy, ownership of decisions, and radical transparency, results also in problems atypical for regular organizations.

Wikipedia, both on the level of each of the projects, and the movement as a whole, has almost no centralized control (Malone et al., 2010: 21). It is basing on ad-hocratic principles (Konieczny, 2010; Konieczny, 2009), and relies on fragile consensus and decisions. In a sense, Wikipedia organization is incomplete by design (Garud et al., 2008), which gives its members the perception of control, but in the same time takes the stability away: all rules and decisions can be overturned, sometimes by agreement of a small fraction of the community, determined enough to insist on a change, and aware of the procedures for change.

Everyday tasks coordination and leadership is dispersed (Zhu et al., 2012; Zhu et al., 2011) and, as already noted, Wikipedia organizational culture strongly enforces rhetorical egalitarianism and democracy. In a way, it denies having stable hierarchies and leaders. Since even in lack of formal leadership informal governance structures naturally emerge, one consequence of the anti-leadership rhetoric and dispersed management is mainly poorer legitimization of those who take up leadership roles (O'Neil, 2009; Epstein, 2001). Also, the resulting lack of a clear coordination center makes negotiating with the outer world more difficult (as was in the described case of a research banner), and internal governance and responsibilities (including the common sense of being responsible for other people in the movement whenever our actions are affecting their standing) very hard to define and narrow down.

Wikipedia community, as a whole, is deeply ideology driven (which may make an organizational change more possible: Dobosz-Bourne and Kostera, 2007) and passionate about its mission (Antin, 2011). It is very possible that the transparency, egalitarianism, and anti-leadership dispersed governance, along with the consensus-oriented decision-making processes contribute significantly to the success of this open collaboration organizational

design. Also, one of the fundamental principles of Wikipedia is that all articles have to be created basing on reliable sources, and discussed basing on the merits of argumentation only, without relying on the personal expertise or formal authority. It is quite understandable that such approach to the encyclopedic articles requires similar principles and denouncement of formal hierarchies also in organizational governance, and since the very beginning has been the social glue tying together people of different beliefs and backgrounds (Enyedy and Tkacz, 2011; Chen, 2011).

Yet, as described in this paper, such decision-making model and governance, besides the many mentioned positives, inevitably results in organizational dysfunctions, too. The sustainable solidarity leads to a system, which relies on endless disputes and quarrels, chaotic and ad-hoc management, erratic internal and external communication, and difficulties in enforcing even the widely supported solutions. Since Wikipedia is a model solution of democratic and networked governance and decision-making in computer-supported collaborative work, and since the organizational designs similar to those used on Wikipedia are considered as advisable and having the future, it is worth to explore their darker sides from the management science angle.

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