Motivation for knowledge sharing by expert participants in company hosted online user communities

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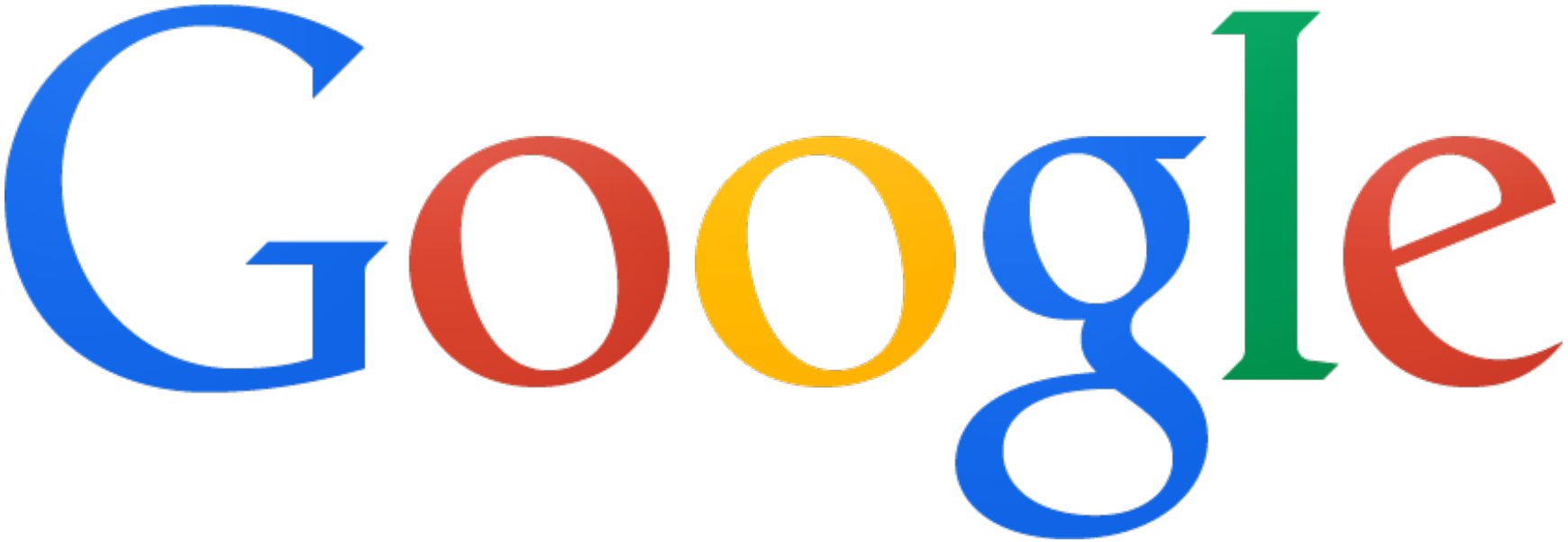
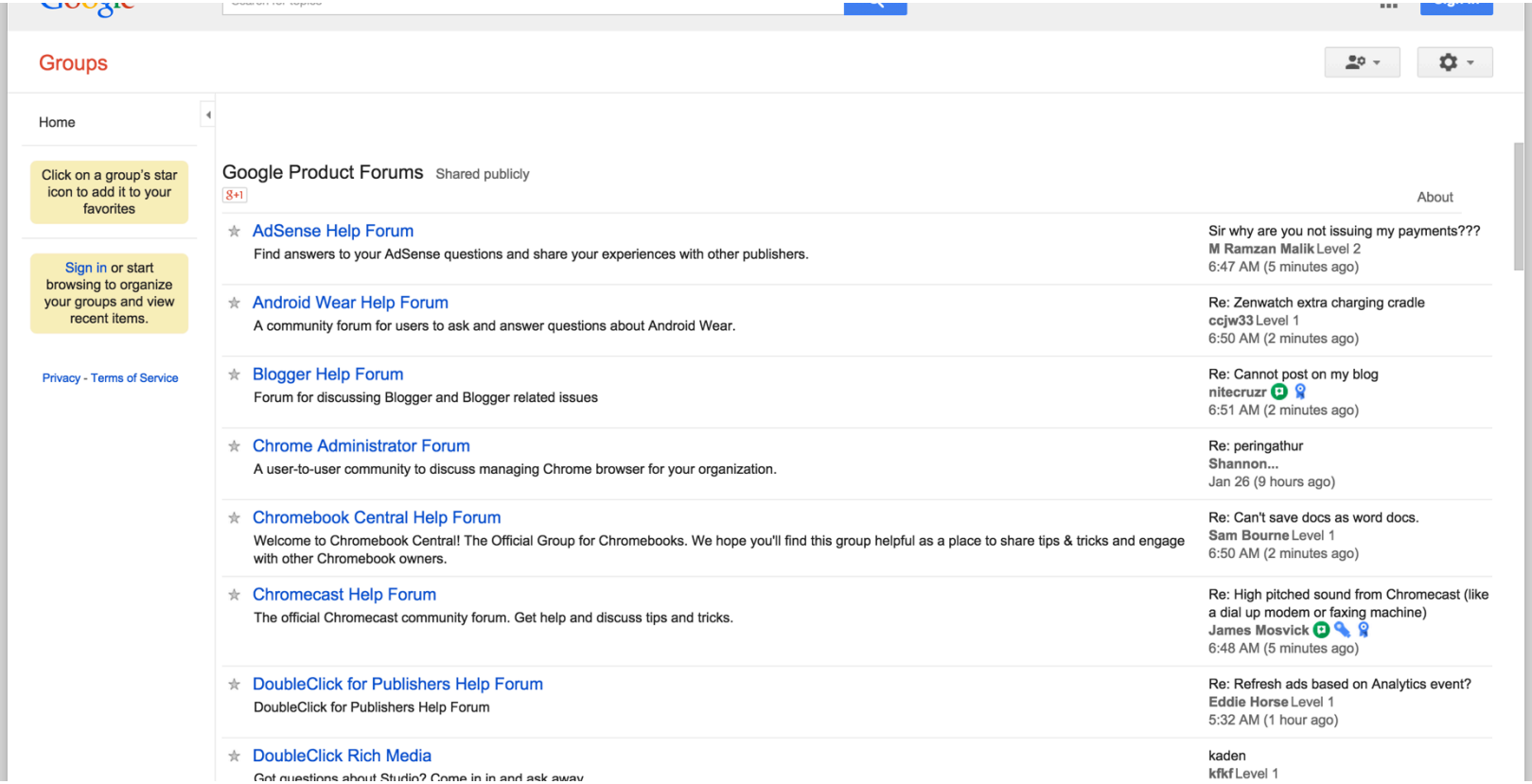
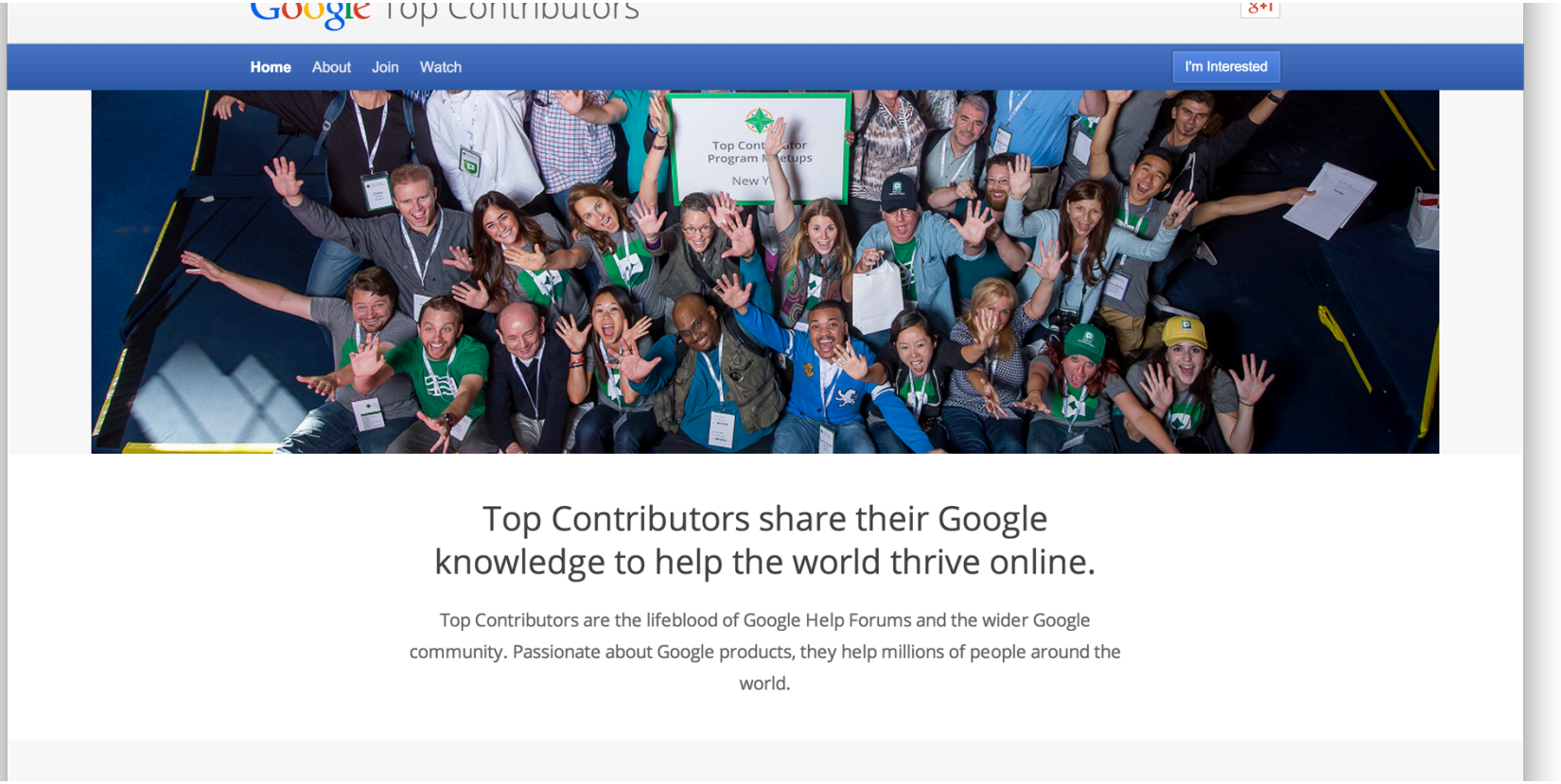

Google

Over 250 help forums across 26 languages

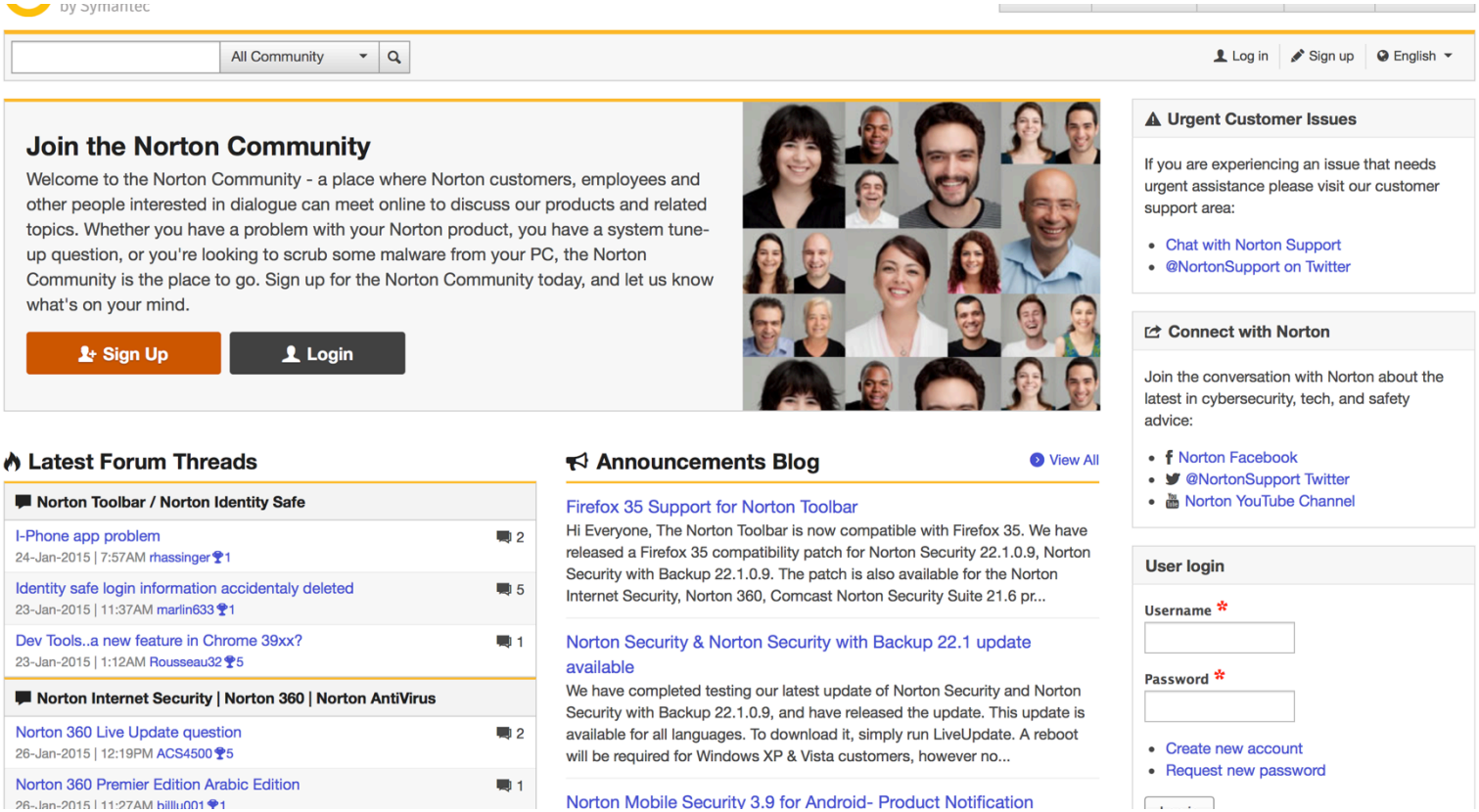


Over 550 Top Contributors

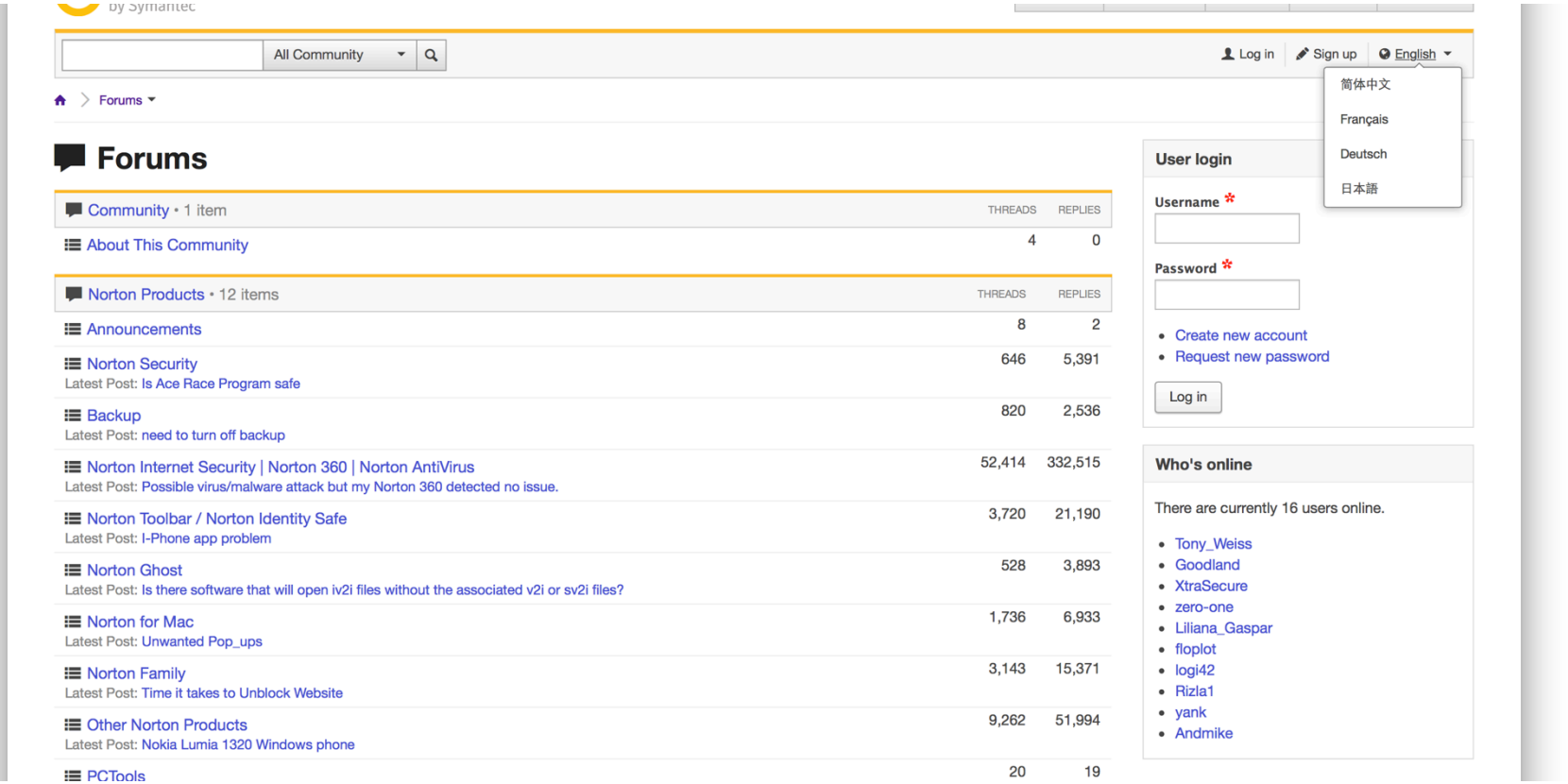


Symantec™

Norton Community



Norton Community forums



About 50 gurus accounted for …

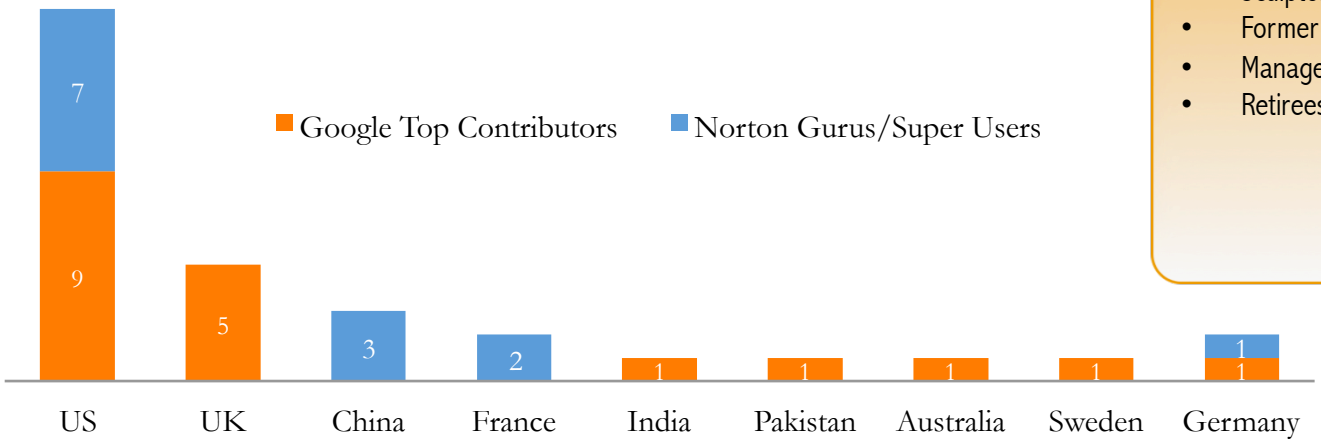
- More than 50% of the overall posts
- 70% of the solutions
  - And Employees make up another 25%, the rest 5%
- The average guru in the English forum spends about 35 hours per week helping people
  - "We have maybe 20,000 users in the English forum and we have only 10 gurus."

Research question

Why do expert users in company hosted online user communities share their knowledge?

Participants

- 2 program managers
- 32 expert users



- IT Professionals
- Students
- Law enforcement officer
- Nurse
- Crochet hobbyist
- Sculptor
- Former soldier
- Manager of a bus company
- Retirees

Findings

How they became expert users

- Experienced users searching for answers to their questions or issues (56%)
- Novice users interested in learning more about the company's products (28%)
- Already active in other forums (11%)
- Connected with the hosting company and was invited (6%)

Quotations

I started using a product called Google Voice and I really liked it. So I started going online to look up answers to my questions about settings and different things and I noticed that most of the questions went unanswered. There was nobody from Google answering questions and some of them I knew. So I started answering the questions that I knew and I help people out.

Quotations

I have a degree in art history, which you know my father's eyes I could probably hear them rolling from here every time I say I have a degree in art history. Then I started working and I fell into some web work by chance and just liked it so became self taught. Had no formal training or real interest before. Then I found the forums as a really good source of information. I asked a question and stuck around. So I learned, built up my confidence, started answering questions, learning more, and then eventually they told me I could be a part of the program.

Quotations

It was back in 2011, I had just finished my high school entrance exams, and the summer break was about to be over. One day I was on the Internet visiting a forum and noticed a link to the Norton forum: It used to be in English, and now it was in Chinese. So it dawned on me that they started a Norton forum for China. I joined the forum and started answering people's questions.

Level of participation in the company hosted online user communities

- Number of postings
  - 3,000 to 20,000
  - Average 10,060
  - 100-400/month
- Time spent
  - Ranged from 30 minutes per week to 40 or 50 hours per week
  - Average 11 hours per week

Types of knowledge sharing activities

- Knowledge sharing with other users
  - Answering other users' questions
  - Sharing resources and best practices
  - Escalating problems up to the hosting companies
- Knowledge sharing with the hosting companies
  - Directly providing product feedback
  - Suggesting improvements or new product features
  - Testing new products and features

Motivation

1. Enjoyment of helping others (69%)
2. Learning (59%)
3. Passion for the hosting companies and products (41%)
4. Need for affiliation (25%)

5. Company provided incentives and rewards (16%)
6. Professional visibility (9%)
7. Fun (6%)

Motivator 1: Enjoyment of helping others

a. Satisfaction simply from hearing a "Thank you"

b. Having the opportunity to help others, which sometimes their own job did not provide

c. Helping others avoid suffering from mistakes or experiencing the same frustration

d. Providing a kind of public service

e. Paying it forward or paying back help gained from others (reciprocity)

f. Taking pleasure in being able to help others by doing what one is good at

Quotations

I really enjoy helping people. It is always great when someone comes back and says thanks, that solved my problem. It is always great to get that feedback from users.

Quotations

Because there are a lot of hacks out there who think they know what they are doing and then they screw up and screw over peoples' websites and things like that. There is a charlatan everyday out there.

Quotations

I know there is no such thing as true altruism but I really do like to help. It is in my nature and I'm in a role with my paying job sometimes where often I'm the bad guy. I'm policing and project managing and not helping as much. This is a really good channel for me to get help out. I try to do a lot of volunteer work in my community, but often times with my schedule and with the girls I can't get out and get hands on so this is my way of giving back.

Quotations

I like to help people without any expectation of anything in return. This is a form of community service or public service.

Quotations

I believe that every person should do what they know best. When they do what they know best, they will succeed. They will proceed in their life, they will feel happy because they are successful. I am good with this kind of thing so I do it because I can. I do it because I can.

Interest in helping others: Where does it come from?

- Influence from upbringing and early career experiences

Quotations

Let's put it this way – it is something to do with upbringing. I'm Jewish. When I was a kid, I asked my father if I could bring somebody home for Passover, and his answer was that's a *mitzvah*. Means it's a blessing. You do that, you are helping somebody. It doesn't matter whether they are Jewish, non Jewish or anything like that. If you help somebody, that is a blessing. It is part of my upbringing. I will help wherever I can.

Quotations

I don't know if this matters but I can tell you one thing that influenced me a lot when I was younger. I worked in hotels in the hospitality industry and I had some really good role models for managers and bosses that really impacted me and said, be helpful to people, employees that you supervise and guests and everybody else, because it will really pay off in the end. They gave me good role models; these ladies were very strong women. They actually showed me how it makes a difference in people's lives and how you can touch people and motivate people. So I think that is probably what impacted me a lot.

Motivator 2: Learning

a. "Keeping fit"

b. "Floats my boat" mentally

c. "Learning from the pros"

Quotations

I’m empowered. I grow, I develop, and crap I got a whole lot better.

Quotations

It is really hard to keep up in this business anyway and so it helps me by participating in the forum and seeing things people are bringing up because a lot of times people will bring up an odd topic. It gives you a chance to actually do the research and figure out how do they differ, how are they the same. It is one of those things that motivates you to kind of stay on your toes and do a lot of research. I am able to keep current just by answering questions especially ones that I really don't know the answer to off hand.

Quotations

I like the technical challenge of the particularly interesting questions. What I tend to be doing is sifting through and looking for the interesting questions. I like the intellectual challenge of saying, 'That is a question I haven't seen before' and answering it. In the process I find it rewarding to help people.

Quotations

I like to learn. There are a lot of brilliant, crazy people in there and I learn a lot all the time.

Motivator 3: Passion

a. For the hosting company

b. For the products

Quotations

I like the product. It's got a great future. I think it will work for an awful lot of people. I really do enjoy using the product. I think it's a really good product. So I like to help people that are using the product so they can get the most out of it.

Quotations

I find one of the really difficult things when you are teaching or using technology is that the technology is already done when the educators get it. So I got involved because I'm like, well, I don't know Java Script but I can learn a little bit and I know a little bit more than some of my teaching friends so the whole idea was if we want to have tools that support our practice, we need to get involved much sooner, build something together. So that is the number one motivator, to try and help shape a tool that will be used by many people that support the kind of practice I support.

Quotations

The other thing is, Norton, I have had it for years and none of my machines have ever been infected so I believe in the product, I really do have a faith in the product. If I didn't have a faith in the product, I wouldn't be doing this because I am not going to go out there and blow smoke and tell somebody a lie.

More quotations

I like the mentality of the company. I like how Symantec communicates to the employees, very professional. They tell you straight in the eye, look, this and that. They pay you respect for what you offer to the company. I like that very much. For me Symantec is something I think will never leave me and when the day comes that Symantec tells me, 'We have a job for you,' I pack my things and in two minutes, I'm gone.

More quotations

I have also a program that I think is the bee's knees. This solves a lot of issues as far as 3D communication and in order for me to help get more people to use this program I am promoting it too. I want more people to join the fold.

Motivator 4: Need for affiliation

a. Belonging to a special group of people

b. The relationship and friendship

c. Connections with people from “the outside world”

Quotations

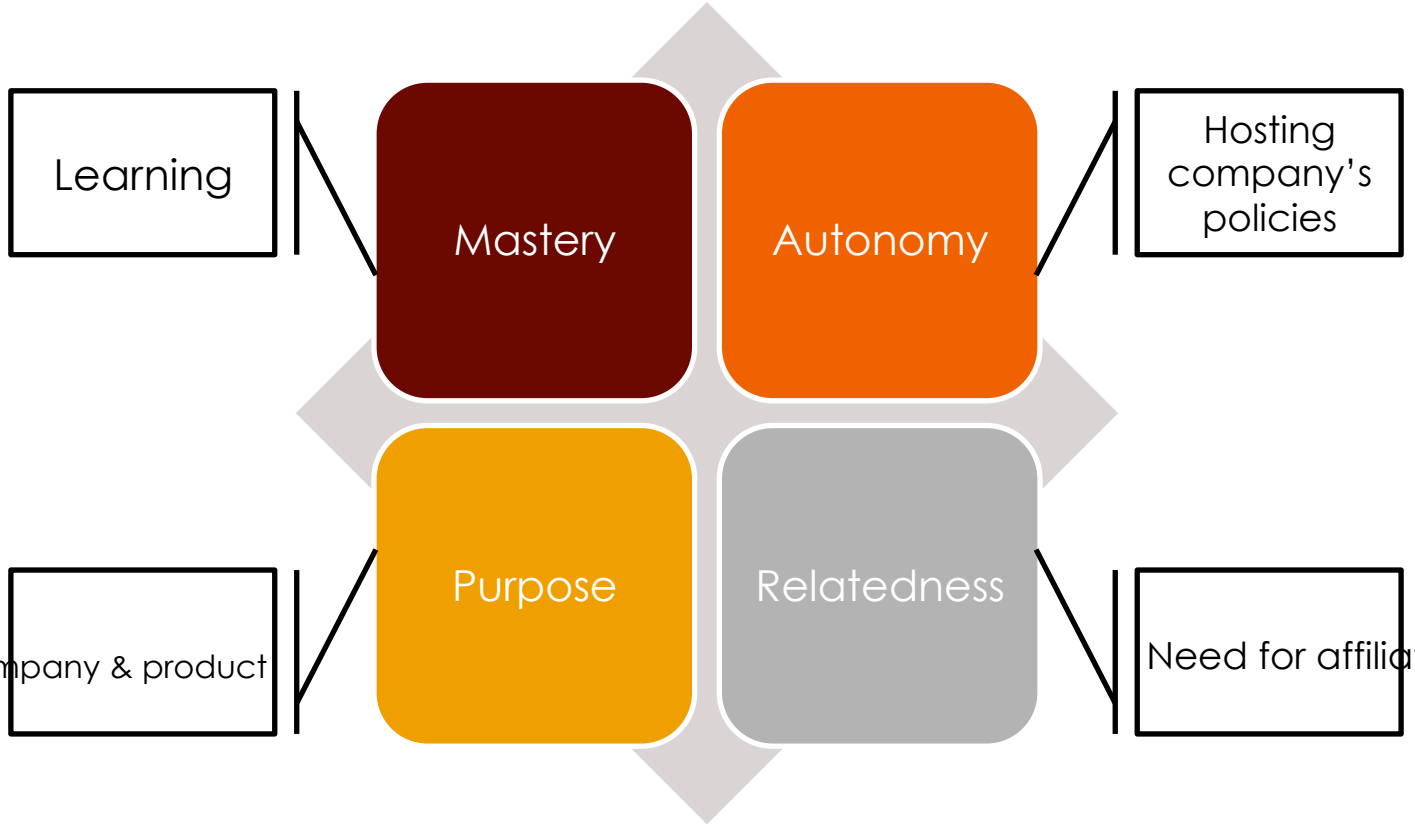
We are with our own kind, your own friendship but it is give and take. It's a very rich, dynamic community. You have kinship. You have some kindred spirits here.

Quotations

It was one of those things that when I came to Pakistan I realized I am literally cut off from the rest of the world. I need to maintain some affiliation or some affinity with the world outside. This was one good way.

Discussions

Putting it all together



Based on self determination theory: Ryan & Deci, 2000; Pink, 2009