

Chapter XXXI

Wiki Enabled Technology Management

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ABSTRACT

Social networking technologies—such as Wikis, blogs and instant messaging—are increasingly being employed in business settings to support communication, collaboration and knowledge management. In this chapter, the authors discuss how a Wiki was used to facilitate project management in a large system implementation for a decentralized organization. Further, they show how it continues to add value to the organization after the project's completion, supporting operational management activities while at the same time providing a platform for fostering and promoting innovation. They introduce important implementation considerations for deploying a Wiki in your organization, in addition to sharing observations from our own implementation that saw both successes and failures.

INTRODUCTION

During the implementation of a student information system at Johns Hopkins University, we faced challenges of communication, knowledge management and information overload that are hallmarks of large system implementation projects and magnified in significantly decentralized

organizations such as ours. We struggled with these challenges and tried a number of approaches and tools to address them before succeeding with a Wiki. Our first use of a Wiki was to facilitate communication with other universities that were implementing the same student information system software. This use was largely unsuccessful mainly due to lack of adoption and use

by would-be collaborators. Since we had already purchased the Wiki software and deployed it in our enterprise, we decided to use it internally to reduce the aforementioned challenges. This began as a very gradual effort with just a few users adding content. Several months later, adoption increased dramatically and, ever since, the Wiki has simplified and greatly improved our approaches to project management and operational management of information technology (IT) systems and services for the university.

This chapter provides a case study on the use of Wiki to support technology project management, planning and operations. It begins with a brief introduction of Wiki concepts, features and the product landscape as of early 2008. We then explore the use of Wiki in project management and in supporting IT systems. Specific examples are shared of successfully using a Wiki as the core repository of project artifacts during the implementation of our student information system. This is followed by discussion of using a Wiki for strategic and operational planning. Many lessons learned are shared from the experience of first attempting to use a Wiki, seeing it fail and subsequently repurposing it and watching its use and adoption grow exponentially.

The conclusion of these lessons is that Wikis provide a number of benefits to all involved. They are simple, efficient and easy to learn, use and implement. Their content is highly accessible for users with varying levels of technical competency. Since they are web based, access is ubiquitous. They are flexible and, generally speaking, inexpensive. These benefits, however, only describe advantages in relation to other collaboration tools. The real power of a Wiki in this domain is derived from its ability to draw people into content rather than push content out. They dramatically change how documents are created and can help to reduce e-mail overload.

The chapter concludes with a discussion of transparency—Wikis allow a broad audience to have insight into details of a project or organiza-

tion. Such openness forces a more disciplined approach to management in some ways but much more significantly fosters trust among all involved.

BACKGROUND

Managing IT has evolved during the past several decades as success factors relevant to the type of technology being managed are refined. Simultaneously, the tools available to support these endeavors have also evolved. While management methodologies cycle from predictive to adaptive and back again—and take on new variations and buzzwords such as spiral, agile or extreme programming—the available supporting tools are continuously improving. These supporting tools include those intended specifically for operational or project management as well as those adapted for this purpose. Wikis are an example of the latter where a general knowledge sharing tool can be leveraged for technical management.

WHAT IS A WIKI?

A Wiki is a set of interlinking dynamic web pages that is specifically designed so that anyone can easily contribute and modify content. They are very often used as the basis for a collaborative community or in business as an inexpensive intranet or knowledge repository. Wikis maintain a history of changes to their content so that it is quickly and clearly evident who is responsible for what changes and content evolution. The power of the Wiki comes from its ability to facilitate knowledge discovery through interlinked and interrelated content. Wikipedia is the best-known Wiki, popular for its community-driven content that has become a fairly reliable collaborative encyclopedia.

Wikis are natural solutions for nurturing an online community in which all members of the

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