



# Crowdsourcing in a time of empowered stakeholders: Lessons from crowdsourcing campaigns

Matthew Wilson<sup>a</sup>, Karen Robson<sup>b,\*</sup>, Elsamari Botha<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Royal Institute of Technology (KTH), Lindstedtsvägen 30, 114 28 Stockholm, Sweden

<sup>b</sup> College of Business Administration, Central Michigan University, 1200 South Franklin Street, Mount Pleasant, MI 48859, U.S.A.

<sup>c</sup> School of Management Studies, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch 7701, Cape Town, South Africa

## KEYWORDS

Crowdsourcing;  
Crowdfunding;  
Creative consumer;  
Consumer backlash;  
Crowdthink;  
Crowd hijacking

**Abstract** Crowdsourcing can test a company's willingness to relinquish control to key stakeholders. Using past examples of four failed crowdsourcing initiatives, we explore the negative and unintended consequences of crowdsourcing in an age when stakeholders are empowered to speak their minds, make a mockery of organizational initiatives, and direct initiatives as it suits their own agenda. The concepts of crowdthink and crowd hijacking are introduced, and advice is given on how managers can avoid or anticipate some of the potential issues that arise during crowdsourcing endeavors. With these considerations, managers can harness the power of crowds effectively to achieve organizational goals with limited negative consequences.

© 2016 Kelley School of Business, Indiana University. Published by Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

## 1. The rise of crowdsourcing

Since Howe introduced the concept of crowdsourcing to academic literature in 2006, scholars and practitioners have become increasingly interested in the phenomenon. Howe's (2006) definition of crowdsourcing has since been updated to refer to "the use of IT to outsource any organizational

function to a strategically defined population of human and non-human actors in the form of an open call" (Kietzmann, 2017, p. 3). This practice can be successful in business contexts largely because tapping into a crowd allows organizations to benefit from a large number of people who bring diversity in ideas, knowledge, and experience, which is leveraged to the benefit of the organization (Erickson, Petrick, & Trauth, 2012). Examples of successful crowdsourcing initiatives abound, including Glassdoor (Dabirian, Kietzmann, & Diba, 2017), Pebble, First-build, and Shock Top (Brown, Boon, & Pitt, 2017). The idea behind crowdsourcing is not new; in fact, it dates back to 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. when Aristotle

\* Corresponding author

E-mail addresses: [matthew.wilson@indek.kth.se](mailto:matthew.wilson@indek.kth.se) (M. Wilson), [robso1k@cmich.edu](mailto:robso1k@cmich.edu) (K. Robson), [elsamari.botha@uct.ac.za](mailto:elsamari.botha@uct.ac.za) (E. Botha)

discussed the benefits of turning to ‘the wisdom of the many’ when solving complex problems (Lord, 2013). Today, new terms have been developed to describe the value that emerges from large groups in a crowdsourcing context, including ‘collective intelligence’ (Lévy, 1997) and ‘crowd capital’ (Prpić, Shukla, Kietzmann, & McCarthy, 2015). Indeed, crowdsourcing has tremendous promise in business applications, many of which have already emerged or are beginning to emerge in both practice and scholarly research.

Despite the tremendous potential of crowdsourcing campaigns, crowdsourcing is not a silver bullet. Consider the recent Name Our Ship campaign launched by the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) in the U.K. The group’s newly-commissioned \$290 million research vessel is set to sail on a prestigious scientific mission in 2019, during which it will collect data from some of the most remote regions of the world in hopes of securing Britain as a world leader in marine and climate change science. To help instill pride in the new ship, the NERC reached out to all Brits by asking them to contribute name ideas in the form of ‘RSS [Name].’ In its initial press release, NERC included criteria for the type of name it was looking for and commenced voting by suggesting a few regal names, such as Falcon and Endeavour. However, the four most popular names in terms of user votes were: (1) RRS Boaty McBoatface, (2) RRS Henry Worsley, (3) RRS David Attenborough, and (4) RRS It’s Bloody Cold Here.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the suggestion RRS Boaty McBoatface received 10 times more votes than the next-closest name and was the runaway winner when the month-long campaign finished. The name also inspired other humorous suggestions, including RRS Big Metal Floaty Thingy-Thing and RRS I Like Big Boats and I Cannot Lie.

The popularity of the name suggestion RRS Boaty McBoatface generated so much international buzz that the NERC voting website was temporarily shut down due to unexpectedly high traffic. During the campaign, NERC announced that the poll was intended to solicit suggestions and that the final decision lay with the council. They have since announced that the selected name of the vessel is the RRS Sir David Attenborough, and “the name Boaty McBoatface will live on as the name of the ship’s high-tech remotely operated sub-sea vehicle.”<sup>1</sup>

The story of RRS Boaty McBoatface is not unique. As we discuss in this article, there are numerous other examples in which crowdsourcing backfires,

or is not taken seriously by members of the crowd. However, as Cicero stated: “We must not say every mistake is a foolish one.” The unintended consequences of failed crowdsourcing initiatives provide managers with key lessons and unique insight into their market. To that end, we present a series of cases to illustrate and explain how and why crowd-based initiatives can go wrong.

In this article, we first define and explain the concept and practices of crowdsourcing. Then, we provide extended examples of unsuccessful crowd-based endeavors. From these examples, we extract a series of takeaways for managers who wish to harness the power of crowds to achieve organizational goals; specifically, we explain a number of considerations as to crowd construction in order to generate crowd capital (Prpić et al., 2015). Finally, we add to the literature by explaining and illustrating some of the pitfalls of crowd-based initiatives and provide suggestions for managers on how to avoid these.

## 2. Crowdsourcing: Theory and practice

Crowdsourcing emerged in literature when Howe (2006) recommended taking a function typically performed by employees and outsourcing it to everyday people. Recent attention on crowdsourcing is not surprising. It has had huge success in the following areas:

- Organizational functions, such as new product development (Poetz & Schreier, 2012) and advertising (Brabham, 2008);
- Contexts such as disaster relief (Zook, Graham, Shelton, & Gorman, 2010), healthcare (Brabham, Ribisl, Kirchner, & Bernhardt, 2014), and retail (Brabham, 2010);
- Small individual entrepreneurship (e.g., crowd-funding) and large organizations (e.g., Amazon’s MTurk); and
- Both online and offline settings (Prpić et al., 2015).

Indeed, the list of applications and contexts for crowdsourcing goes on. Crowdsourcing has proven to be an exciting new development for a wide range of organizations and individuals around the world.

There are four types of crowdsourcing, which can be identified based on two key dimensions: what type of contribution members of the crowd

<sup>1</sup> See <https://nameourship.nerc.ac.uk>

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5108839>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5108839>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)