Additional case studies

Relevant to: Chapter 10 (Practice-based perspectives on ICT-enabled knowledge management)

Case study 1:

Knowledge Sharing Using Web 2.0 technology in a Non-Governmental Organization

Matschke et al (2012) present the findings of a case study on the use of Web 2.0 technology to facilitate knowledge exchange within a German non-governmental organization (NGO). They define NGOs as organizations which are not profit-oriented, but which instead pursue charitable goals. In the case examined, the purpose of implementing a Web 2.0-based knowledge management initiative was to facilitate communication and the sharing of knowledge and experience between people within the NGO. The NGO was dispersed across the whole of Germany, and one of the aims of the Web 2.0 system was to encourage and facilitate knowledge sharing between people who were geographically dispersed. The key question being addressed in their research was to investigate the factors which facilitated the successful implementation of this initiative.

Matschke et al argue that Web 2.0 technologies are potentially very suitable to NGOs as both have a number of characteristics in common. Firstly, both are driven and shaped by voluntariness. While in NGOs unpaid volunteers who believe in the organization's goals typically play a key role, the development of Web 2.0 systems is based on the voluntary participation of users. Secondly, with both NGOs and Web 2.0 systems, participation and decision making is relatively democratic and inclusive. Finally, with both NGOs and Web 2.0 systems, much interaction is relatively informal in nature.

The NGO which was examined by Matschke et al., was the EKD, the protestant church in German. The EKD is a very large organization employing over 250,000 people full time and has more that 1 million volunteers. The authors participated in the design and implementation of the Web 2.0-based knowledge management system, and then evaluated its effectiveness 10 months after it has been implemented. The Web 2.0 system that was implemented had three distinct elements. Firstly, there was the 'idea space' which was a discussion forum where people could post questions, and others could contribute ideas. At the conclusion of each discussion a summary was also produced. Secondly, there was the 'experience space', where people were able to post comments describing specific experiences they had, and what they learnt from them. Finally, there was the 'knowledge space' which contained more generic and abstract knowledge.

During the first 10 months after implementation, over 2000 people registered as users, with 10% contributing articles to the system. 230 articles were written in the knowledge space, 300 experience reports were produced, and over 100 discussions conducted in the idea space. Further, the fact that about 240,000 document retrievals per month were made suggests that many people found the system to be useful.

Matschke et al's analysis identified a number of factors which facilitated the implementation and use of the system. Firstly, trust and good inter-personal relations were developed between system users by two means. One way this was done was by organizing some face-to-face meetings to

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discuss the knowledge management system and what people hoped to gain from it. The second way in which inter-personal relations were developed was through the system itself. Similar to social networking systems like Facebook, people could create profiles and develop a network of contacts with similar interests with whom they could communicate directly. Secondly, to address people's concerns about the potentially uncertain quality of the contributions that could be made on the system, it was possible for users to rank the quality of any contribution using a five-point star system. Thus, before anyone read an article on the system they could see how it had been evaluated by other users. A survey of users suggested that they were happy with the quality of the contributions on the system. To address people concerns about a potential loss of face or negative feedback on contributions from contributing articles that may be unpopular people had the option to only share articles with those on their contact list. Finally, to help people quickly evaluate the potential value of a contribution to them a structured format was used for recording contributions which required contributors to organization their contributions around criterion such as the issue/problem being examined, the idea/solution that was being proposed and the contextual background of the issue/problem.

Questions:

1) Do you agree that the features of Web 2.0 systems make them particularly appropriate for use within NGOs?
2) In relation to people's willingness to share knowledge with each other, is this generally likely to be easier in NGOs than in private business organizations, due to the typically strong commitment of those who work in NGOs to the organization's goals?

Source: Matschke, C., Moskaliuk, J., Cress, U. (2012). 'Knowledge Exchange Using Web 2.0 Technologies in NGOs'. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, 16/1: 159-176.

Case study 2:

Using Web 2.0 technology to help build a knowledge-sharing culture

Teo *et al*. (2011) report on a study into the successful use of a range of Web 2.0 technologies to facilitate the development of a knowledge-sharing culture within HP Analytics, a business unit in Hewlett Packard's global business services division that is responsible for providing shared services and other business process expertise to different HP divisions. HP Analytics is based in offices in the Indian cities of Bangalore and Chennai, and by 2010 had about 900 employees. The company decided to invest in IT to facilitate knowledge sharing between employees, but the aim was not to create a 'static', centralized knowledge repository or library, but instead to utilize IT to facilitate a process of ongoing interaction and knowledge sharing. Further, it was recognized that this would require a change in culture, with it being hoped that the use of Web 2.0 technologies would facilitate this culture change. Thus, Teo *et al*. (2011: 11) said that the key aim of the Web 2.0 initiative was to 'promote knowledge sharing behaviours that over time would become part of the organizational culture'.

The web-based knowledge-sharing platform that was developed had a number of components to it, but it was accessed through a single portal. There were four main components within the

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platform which were a website with links, an online document repository, a blog, and online discussion forums. The main focus of Teo *et al*.'s case study is on the blogging and discussion forum elements of the initiative. With both these elements, there were opportunities for people to discuss both work and non-work issues.

The blog was intended to be a central focus for discussion where people could post comments and contribute to discussions on any topic that they wanted. While the discussion forums had the same broad objective, they were more decentralized and focused, with discussion forums being set up on specific topics and themes. The idea with the forums was to create small, more specialized interest groups to share knowledge on specific topics. These interest groups could be formed around work-related issues (such as cloud computing), or non-work-related, with forums being set up on topic related to personal interests and hobbies, such as sport and cricket. There were two reasons for allowing people to discuss non-work issues on the blogs and forums. It was felt this would help motivate people to participate in the Web 2.0 collaborative platform and allowing people to discuss non-work issues was also seen as helping the development of a sense of community identity and good interpersonal relations.

User participation and involvement with the collaborative platform was developed via a number of means. First, knowledge management ambassadors were recruited to the project from a wide range of different parts of the business. The people selected were those who were passionate about the initiative. The aim of having ambassadors was to help 'sell' the benefits to employees of the initiative, and to also provide a decentralized source of technical support that people could utilize. Secondly, particularly in relation to the blogging component, various things were done to encourage participation. For example, some fun competitions were set up to encourage people to both post and read blogs. One such competition took the form of the TV shows *Pop Idol/X-Factor*, where awards were given to the best blogs, with the decision on which blogs were best being made by employees reading the blogs who then voted for them. Winners were announced at a special ceremony where they were given rewards and recognition for the popularity of their blogs. Finally, the topics for forums were decided via a process of discussion—the aim was only to set up forums on topics that people were interested in and likely to contribute to.

Overall, the initiative succeeded in facilitating knowledge sharing, with one interviewee saying, 'collaborative technologies help information flow freely so that people can get their information from various sources, all across the world, at the touch of a button'.

1. While the use of 'fun' competitions may provide a way of generating interest in the platform, is there a risk that using fun and humour to do this may undermine the seriousness and importance of the initiative's objectives?

2. How important is it to allow the discussion of non-work-related topics/themes on this type of platform? Is this likely to encourage people to participate in this type of initiative, or is it likely to distract people from the work-related elements of the initiative? Finally, should there be limits and/or controls on the type of non-work topics that can be included?

Source: Teo, T., Nishant, R., Goh, M., and Agarwal, S. (2011) 'Leveraging Collaborative Technologies to Build a Knowledge Sharing Culture at HP Analytics', *MIS Quarterly Executive*, 10/1: 1–18.

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