

Chapter 8

Principles and Good Practices for Using Wikis within Organizations

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses the basic properties of corporate Wikis that make them an effective learning and knowledge management tool. Wikis offer a user-friendly environment that enhances informal knowledge sharing and the collaborative creation of new knowledge. Enterprise-wide adoption of Wikis promotes the reuse of existing know-hows and prevents employee re-invention of the wheel. Four cases of successful implementations of Wikis in large, hi-tech global organizations are described in detail including their goals, design considerations, implementation and actual use for formal and informal knowledge creation and sharing. The adoption and long-term sustainability of Wikis is attributed to perceived business outcomes by managers and to perceived usefulness and ease of use by individual contributors and users. Good practices based on one or more of these use-cases can provide practical guidance to organizations that wish to use a Wiki for KM purposes.

INTRODUCTION

Hi-tech companies operate in a global, highly competitive and rapidly changing environment (Henselewski, Smolnik, & Riemp, 2006). Survival in this “Darwinian system” largely depends on the ability of the companies to learn, in order to develop new technologies or innovative solutions as a response to new market demands, as well as to adopt emerging technologies or adapt to new regulations.

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Knowledge management (KM) in organizations incorporates all aspects of knowledge under one umbrella and allows employees in a high-paced, knowledge-intensive, multi-project work environment to share and find valuable knowledge, avoid repeated mistakes and provide quicker responses to customer needs. All these issues are essential to ensure business agility and a competitive edge.

KM initiatives include the creation of new knowledge, the re-use of existing knowledge, and the organization of learning products and knowledge assets, such as intellectual property, for safe-keeping and easy retrieval.

A corporate Wiki is a multi-purpose KM tool (Sousa, Aparicio & Costa, 2010) “that has been developed to capture organizational knowledge and make it available” (Meloche et al., 2009), to “support innovation processes” and to “address challenges of knowledge management and collaboration” (Standing & Kiniti, 2011). However, many obstacles may obstruct the way to successful deployment of corporate Wikis (Garcia-Perez & Ayres, 2010).

This chapter describes the principles of Wiki-based organizational KM solutions and provides detailed descriptions of successful implementations in four global organizations where each Wiki serves a different KM-related purpose. The chapter reviews methodological, technical (platform), cultural and implementation aspects of these Wikis. Good practices and key success factors for Wiki adoption are discussed in a way that can help organizations wishing to harness the power of a corporate Wiki.

LEARNING ORGANIZATIONS

The notion of a learning organization was developed by De Geus (1988) who claimed that “the ability to learn faster than your competitors may be the only sustainable competitive advantage” for companies. Lunenburg (2011) stresses the strategic element of learning organizations: “A learning organization is a strategic commitment to capture and share learning in the organization for the benefit individuals, teams, and the organization”. Garvin (2000) defined a learning organization as follows: “An organization skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge, and at modifying its behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights”. Senge (2006) details five learning disciplines that constitute a learning organization. This chapter describes techniques that are relevant to two disciplines: personal mastery and team learning. Every profession expands in such a way that an expert may be familiar just with a section of this profession. An organization must therefore exercise team learning in order to lead in existing and emerging technologies. Lunenburg (2011) combines Garvin’s and Senge’s observations: “It does this through alignment and the collective capacity to sense and interpret a changing environment; to input new knowledge through continuous learning and change; to imbed this knowledge in systems and practices; and to transform this knowledge into outputs”. Garvin, Edmondson and Gino (2008) define three building blocks of a learning organization: “A supportive learning environment, concrete learning processes and practices and leadership behavior that provides reinforcement”. One of the ‘managerial’ requirements from the organizational knowledge management team, from a learning perspective, is to provide environments in which organization members can converse with each other, share existing knowledge and views and work together to create new knowledge (team learning in Senge’s lexicon). Nonaka, Toyama and Konno (2000) define ‘ba’ as a learning environment: “Ba is a place where information is interpreted to become knowledge” “ba works as the platform of knowledge creation by collecting the applied knowledge of the area into a certain time and space and integrating it”. A Wiki-based KM solution constitutes a “virtual KM ba” as will be discussed in detail in the use cases.

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