

Capturing and Storing Knowledge

The palest ink is better than the best memory
Chinese Proverb

25. Taxonomies for Documents and Folders

Introduction

Taxonomies have been used for many decades in the information management field. They are the basis of classification schemes and indexing systems such as the Dewey Decimal System. With the advent of the internet, there has been increased interest in using taxonomies for structuring information for easier management and retrieval. At their simplest, taxonomies are nothing more than systems for naming and organising things. One of the simplest applications is based on naming conventions – standard rules to be applied to documents and the physical and electronic folders storing these documents. This example demonstrates the value of taxonomies: they provide an interface for staff in an organisation to access information and knowledge relevant to their work and interests, and also to understand how to contribute to knowledge bases. Within development and humanitarian organisations, taxonomies can give a particular perspective on the organisation. Possible taxonomies include:

- Countries
 - e.g. Ethiopia, India, etc.
- Regions
 - e.g. sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, etc.
- Programme theme
 - HIV/AIDS, trade, gender, livelihoods, etc.
- Donors
 - Bilateral, foundations, etc.
- Document types
 - Proposal, project report, beneficiary feedback, etc.

Each of these categories can be used to signpost valuable knowledge and support better decision making. Implementing a simple but effective set of taxonomies can provide the basis for successful systems for information storage and capture, as well as for the overall knowledge and learning strategy. The key applications of taxonomies for development and humanitarian organisations are:

- Signposting and searching for files and folders on an intranet or shared drive;
- Classifying and searching for different kinds of staff expertise;
- Classifying and searching for different kinds of projects and programmes.

Users can use these taxonomies to access the information or experts they require, through the hierarchy of information. Of course, some users may prefer to search for information using dedicated search engines. In this situation, taxonomic searches might be supplemented by searches at different levels within the system. You may be able to search an entire intranet, or navigate to staff, programme or document-type levels and conduct a search within that category.

Detailed description of the process

Developing a taxonomy involves finding an appropriate breakdown for the diverse forms of information contained and used by different actors within an organisation.

- Start with a general category for the area of work being addressed, e.g. programme theme.
- Establish the subcategories for this category. These can be developed by answering the question ‘what types of [e.g. programme themes] are there?’
- Repeat the process of division, based on the planned application of the taxonomy, and the users concerned. The division used should be consistent with the expectations of the users, otherwise it becomes hard for them to navigate the system intuitively.

- For example, if the taxonomy is to be used for senior management or communications staff searching different projects in preparation for a press release, the taxonomy could be based on geography (and then region, and then country), type of project (and then advocacy, service delivery, etc.), team involved (development, humanitarian relief, conflict prevention).
- By contrast, a project information system for use by project staff should be based on the categories and subcategories of information with which the staff member is likely to be familiar. This might include proposals, project initiation documents, budgets, background materials, relevant research reports, timelines, progress reports, final reports.
- Decide on standard terms. These should follow the same logic and consistency across different types of item, following the same pattern for similar situations so that, once learned, the user can reasonably predict how it will apply in a new situation. As an example, standard terms can be applied to:
 - Use of standard naming conventions for organisation sub-units and people:
 - As an example, a organisation may decide to always use ‘HIV/AIDS Team’ or ‘Gender Team’ rather than ‘HIV/Aids Programme’ or ‘Gender Unit’.
 - e.g. always use ‘Navin Patel’ rather than ‘N Patel’.
 - Use of standard names for projects and activities:
 - e.g. always use ‘Advocacy and Communications’ rather than just ‘Advocacy’.
 - Use standard common terms for document types across units:
 - e.g. always use ‘Budget Report’ instead of ‘Financial Report’.
 - e.g. always use ‘Progress Reports’ instead of ‘Progress Updates’.
- Establish and share simple rules to encourage consistent practice and provide guidance on how to use different taxonomies. Example of rules for documents might include:
 - Use one of these standard terms: Agenda; Report; Letter; Project schedule; Meeting Minutes.
 - Do not use terms such as ‘Presentation on...’ in a title because different document types are already identified (e.g. as .ppt in the document title).
 - Do not use the document creator’s name in the title.
 - Use structured titles in pre-specified formats which draw on the taxonomies, e.g., for standard document types, combine elements of a title to give the most useful information first, bearing in mind the folder structure and titling; for example, for a letter: topic – recipient – letter type.

Example: The OECD Macrothesaurus

Perhaps the most systematic collection of standard terms in the development sector is the now-discontinued OECD Macrothesaurus. Although work on this was ceased in 1998, it is still available online and – despite the odd anachronism – is still widely applicable today.

The discontinued version is available at <http://info.uibk.ac.at/info/oecd-macroth> and provides guidance for themes, document types, countries, regions, and so on. This is a good starting point for developing an organisational specific taxonomy.

Sources and further reading

- Online guide to building taxonomies: <http://knowledgemanagement.ittoolbox.com/documents/popular-q-and-a/building-a-taxonomy-2056>.

26. Exit Interviews

Introduction

Exit Interviews are usually thought of as a rather formal interview between a manager and staff member leaving an organisation, focusing on the latter's reasons for leaving. Increasingly, however, exit interviews are a label for a specific learning process emphasising the importance of capturing and storing know-how. Obviously, it is impossible to capture all of the knowledge of any individual, but exit interviews are designed to minimise the loss of useful knowledge through staff turnover and ease the learning curve of new staff. If conducted appropriately, they can benefit both the organisation and the leaving staff. The organisation captures the leaver's useful knowledge, hopefully in an accessible form. The leaver gets to reflect on their role, and hopefully leave on the positive note of leaving a positive impact on the team or organisation. Conducting exit interviews can also be highly therapeutic, especially for staff who are leaving volatile or violent environments.

Detailed description of the process

The ideal focus of the learning-based exit interview is on knowledge that is most useful to the next person, or for others doing similar jobs. Because face-to-face interactions are central to such exit interviews, ideally between the leaver and potential learners, the management of the exit interview process must be initiated as early as possible after it is known that the person is leaving.

- Identify who in the organisation might benefit from the leaver's knowledge and what they will need to know from that person.
- Consider who currently accesses the person's knowledge and what they need to know from the replacement staff. Think about documented explicit knowledge (in files, documents and emails) as well as tacit knowledge (know-how), which needs to be explained.
- Develop a plan in a participatory way to ensure knowledge can be captured and documented during the leaver's notice period. This requires a review of key tasks, drawing from a ToR in consultation with the leaving staff. An Activity-based Knowledge Mapping (Tool 8) could prove useful, providing a framework for conversations about how key tasks are undertaken, what inputs and outputs are involved, obstacles and bottlenecks, etc. Internal and external networks and other sources of knowledge should also be discussed. For explicit knowledge, the leaver should move relevant files – hard and electronic – into shared folders or a document library. Ideally, they should be clean up and organise all files and draw up a related set of notes for their successor.

Key points/practical tips

- Get the leaver involved from the outset. Ask them for their inputs on how the organisation might best benefit from their knowledge, experience, contacts, etc., prior to departure.
- While HR need to be involved in the process, it may be best that knowledge-focused interviews are undertaken by a relevant peer or subject expert, as long as they are appropriately skilled and trained.
- If at all possible, there should be an overlap period between the leaver and their successor so that a 'live' handover can be done; this may need to be in the form of a temporary member of staff who acts as a 'bridgehead'.
- Exit interviews are usually only appropriate for employees who resign voluntarily or retire, rather than those who are fired or made redundant.
- There is a real need to be clear about who will use the knowledge gathered and how it will be used, before you begin to gather it; the purpose of the interview is not to gather knowledge per se but to gather useful knowledge that will actually be used.
- The less knowledge your organisation captures on a regular basis, the more it will need to capture

at exit. It is possible to capture this on an ongoing basis, through tools such as Social Network Analysis (Tool 3), Activity-based Knowledge Mapping (Tool 8) and How To Guides (Tool 26).

Example: Exit interviews and handovers at the BMZ

‘...The need for a quality procedure for job handovers within the BMZ is made particularly urgent by the fact that staff operate as “all-rounders” and frequently change jobs within the ministry. The “all-rounder” principle means that individuals have to be able to familiarise themselves rapidly with new subject areas. The faster this process of familiarisation can take place, the faster they can become operational in their new job.

Staff statistics from 2000 and 2001 show that over 70 people in the executive and professional grades alone change job each year and must be familiarised with their new tasks. That is 20% of people working in these civil service grades. Statistically, the entire staff of the BMZ moves round once every five years. Handover procedures have, until now, varied widely and have not always done enough to ensure that knowledge is preserved.

Handovers provide a systematic basis for improving institutional learning within the BMZ, something that will benefit both the ministry and individual employees but has been lacking to date. It allows the BMZ greater productivity and continuity in discharging its duties. It also provides valuable support to staff members in tackling the special challenge of rapidly developing the skills needed when taking on a new post. ...

The quality of the handover will depend in practice on the care each individual takes over it, on the ideas they have and also on the time pressures they face when the changeover occurs. The aim of the regulation is therefore to outline a handover procedure that allows the relevant knowledge to be preserved without a disproportionate amount of working time being taken up. Clearly, however, a good handover does require time, and this should be taken into account when planning work ...’

The German Ministry for International Development (BMZ) has released a summary of its experience of utilising handovers which can be viewed on the KM4Dev website: www.km4dev.org/index.php?module=uploads&func=download&fileId=244.

Sources and further reading

- This tool was drawn from the NHS KM Toolkit, which can be viewed online at: www.nelh.nhs.uk/knowledge_management/km2/getting_started.asp.
- A useful webpage on exit interviews is www.businessballs.com/exitinterviews.htm.

27. How To Guides

Introduction

Developing a **How To Guide** is an increasingly important process, as it enables the know-how of staff within an organisation to be captured, documented and made available to others. The simple aim is to help organisations make better and wider use of existing knowledge by drawing it out from selected people and making it available to a wider group. The ultimate goal is to capture an effective sequence or process with enough accuracy so that it can be repeated with the same good results. In development and humanitarian organisations, 'how to guides' can be used for a wide range of situations. The key is only to spend time developing these guides when there is a clear need and/or an articulated demand.

Useful 'how to guides' might be: i) related to programming or projects to address a specific problem, issue or challenge, e.g. HIV/AIDS or gender; ii) contain knowledge about a relationship with a particular type of stakeholder, e.g. donors; iii) give knowledge about key operational processes, e.g. fundraising or negotiation; iv) offer knowledge about a key system, technology or piece of equipment, e.g. how to access the intranet while travelling; or v) provide knowledge about the organisational culture and the internal infrastructure.

Detailed description of the process

Although there is no set formula for developing a 'how to guide', there are general guidelines (drawn from www.nelh.nhs.uk/knowledge_management/km2/harvesting_toolkit.asp):

- **Focus:** Decide on what specific knowledge and expertise you want to capture, and be clear about what the benefits will be. You may need to focus on the knowledge that is most important to the success of the organisation, relative to goals and objectives.
- **Understand the audience:** Establish who will be using the 'how to guide' before you start the research process, to ensure you pitch your research at an appropriate level of complexity. Consider other aspects of your audience that may be relevant, e.g. numbers, location, current knowledge, access to ICTs, etc.
- **Find the knowledgeable sources:** Identify the people who have the know-how you are seeking to capture. A staff pages system could be a good start, if you have one. Otherwise, ask people working on similar issues, or scan organisational literature.
- **Choose appropriate researchers and the right questions:** The researchers should be people with strong communication, interpersonal and interviewing skills, such as recruiters, trainers, counsellors etc. Get these people to work in workshop format with the knowledgeable sources and ask them to talk about what they do, when they do it, how they do it and why they do it. A tape recorder or note-taker is essential. It might also be worth having a potential user of the 'how to guide' present in order to ensure the right questions are being asked. This could also be done in a separate workshop of potential users.
- **Organise, package and share:** Once the information has been gathered, it can then be edited, organised and presented (or 'packaged') into the form that best meets the needs of the users. This may be a checklist, a manual or a set of guidelines which can then be made available either in hard copy or via an electronic medium.
- **Apply, evaluate and adapt:** 'How to guides' can sometimes result in documents that are never accessed or are quickly obsolete. In order to counteract this, it is necessary to track use and regularly update the information.

Key points/practical tips

- 'How to guides' will only work when people share their experiences in an open fashion, so targeting knowledge that is a clear source of internal status or power could lead to a poor resource.

- Not all know-how can be captured, and some believe that knowledge collection through tools such as ‘how to guides’ is far less useful than a well connected internal network. In reality, a balance must be sought between the ‘collection’ and ‘connection’ approaches.

Example: ‘How to guide’ used by UNDP in the Europe and CIS Region

In the UNDP region of Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, ‘how to guides’ are used for project and programme design as an aid in development of programmes, projects or initiatives. The aim is to present readers with a concise overview of main debates and issues in the selected area, as well as a framework for developing projects and programmes conforming to the latest international good practice. The guides consist of three elements: i) introduction of an issue; ii) synthesis of methodological and strategic approaches for programming; and iii) a checklist for programme and project development. This last part forms the bulk of the guide, covering the main issues that need to be taken into consideration and presenting a range of FAQs (questions typically posed by programme officers, project and programme managers and others tasked with project development of implementation in the area), and sets out concise and practical responses. The final section sets out references, useful reading materials, web resources and UNDP project and programme contacts for further information.

Sources and further reading

- NHS Toolkit: www.nelh.nhs.uk/knowledge_management/km2/harvesting_toolkit.asp.
- UNDP’s WaterWiki: <http://europeandcis.undp.org/Waterwiki>.

28. Staff Profile Pages

Introduction

Organisational **Staff Profile Pages** systems are electronic directories which store information about staff in a given organisation. In addition to providing information such as names, job titles, groups and contact details, staff pages include details about knowledge, skills, experience and interests, and even hobbies. As these systems are electronic, they are especially valuable in organisations that have geographical or other barriers to personal connections. For this reason, they are often used as the cornerstone point of systematic knowledge and learning initiatives in development and humanitarian organisations. At their most useful, staff pages have the potential systematically to facilitate connections that might otherwise happen only randomly, leading to valuable new collaboration opportunities. On a day-to-day level, effective staff pages enable and improve the brief, fluid connections across an organisation that are at the heart of the learning organisation.

Detailed description of the process

- **Identify user perspectives:** Find out how the different teams and individuals might use the system, for what reasons, and when. A particular need is to consider the multiple uses to which the system may be put, as well as potential differences between intended and actual uses.
- **Determine the appropriate level of participation and control:** It is essential to establish from the outset whether inclusion on the system should be compulsory or voluntary, and whether to create and manage entries centrally or allow individuals to create and update their own. Most successful pages are based on the voluntary and decentralised approach, allowing staff to personalise their entries. Some systems aim for a halfway house between centralised and decentralised approaches, by providing a core set of data, which expands on the basic concept of the staff directory, but leaving users free to add details as they see fit.
- **Create a template and taxonomy for the information:** When creating a template for the system (see Figure 16 below), it is important to consider ease of data entry, data amendment and data retrieval. A common language or taxonomy describes information in essential fields, such as those relating to expert knowledge, experience, countries, areas of work and interests (see Tool 30). Fixed terms and options for these fields may be appropriate, so that users can select from a menu or a selection of tick-boxes.
- **Broadening the scope:** Staff pages should be easily linked to other components of the KM system, for example, collaborative working tools, trip report systems, project databases or email systems, to allow easy access to electronic information of the organisation. They might also be expanded to include details of communities, teams, external suppliers, partners, and so on.
- **Develop guidelines and provide training:** Data protection laws mean that staff pages must comply with relevant requirements. As such, a clear HR policy on the correct use of the system is crucial. These policies and guidelines should be provided to current staff and new joiners in the form of manuals and training courses, so that current and new staff are able to understand the system and are encouraged add their entry. Leavers should also be reminded to update their entry accordingly, subject to their own preferences for contact after moving on.
- **Launch the tool and gain 'buy-in':** There is a need for internal marketing of any staff pages system, to encourage participation and use. Useful initial mechanisms include launches at staff meetings, putting up posters and nominating champions to promote the system in different areas of the organisation. Another useful tool is to ensure senior management are all involved with the pilot rollout, thus leading the rest of the organisation by example. As with all knowledge and learning tools, the benefits must be made apparent at every stage.
- **Monitoring ongoing use and promotion of the tool:** There is the need and the potential to track the ongoing use of electronic pages, and the reporting requirements for this should be considered as early as possible. Effective measuring can help promote the tool across the organisation, and

help strengthen internal networks. Gathering and sharing the best success stories of using the system can help build participation on an ongoing basis.

- **Maintenance:** Owing to the continual changes in staff composition and location, and additions to personal knowledge and skills, updating the system regularly is particularly important in development and humanitarian organisations. Links to other systems (e.g. HR systems and project information systems) should allow data such as job details, contact information and current work to be updated automatically. Where individuals create their own entries, it may be necessary to send regular reminder emails about updating the system, with a reporting mechanism to highlight those who are lagging behind.

Figure 16: Staff pages template

Name
Job title
Department or team
Photograph
Contact information
A brief job description
Current and previous projects
Trip reports
Areas of current knowledge and expertise (selected from a pre-defined list of subjects / terms; people may also rank their knowledge, e.g. from 'extensive' to 'basic')
Areas of interest
Countries of interest
Key contacts – both internal and external, e.g. key donors, valuable partners, etc.
Membership of internal and external communities of practice or other networks
Relevant professional qualifications
Personal profile: hobbies and interests, holidays, etc.
An uploaded CV (multiple versions possible)

Example: Aid people directory

The aid world is characterised by high turnover and rapid redeployment. www.aidpeople.org is a website set up to serve as an inter-organisational staff pages, the main focus of which is to find former colleagues and others facing similar issues or with similar interests. The focus of the site is explicitly on signposting people rather than information. The site also has supporting tools such as blogs and discussion fora to enable users to benefit from the experience of others. At the time of writing, the site was being launched, with the ambition of developing a member base of 25,000 in the first year. If even half this number is reached, it could prove a significant resource for the humanitarian sector.

Sources and further reading

- Collison, C. and G. Parcell (2001) *Learning to Fly*, Oxford: Capstone.
- NHS Toolkit: www.nelh.nhs.uk/knowledge_management/km2/white_pages_toolkit.asp.

29. Blogs

Introduction

A **Weblog** (also known as a web log or a 'blog') is a web application on which dated entries are posted on a webpage on a particular topic. Weblogs can vary in form from sites maintained by one individual to multiple contributor weblogs where information is posted by approved contributors after editor approval: many weblogs allow the creation of a community of interest based on the particular topic of the blog. A 'blogstorm' or 'blog swarm' happens when there is an explosion of interest, or posting of opinions and information around a particular subject. Weblogs were originally set up by web professionals; today, most webloggers (or 'bloggers') do not need a technical background and sites can be relatively easily set up and maintained.

Detailed description of the process

Before setting up a weblog, consider what form is appropriate for your needs: according to Wikipedia there are 16 types of weblog, including the following:

- Personal weblog: online diary or journal posts written by friends connected.
- Thoughtful weblog: an individual's (or small group's) thoughts on a topic.
- Topical blog: concentrate on a particular specialised topic.
- News blog: a news compendium on a particular subject.
- Collaborative/collective/group blog: involves multiple contributors on a particular topic, although can be a selected group or open to anyone.
- Political blog: includes the watch blog in which an author(s) critiques what he/she/they see as consistent errors or bias in an online newspaper or news site.
- Legal blog: often referred to as blawgs, these sites discuss law and legal affairs.
- Directory blog: often collect numerous websites with interesting content on a topic.
- Corporate blog: employees post official or semi-official blogs about their work.
- Advice blog: sites that provide expert technical advice.
- Format blogs: sites with a specialist form of presentation, such as images or videos, or on a particular theme. Examples include audio, photography and video ('vlog') weblogs.

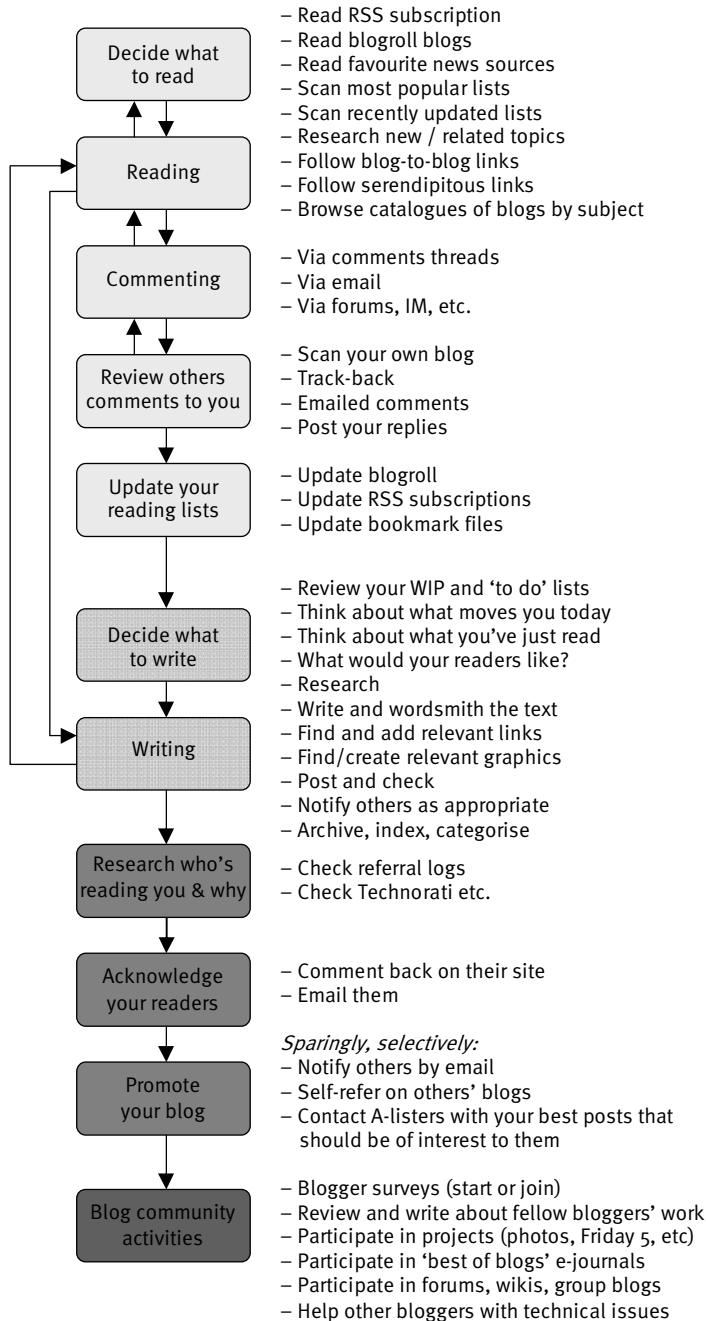
Browse through the range of software packages to select the most appropriate for you: a range of packages have sprung up including GreatestJournal, Pitas, Blogger, LiveJournal and Xanga (Wikipedia) and web hosting companies and online publications also provide blog creation tools such as Salon, Tripod and Bravenet. These provide varying levels of support and functionality, so select the package that best suits your skills and requirements. For more advanced bloggers, there are a range of server-side software tools to publish on their own website or a third-party site, or to host a group of blogs (see Wikipedia for further details) such as Nucleus CMS, Movable Type and WordPress. Weblogs can also be programmed using PHP, CGI or other server-side software, which allow more freedom of creativity but can be more complicated to set up and maintain.

A list of questions to ask yourself when evaluating weblog software includes (Blood, 2002):

- Can you easily identify how to create and delete an entry?
- Can you easily change the way the site looks?
- How do you add the name of your weblog to the page?
- Does this service offer clear instructions?
- Is it easy to find help when you need it?

- Do you need to read the instructions before you can actually use the service, or are many of the available functions easily understandable just by looking?
- Are there user forums where you can ask questions?

Figure 17: The blogging process



The format of your weblog should match the purpose for which it is intended: formats vary from simple bullet lists of hyperlinks to article summaries with user-provided comments and ratings. Features common to many blogs include ‘blogrolls’ (list of other blogs that are linked separately from any article) and feedback comment systems or ‘threads’ (a comment system which allows users to post their own comments). Not all blogs have comment systems, and some have a closed commenting system which requires approval from the blog owners.

It is important to ensure that links are not lost from weblogs, and many sites archive older entries and generate a ‘permalink’ for individual entries, a type of a type of Uniform Resource Locator (URL)

designed to refer to a specific information item and to remain unchanged permanently, or at least for a lengthy period of time (Wikipedia). Permalinks became ‘the first – and most successful – attempt to build bridges between weblogs’. You can also use a ‘track-back’ facility so that blogs refer to each other.

Example: Blogging in international development

According to the authors of the first World Bank foray into blogging, blogs have a role to play in the international aid system.

‘Blogging improves the quality of debate. For instance, an article in the Washington Post, “The Rise of a Market Mentality Means Many Go Hungry in Niger” in August 2005 drew furious responses from bloggers. That’s nothing new, of course: people have always read newspaper articles and grumbled to their spouses over the breakfast table. The difference is that now commentators can find each other, track the debate, air their differences and discover more about the facts behind the story. Blogging technology makes it easy to collect comments and see who is citing your ideas. Readers are able to chase the debate across the internet at the click of the mouse, and contribute to it themselves – no matter if they are a CEO in New York or a student in a Nairobi internet café. Meanwhile, new research and opinion-forming analysis is quickly disseminated and discussed – and the number of new blogs is doubling every five months or so. This changes the terms of the development debate, too. If you typed “World Bank Blog” into Google in the summer of 2005, you’d have found that the most popular result was “WorldBankPresident.org”, a free-standing site dedicated to discussing the successor for then-President James Wolfensohn and criticising the Bank’s selection methods. This apparently independent site was regularly checked by many Bank staff as well as journalists seeking a convenient way to read all the gossip. Next blog down was Friends of the Earth’s “World Bank blog”, documenting their protests and the reasons behind them at the World Bank’s spring meetings.

A backroom effort, followed by a campaigning site: the World Bank itself was nowhere to be found. The World Bank, and other development organisations such as UNDP and DFID, will have to work with this new technology, as many large corporations are trying to do. But the playing field is much more level than it was even a year ago. Being a big organisation counts for very little in the booming world of blogs – what counts is quick, relevant content. And if the playing field is being levelled within the developed world, just wait until the developing world starts to play the game. It’s already happening: during this summer’s Live8 campaign, some African bloggers started to complain that the concerts were irrelevant, patronising, or worse. Even just a couple of years ago, such dissenting voices from Africa would never have been heard. Huge sites, such as Harvard’s Global Voices Online, are gathering together the output of “bridge bloggers” who read local blogs and comment in English. Some countries, such as Iran, have vast blogging communities; others are tiny but growing very fast.

It has never been easier for journalists to pick up voices from the developing world – or even for you and us to do so from our desks. People all over the world are talking, but only now can we hear what they’re saying.’

This example is drawn from www.id21.org/viewpoints/blogsOct05.html.

Sources and further reading

- Blood, R. (2002) *The Weblog Handbook: Practical Advice on Creating and Maintaining your Blog*, Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing, see: www.rebeccablood.net.
- Hovland, I. (2005) *Successful Communication: A Toolkit for Researchers and Civil Society Organisations*, ODI Working Paper 227, London: ODI.
- Perrone, J. (2004) ‘What is a Weblog?’, posted on www.guardian.co.uk/weblogarticle/0,6799,394059,00.html and accessed on 12 May 2005.
- Wikipedia Encyclopedia, a free online encyclopedia, provides information on weblogs at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weblog>.

30. Shared Network Drives

Introduction

In most organisations' computer networks, there are a series of **Drives** used for the storage of information. These are often divided up into the following categories:

- A corporate-wide shared drive, containing documents relevant to the whole organisation;
- A branch, or group shared drive, containing documents relevant to a single organisational unit;
- A personal drive (for example, a P: or U: drive), containing documents relevant only to individuals.

It is necessary to identify clear and acceptable use policies for all three categories of drive. Good practices in managing electronic documents should be initiated in both the user workspace and the corporate space and, like so much in this area of work, begins and ends with the individual.

Detailed description of the process

Implement 'publish and point' across the organisation: This is a method of controlling the duplication of a document being circulated. Instead of attaching the document to an email message, which gives each recipient an individual copy, a read-only version of the document is placed on a shared drive – 'published' – and a 'pointer' or shortcut is emailed to alert intended recipients. Recipients can then retrieve the document from the shared drive as required. This will help to encourage a culture of sharing documents and lead to users thinking more carefully about the most appropriate method for publishing information to recipients and to treat these consistently as formal corporate documents. It will also reduce the amount of multiple working copies in the folders of many individuals.

Establish a general filing structure: Where there is a significant number of electronic documents stored on a shared network drive, a basic general filing structure should be established. Where there are group or project-based filing structures, these should aim to conform to the principles of the general filing structure to prevent divergent practices and application. The general filing structure on network drives should:

- Use simple but logical structures which meet the needs of both the organisation and the users;
- Not use individual names or position titles for directory or folder names;
- Use names which identify logical elements, such as business functions and activities or theme: sub-theme relationships.

The need for good filing structures in a shared network drive is primary, but end users should also be encouraged to use consistent filing structures in their own group and personal workspaces. This will help with the coordination between working papers and formal finalised documents, and will ease retrieval and access across all workspaces for the individual.

Use of a common terminology is essential to integration: Planning the use of shared drives should be done in conjunction with thinking about naming conventions.

- Work towards consistent use of common terminology across all groups and units of the whole organisation;
- Develop formal liaison mechanisms between those responsible for records at the local level to establish and enforce these conventions;
- Where feasible, make terminology in the shared network folder structure consistent with terminology in the paper filing system.

Build links to the paper filing system: The organisation of a shared network drive can usually be made to reflect the paper filing structure so that electronic documents are stored in a manner

compatible with their paper counterparts. This may be achievable by building a hierarchical 'folder within folder' structure using Windows, to simulate the structure of a paper file plan. Some considerations are:

- Electronic structures tend to be broader and flatter – have less depth – than their paper counterparts; it is important to control the number of levels to retain usability: in general, no more than about four or five levels to a hierarchy;
- Alphabetical folder titles are generally more usable in the electronic environment than are numerical file or classification reference numbers;
- Paper filing systems tend to use longer names than are comfortable in a Windows environment, resulting in poor file directory displays.

Control over folder creation: Where the folder structure on shared drives is formalised, there is a need for clearly articulated rights and responsibilities for folder creation, potentially allocated to specific roles.

- The extent to which individuals/workgroups are able to create electronic folders themselves;
- Mechanisms for guiding and controlling the use of terminology.

Balancing drive usage: Extending disciplined management to shared network drives will eventually involve decisions on appropriate technological support platforms and network bandwidth, and coherent policies and procedures will need to be developed. Consideration should be given to:

- The risk of lost documents in a shared network environment, where more reliability is expected;
- The need to provide back-up storage;
- The implications of shared storage for network traffic and bandwidth requirements;
- Clear identification of material that should be entrusted to a shared drive and material that should be entrusted to the non-shared environment.

Disposing of documents: In all cases, 'good housekeeping' of both shared and personal drives is essential to maintaining long-term viability, removing material which should no longer be kept, whether classed as document or record. Guidance is needed for removing:

- Unnecessary duplicates of final documents;
- Working copies which are no longer required;
- Documents which have no continuing value.

Users of local drives and personal areas of a network drive should also be encouraged to perform basic housekeeping. Regular use of the Windows Explorer 'find' facility for documents created and modified in a given period of time, will help ensure that locally held files are deleted or copied to the relevant shared drive as appropriate. Local drives should not be used for long-term storage of corporate level documents.

Example: Tearfund shared drives

During 2001, Tearfund established a shared drive on its server with the explicit purpose of supporting learning. The shared drive is organised with a folder for each of Tearfund's 15 departments, in which there are five sub-folders: 'About', 'Policy', 'Strategy', 'Learning' and 'Archive'. All activities, projects and correspondence are organised within the sub-folders and each department has an assigned activity administrator responsible for ensuring the folders are correctly and consistently used across departments. The 'Learning' sub-folder allows the results of all learning (from 'peer assists', 'learning affairs' or 'learning reviews') to be located and retrieved at head office. The introduction of an intranet was planned in order to make the shared drive structure more widely accessible (see: www.odi.org.uk/alnap/AR2002/chapter3a.htm#current).

Sources and further reading

- Managing Electronic Documents on a Local Area Network (LAN), available on www.acarm.org/documents/issue33/Smith.pdf.
- Managing Electronic Documents, see: http://customs.hmrc.gov.uk/channelsPortalWebApp/downloadFile?contentID=HMCE_CL_001555.

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