Citizen Science: Learning to effectively contribute in virtual organizations

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Presentation Abstract

Virtual citizen science projects such as the Zooniverse (http://zooniverse.org) provide tools and opportunities for public engagement in scientific research, thus providing an increasingly important venue for informal science education. However, these projects raise the question of how new contributors to such open online collaborative projects learn to participate. Many studies of informal learning apply the framework of situated learning, which emphasizes novices observing and participating in practice as well as interacting with more experienced participants. However, online citizen science projects offer participants only limited forms of engagement with practice. To explain how newcomers learn in such restricted settings, we extend the notion of situated learning and suggest that volunteers exploit varied modes of access to practice, feedback and relationship building. In current work, we are extending this work by exploring how machine learning systems can be used to support learning by newcomers.

Speaker Biography

Kevin Crowston is a Distinguished Professor of Information Science in the School of Information Studies at Syracuse University. He received his Ph.D. (1991) in Information Technologies from the Sloan School of Management, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

His research examines new ways of organizing made possible by the extensive use of information and communications technology. Specific research topics include the development practices of Free/Libre Open Source Software teams and work practices and technology support for citizen science research projects, both with NSF support.

He is currently a co-Editor-in-Chief for the journal *Information, Technology & People*.