

Defining and Improving the Role of Facilitators within a Knowledge Management Tool

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Abstract: Community of Practice (CoP) Facilitators are critical for supporting knowledge sharing and learning within organizations, yet the effectiveness of their activities is not well understood. Prior research has focused primarily on general task descriptions, with limited research on how facilitation is completed in practice, or how organizational, motivational, and cognitive factors shape effectiveness of activities. This study addresses this gap by investigating Facilitator activities through a mixed-methods case study conducted within Eni's knowledge management system (e-kms). By utilizing both qualitative interviews (n=25) and a quantitative survey (n=172; 83% response rate), this work investigates the differences in the interpretation of activities, levels of engagement, perceived challenges, and value creation across Facilitators. The findings show that facilitation is not a standardized role but is rather a dynamic and complex activity. Patterns emerge for the need of formal recognition, time allocation, and organizational support related to Facilitator motivation and behaviour. A critical point is that effectiveness is driven by motivation and time investment, rather than years of experience. A significant share (21%) showed low motivation in their activities, underlining the need for a better understanding of the barriers affecting Facilitator engagement. The results of this study led to the development of a multi-level Facilitator Effectiveness Model, highlighting how successful facilitation is based on organizational factors, behavioural capacities, and community outcomes, representing a theoretical contribution to knowledge management literature. From an organizational perspective, a Strategic Facilitator Profile was created to enable a targeted selection and onboarding process, ensuring that Facilitators are equipped with the right skills and expectations to guide their activities. This aims to increase recognition of facilitation activities, improve knowledge sharing, and support innovation. Finally, the study has sparked broader organizational awareness of the value of knowledge management. By conceptualizing facilitation as a dynamic, motivation-driven practice, this research enhances the literature beyond task-based models and provides insights for improving knowledge sharing in complex organizational environments.

Keywords: Knowledge management, Facilitators, Communities of practice, Collaboration, Knowledge sharing, Knowledge diffusion

1. Introduction

Knowledge management is critical for organizations seeking to retain their expertise and foster growth. E-kms is Eni's central tool for sharing and storing technical knowledge to support problem-solving, collaboration and innovation. Within this system, Community of Practice (CoP) Facilitators play a critical role in promoting engagement, managing content, and shaping collaboration between employees. However, while Facilitators are valuable, it is unclear what makes their activities effective.

Recognizing the need to clarify Facilitator activities, a comprehensive study was launched to define the Facilitator tasks, understand current challenges, and develop a strategic Facilitator profile. While prior works propose facilitation taxonomies, empirical studies of Facilitators in large organizations are limited, as they do not measure the multi-level interactions that can influence Facilitator effectiveness. The goal was to formalize expectations of Facilitators and clarify the selection and onboarding process for managers, which would improve the use of the e-kms tool and further promote knowledge sharing. This paper contributes by:

- Proposing a Facilitator Effectiveness Model integrating organizational, behavioural, and community factors
- Developing a Strategic Facilitator Profile to guide selection and onboarding
- Providing empirical insights into facilitation practices in a large organization

2. Literature Review:

2.1 The Importance of Knowledge Sharing

In competitive, technical organizations, internal knowledge is critical for growth. In this context, knowledge is a resource that can be shared and reused across an organization (Davenport & Prusak, 1998). Knowledge management systems (kms) are tools for storing, organizing, and sharing knowledge (Alavi & Leidner, 2001). When a knowledge management system functions effectively, it creates a culture of continuous learning and sharing (Dei & Walt, 2020), and much of a company's technical knowledge is formed and kept by its individuals, rather than simply being part of a technological system (Nonaka & Konno, 1998). Therefore, it is vital to implement a proper system to store and share this knowledge. However, these systems cannot function effectively without the proper motivation to contribute to them (Hong et al., 2011). A lack or aversion to knowledge sharing (Serenko & Bontis, 2016), or organizational culture barriers (Girdauskienė & Savanevičienė, 2007) can have consequences in knowledge sharing. Within the literature, this led to a shift in research in understanding knowledge management systems as combinations of both technological and social systems (Orlikowski, 2002; Leonardi, 2011). Communities of Practice (CoPs) were implemented to promote the use kms within organizations, however it was unclear how individuals could mediate the relationship between the people and the tool.

2.2 Communities of Practice and the Tasks of Facilitators

Communities of practice are groups created out of a shared expertise or passion, with a focus on knowledge sharing and organization (Wenger et al., 2002; Wenger, 2004). These communities aim to create positive environments that foster professional development (Wilson et al., 2023), and they can be implemented in knowledge management systems to increase motivation and collaboration between individuals (Wenger, 1999). However, communities of practice can lack direction without an assigned leader or proper guidance. Many prior works note a common challenge of maintaining participation and engagement with CoPs over time (Roberts, 2006; Gongla & Rizzuto, 2004). This is due to the difficult task of balancing the social nature of communities with the formal requirements of an organization. Therefore, Facilitators could better exploit the community's knowledge for continuous innovation and growth (Matsuo & Aihara, 2022; Sekkal et al., 2019).

Facilitators act as guides who lead a group towards a community objective, and they play a pivotal role in knowledge sharing within communities of practice (Hildreth et al., 2004; Shuman, 2005). Their goal is to promote engagement and effective knowledge sharing (Muhammed & Zaim, 2020), and to guide other community members towards effective learning and collaboration (Ishom et al., 2023). Facilitators have shown to be critical in providing support, guiding knowledge flow, addressing challenges within the CoP (Kimball & Ladd, 2004), through networking and connecting community members, promoting discussions, maintaining the standards of the community, and encouraging participation (Fontaine, 2001; Barnett et al., 2012). Through these activities, CoP members can refer to Facilitators for advice or guidance in relation to knowledge sharing within the community and promote further engagement (Tarmizi et al., 2009). However, despite previous works having a general understanding of various Facilitator activities, they tend to focus either on engagement behaviours or technical tasks, rather than combining both perspectives for a more comprehensive guideline. Works examining how Facilitators truly experience their role and activities are quite limited, and they are focused more on idealized roles, rather than the more complex reality of how facilitation occurs effectively within an organization.

2.3 Motivational and Cognitive Perspectives

Beyond organizational tasks, facilitation can also be shaped by psychological and cognitive behaviours, as the tasks require motivational dynamics and social connections to affect how knowledge flows within the community. A challenge in facilitation is that knowledge-sharing activities may not be formally recognized, even if valuable contributions are made (Serenko & Bontis, 2016). This can affect the motivation levels of Facilitators if they feel their work is not valued. Drawing from Self-Determination Theory, motivation is affected by a need to have control, master skills, and feel connected to others (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Therefore, Facilitators may perform well if they feel autonomy to perform their tasks, feel skilled in their activities, and have engaging connections within their CoPs. In contrast, without formal recognition or valuable connections, their motivation may decline. Motivation is also shaped by Social Identity Theory, where individuals show higher commitment to activities when there is a strong community, and when the activities are recognized and valued (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). For this reason, recognition of Facilitator activities and a sense of community and support within the CoP is important for the effectiveness of knowledge management activities.

In addition to motivational dynamics, facilitation also has cognitive demands. Cognitive Load Theory highlights how individuals have cognitive burdens in managing complex information when there is lack of clarity in their tasks (Sweller et al., 2011). If Facilitators lack understanding of their activities, they may feel less willing to manage the tasks within their already complex workload and focus primarily on their immediate work tasks. Therefore, considering these motivational and cognitive behaviours can help improve the Facilitator experience through adding value and clarity to the activities.

2.4 Research gap and Contribution

Overall, previous research has recognized the importance of Facilitation with gaps regarding the understanding of the activities and experience. Most works focus on an idealized form of facilitation, rather than considering how the role functions in complex organizational environments. It is also important to consider that there are organizational, motivational, and cognitive factors that improve the effectiveness of Facilitator activities. While early works aim to identify key facilitation tasks, (Tarmizi et al., 2005), later studies note how there are challenges in maintaining engagement and motivation within communities (Tarmizi et al., 2009). To manage this, Facilitators must have proper theoretical knowledge training, but also the means to share this knowledge with community members (Avery, 2016). Because of a lack of clarity on which conditions better support effective facilitation in large organizations, the goal of this study was to better define the activities and selection process of Facilitators within Eni's e-kms and CoPs to improve Facilitator effectiveness.

3. Methodology

This study used a two-phase, mixed-methods design to gain both in-depth and generalizable insights on Facilitator behaviours, motivations, and challenges within the organization.

3.1 Phase 1: Qualitative Interviews

Phase 1 interviews were based on a series of in-depth, individual interviews exploring how Facilitators perceive their activities, how they engage with e-kms, and which factors influence their behaviour.

The selection of Facilitators was guided by a sampling strategy designed to ensure representation across key factors:

- Activity level within the e-kms tool (active, intermediate, inactive)
- Ranking of the CoP
- Seniority within the organization (junior, mid-level, senior)
- Gender

25 Facilitators were interviewed from March to June 2025. During each interview, 10 open questions were proposed to discuss their role. At the beginning of each session, the interviewee was informed of the anonymity of their responses. The questions were grouped by theme, covering the following subjects:

About you and your CoP

- Each Facilitator's specific tasks they complete inside and outside of the portal
- How tasks are allocated to Facilitators within their CoP

Facilitators in greater generality

- Describing the general role of a Facilitator and the main activities a Facilitator should complete
- The mission and values of a Facilitator

Facilitators' activities

- The most important activities inside and outside of the portal for a Facilitator

Facilitators' performance

- Qualities that make a Facilitator "good" or effective, compared to indicators that a Facilitator is struggling or ineffective.

Facilitators' network

- How well Facilitators interact with other Facilitators, knowledge owners, and CoPs.

Suggestions and recommendations

- Any further suggestions that could help improve the Facilitator experience.

The interview transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis, with codes generated to observe common themes of activities, challenges, motivation, and perceptions. These themes were then refined into dimensions of Facilitator typologies, behavioural patterns, and motivational challenges, thus providing the foundation for the phase 2 survey design.

3.2 Phase 2: Quantitative Survey

The objective of the phase 2 survey was to validate and generalize the initial findings and further analyse trends in survey responses across the entire Facilitator population. The general themes of exploration were behaviours, challenges, and perceptions of Facilitator activities within their CoPs.

The survey was designed with a mix-methods approach, incorporating both:

- Quantitative Likert scales to capture structured data
- Open-ended responses to allow for more in-depth explanations

This survey was sent to all 172 Facilitators within the e-kms tool. The survey contained 25 questions, categorized into the following sections:

- Level of Facilitator Experience
- Facilitator Tasks
- Facilitator Skills and Cognitive Abilities
- CoP Value Creation
- Facilitator Challenges
- Tools and Support for Facilitators

The survey integrated cognitive and behavioural theories from the literature to better understand the following factors:

- Motivation: Questions about task ownership, personal mission, value added, and top management support to understand the main factors that motivate Facilitators
- Social identity: Questions about team collaboration help understand how Facilitators perceive their role on a social level.
- Cognitive load: Questions about clarity of e-kms use and understanding of tools helps to understand how Facilitators mentally perceive the system to be comfortable in relation to their natural way of thinking

4. Results

This section presents the empirical findings from both phases of the study, with the aim to integrate organizational, behavioural, and community factors that influence Facilitator effectiveness.

4.1 Response Rates and Motivation

Of the 172 Facilitators, the survey had an 83% response rate, indicating strong engagement and reliable results. 6% of these Facilitators chose to not consent their data collection, while 30 Facilitators did not complete the survey. Therefore, we calculated 21% of Facilitators with low motivation or involvement in their role, which signals a need to re-evaluate the organizational barriers and motivational factors that can improve involvement.

4.2 Sample Characteristics

In Figure 1, we see the distribution of years as a Facilitator, and the declared weekly time dedication to their activities. Facilitators varied in experience:

- 47.6% had 1–5 years of experience
- 26.6% had less than 1 year
- 20.3% had more than 5 years

Despite this variation, time dedicated to facilitation was consistently low:

- 38.5% spent less than 1% of their time
- 46.2% spent 1–5%
- Only 9.8% spent more than 5%

Overall, 84.7% of Facilitators devote less than 5% of their working time to facilitation, confirming that the role is typically treated as a secondary responsibility.

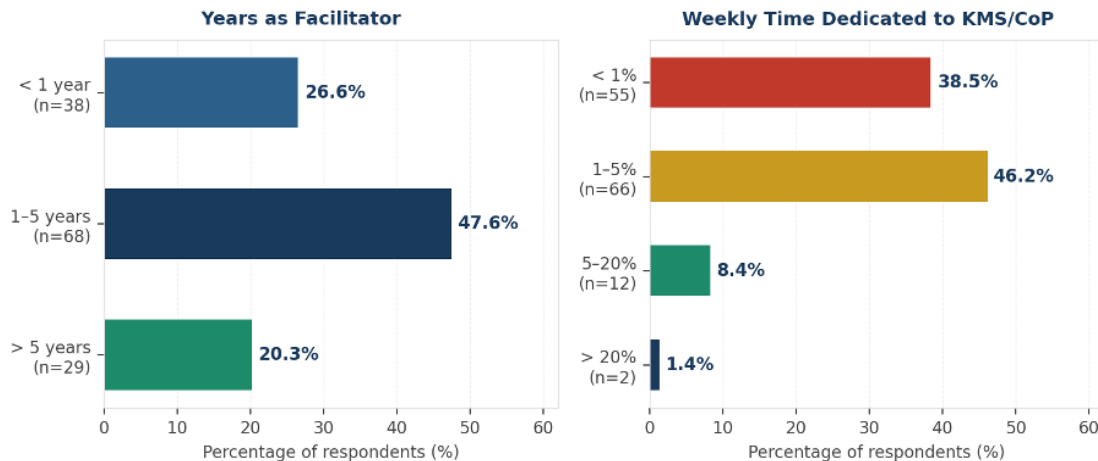


Figure 1: Distribution of Facilitator years of experience (Q1) and weekly time dedicated to activities (Q10)

4.3 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were computed for all multi-item Likert scales (rated 1 = not at all important to 5 = extremely important) and for the three outcome variables. Table 1 presents means, standard deviations, and median values for all composite scores.

Internal consistency was assessed for all six multi-item scales using Cronbach's alpha. Values ranged from .757 (Q4, Inside Portal Activities) to .865 (Q12, CoP Added Value), all exceeding the conventional threshold of $\alpha \geq .70$. Thus, the scales are considered to possess sufficient internal consistency for further analysis.

4.3.1 Facilitator activities

Facilitator activities were grouped into three categories: general tasks, activities within the e-kms platform, and activities outside the platform. General activities ($M = 3.91$) emphasized understanding CoP objectives, familiarity with the e-kms system, and encouraging knowledge sharing. Activities within the e-kms that had the highest importance ($M = 4.01$) were creating a positive and participatory environment, and supporting interaction and engagement. In contrast, administrative tasks such as meeting planning were rated lower. Activities outside the e-kms were less emphasized ($M = 3.69$), with higher importance placed on promoting the community and collecting relevant knowledge. Overall, Facilitators prioritize relational and engagement-oriented activities over administrative responsibilities.

4.3.2 Facilitator skills and value

Facilitators identified key competencies as critical to their role ($M = 4.20$), such as clear communication, curiosity and continuous learning, and ability to motivate others. Lower rated skills included goal-setting and structured planning. These results show an emphasis on interpersonal and behavioural capabilities over formal management skills. For value creation, Facilitators primarily view CoPs as tools for knowledge identification, storage, and sharing. They found less importance for accelerated learning, professional development, and onboarding time. This suggests that CoPs are perceived more as knowledge repositories than developmental platforms.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for Likert scale questions

Question	Items	n	M	SD	Mdn	α
Q2 General Facilitator Activities	12	135	3.91	0.58	3.9	.807
Q4 Activities Inside e-kms Portal	8	135	4.01	0.55	4.0	.757
Q5 Activities Outside e-kms Portal	6	135	3.69	0.74	3.7	.829
Q7 Facilitator Skills & Qualities	9	135	4.20	0.51	4.2	.839
Q12 CoP Added Value	6	128	3.54	0.83	3.7	.865
Q14 Facilitator Challenges	10	128	3.62	0.67	3.6	.829
Q16 Tools & Resources	6	135	3.08	0.68	3.0	—
Outcome Variables						
Q18 Perceived Effectiveness	1	135	3.38	0.86	3.0	—
Q20 Work-Role Balance	1	135	2.97	1.10	3.0	—
Q22 Management Support	1	135	2.67	1.15	3.0	—

4.4 Analysis of Group Differences

As the survey data was ordinal, Kruskal-Wallis H tests were used to observe group differences in varying time commitment and years of experience of Facilitators. Where the Kruskal-Wallis test indicated statistical significance, pairwise follow-up comparisons were conducted using Mann-Whitney U tests with Bonferroni correction (adjusted $\alpha = .008$ for six pairwise comparisons). A key finding shows a significant effect of weekly time commitment on perceived effectiveness, $H(3) = 26.06$, $p < .001$. As seen in Table 2, average perceived effectiveness increased with time dedication, showing how Facilitators who spend more time in the role perceive a higher effectiveness in their activities.

Time commitment was also significant in relation to importance of facilitation skills, $H(3) = 13.14$, $p = .004$. This suggests that Facilitators who commit more time to activities rank skills as more important, or that those with higher skill awareness are more likely to invest more time in the activities. In addition, time commitment was also significantly related to perceived challenges, $H(3) = 11.44$, $p = .010$. Facilitators who have the highest time commitment also rated challenges as higher, suggesting that the more exposure to activities, the more the challenges become apparent.

In contrast, years of experience as a Facilitator did not significantly affect perceived effectiveness, $H(2) = 0.07$, $p = .966$. This null result shows that the years of experience as a Facilitator does not relate to how much one feels they are effective in their activities, rather, the commitment dedicated to activities is a stronger factor. In addition, years of experience did not significantly relate to skills or challenges as well, suggesting that the time commitment is more of a key indicator in terms of skill and challenge valuation. In summary, while a Facilitator may have a certain amount of experience, it is really their motivation to commit time to their activities that determines their effectiveness and value of their activities.

Table 2. Kruskal-Wallis results: time commitment and experience as predictors of key outcomes

Dependent Variable × Predictor	H	df	p	M (Low group)	M (Mid group)	M (High group)
Grouped by Time Commitment (Q10):				< 1%	1–5%	5–20%
Q18 Effectiveness × Time	26.06	3	<.001 *	2.98	3.53	4.25
Q7 Skills × Time	13.14	3	.004 *	4.02	4.29	4.46

Dependent Variable × Predictor	H	df	p	M (Low group)	M (Mid group)	M (High group)
Q14 Challenges × Time	11.44	3	.010 *	3.46	3.63	4.14
Grouped by Experience (Q1):						
				< 1 year	1–5 years	> 5 years
Q18 Effectiveness × Experience	0.07	2	.966	3.39	3.35	3.41
Q7 Skills × Experience	2.93	2	.231	4.25	4.15	4.26
Q14 Challenges × Experience	1.30	2	.523	3.51	3.64	3.70

4.5 Qualitative Insights

Facilitators provided more in-depth explanations of their experiences through interviews and open-ended questions regarding their mission, values, and suggestions.

4.5.1 Mission and values

Facilitators generally described their mission as promoting knowledge sharing, engaging colleagues, and ensuring the effective use of the e-kms within their CoP. They aim to foster a collaborative and open culture, increase the visibility of knowledge assets, maintain content quality, and encourage participation. Some also emphasize supporting organizational goals, mentoring newer colleagues, and bridging gaps between departments. When asked about the added values of CoPs in their work, Facilitators mentioned that CoPs contribute to a stronger sense of professional identity and belonging, fostering engagement and pride in their community.

The main topics mentioned in relation to CoP value were:

- Networking and cross-functional collaboration, enabling innovation and connection across departments
- Professional identity and belonging, fostering cohesion, pride, and a sense of community
- Visibility and recognition, highlighting individual and team contributions

When asked if there were any additional activities beyond those mentioned in the survey, Facilitators emphasized the following activities:

- Monitoring and curating content within e-kms
- Actively engaging with e-kms and CoP teams for feedback and alignment
- Supporting the onboarding of new hires and targeting training awareness
- Promoting a strong culture of knowledge sharing across units and levels of experience
- Creating structured content plans and participating in relevant workshops and community activities

These responses show proactive leadership behaviours beyond general organizational tasks, confirming the interplay between these two factors in effective facilitation.

5. Discussion

Through the mixed-methods study design, we show how effective facilitation is not only a standardized task list, but rather an interaction between motivation, time investment, and organizational support. We suggest how organizational, behavioural, and cognitive factors shape effectiveness, supporting how facilitation is a multi-level process.

5.1 Facilitator Effectiveness Model

We have proposed a Facilitator Effectiveness Model to highlight the factors that support effective facilitation, based on the previous literature and the empirical findings of both phases of this study. First, organizational factors such as time allocation, clearly defined tasks, and recognition were important for Facilitator success. Second, behavioural capacities such as communication and engagement were critical for influencing participation within the e-kms. These can lead to community outcomes such as proactive participation, and effective knowledge sharing. Therefore, this model, seen in Figure 2, focuses on the combination of

organizational policies, behavioural competencies, and community approaches to improve facilitation of knowledge management within large, complex organizations.



Figure 2: Facilitator Effectiveness Model

This model serves as a foundation for strategic Facilitator profile, which was developed to formalize expectations, clarify responsibilities, and provide a structured foundation for Facilitator onboarding and evaluation.

5.2 Facilitator Profile Description

Table 3 summarizes the structure and core components of the profile, including its purpose, key tasks, skills and capabilities, competencies, and time commitment guidelines. The full, detailed version of the Facilitator Profile, including expanded behavioural indicators and task definitions, is available upon request.

Table 3: Facilitator profile summary

Purpose	Enable knowledge sharing, foster collaboration, and ensure effective use of e-kms	
Key Tasks	Support community engagement Promote collaboration, knowledge documentation, and sharing Foster a positive, inclusive, participative environment Define and maintain community objectives	
Competencies	Strong communication Relationship building Content Organization	Digital Fluency Facilitation and Engagement Effective Problem-Solving
Time Commitment	Dedicate 1-5% of weekly working hours to facilitation activities	

5.3 Implications for Knowledge Management Research

This study contributes to knowledge management research in several ways. First, it shows one of the most comprehensive studies of Facilitators within a large, complex organization, whereas previous works are more conceptual. Second, it suggests Facilitator effectiveness through a multi-level framework at the intersection of organizational, behavioural, and community-level factors. We see the benefits of providing a more formal validation of tasks by recognizing the value of facilitation as a leadership activity, as well as how sense of community and perceived social value shape motivation to participate in knowledge sharing. This work suggests that knowledge sharing is most effective when Facilitator activities and competencies are clearly defined through an organizational and behavioural lens. Finally, we observe a critical point, that time investment is a significant predictor of Facilitator effectiveness.

These contributions lead to actionable items for organizations to consider, such as formalizing their facilitation activities with clear expectations, allocated time, and recognition of value for the goal of improving engagement and motivation. Next, there is still value for organizations to consider a variety of experience levels within Facilitator teams, ensuring a balance of strengths to enhance collaboration and mentorship opportunities. By utilizing the model and profile from this study, organizations can implement their own clear framework for optimizing facilitation.

This study additionally opens new ideas for research linking organizational and behavioural interventions can jointly improve knowledge sharing in an organization. Future works could test the Facilitator Effectiveness Model across other industries or companies of different sizes to measure its efficiency. Additionally, it could be of great interest to measure the longitudinal effects of implementing this Facilitator framework into an organization and measuring how facilitation and knowledge sharing progress over time.

6. Conclusion

This study aimed to clarify Facilitator tasks, behaviours, and challenges in the context of a large organization. We highlight through interviews and surveys that facilitation is not a standardized role, but a dynamic practice shaped by organizational structures, motivation, and behavioural capacities. A key insight is that Facilitator effectiveness is driven less by experience and more by time investment, motivation, and support. As a result, this study proposes a Facilitator Effectiveness Model that identifies the combination of organizational, behavioural, and community factors that contribute to successful facilitation. The findings also introduced a Strategic Facilitator Profile to support effective selection and onboarding of Facilitators.

In conclusion, by investing in the value of Facilitators as strategic and complex knowledge leaders, organizations can make progress towards optimized knowledge management practices and further growth. These insights provide a basis for furthering knowledge management research as well as organizational practices and reinforces the idea of facilitation as a strategic activity within knowledge management systems.

Ethics declaration: This study did not require formal ethics approval, as all participants were informed of the purpose of the research, and participation was entirely voluntary.

AI declaration: AI was used to support grammar editing, text refinement, and figure generation. All conceptual development, analysis, and interpretations presented in this paper are the authors' own.

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