

Wiki: A new paradigm for online training and development of faculty



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The training and development function in organisations is undergoing a paradigm shift with the advent of new online technologies like the wiki and educational institutions are no exception. Wiki may provide a means for creating a faculty learning community at educational institutions, thus involving all faculty on a single common platform where each faculty is the producer as well as the user of knowledge. This paper proposes a model for the deployment of wiki for online training and development of faculty in educational institutions. The model is implemented at an online university and preliminary findings indicate that wiki activity by all faculty members is low suggesting the need of further experimentation in the use of wiki as a collaborative T&D tool for online faculty.

Keywords: wiki, faculty, training and development, online collaboration, knowledge creation

Introduction

Training and Development (T&D) has always been a key ingredient of any organisation's strategic plan in order to remain competitive and to achieve or exceed their goals. Organisations, as well as Higher Education settings are undergoing continuous profound change in the way they deliver T&D to their employees. Learning Technology is on the forefront of such change. Today, most of the web architecture, for example Web2.0, is all about participation (Gordon, 2006). Parts of the new learning methodologies that require participation and that are deployed by organisations at present are web blogs, RSS, podcasts, vodcasts, and wikis, to name a few. There appears to be a growing challenge for online faculty to keep abreast with the latest in their discipline (Villar Angulo, & Alegre De La Rosa, 2006), while also handling and learning about various new participatory methods of learning delivery in the ever growing online educational environment. Furthermore, it is crucial for any university to continuously develop and train its faculty on functions and other how-to's in order to secure a successful outcome for all stakeholders, namely the faculty member, the student, and the organisation as a whole.

Wiki as a T&D platform

Wikis are known as online encyclopaedias or websites that provide a vast source of information and allow each individual to contribute their own knowledge and experience on any topic (Clark, 2006). Basically, it allows for the emergence of an ongoing community of collaboration and learning to which anyone can add asynchronously. Organisations do have the ability to control the wiki web pages to be edited, in other words may restrict access or authority to modify content to certain users or groups.

Furthermore, organisations have started to use wiki as a tool to build internal and external social networks (Fontana, 2006). Similarly, Gordon (2006) observed that wikis increase social interaction, while enabling swift collaboration and interaction while exchanging information and creating knowledge. Correspondingly, the use of wiki as a forum may help launch the culture of collaboration (Hatch, 2007), with the sharing of lesson plans and other educational information, for example. Moreover, wiki can be seen as an informal method of learning (Clark, 2006) that may impact and improve the learning and skills of employees, online faculty in our case, considering their geographic dispersed locales.

Additionally, wiki represents criteria of collaborative technology proposed by Lipponen & Lallimo (2004), namely that pedagogical theories can be applied, that facilitation takes place, that it relies on the idea of groupware, and that it is a community-building tool. Wiki is a place where people with the same interests come together in groups on a regular basis, which Wenger (1998) refers to as communities of practice. "Communities of practice" is a pedagogical approach in professional development that considers the consequences of individual participation within a group (Macdonald & Hills, 2005). Another pedagogical approach that comes to use here is that of reflective practice, as wiki gives faculty time to think about what they have read before they reply and contribute. This, according to Schon (1983), is one

of the most effective pedagogical concepts known in the professional development practice. Research has identified communities of practice, as well as reflective practice to be vehicles for change management approaches in online settings and methods for progressive professional development (Beaty, Cousin, & Deepwell, 2002; Barab, MacKinster, & Scheckler (2003).

Expectations and learning styles have changed among professors, particular the ones who facilitate online. To these individuals the ability to make use of the web for self-paced, on-demand learning, or T&D via multiple platforms or learning technologies is of great value, which is why we have selected wiki as a T&D tool.

Deployment of wiki for faculty T&D at U21Global

At Universitas 21 Global (U21Global), selected faculty potentials undergo a mandatory three-week online faculty training programme (FTP), which they must successfully complete before they receive their official appointment to teach an online class for U21Global.

Considering the length of the FTP and the time it can take to receive an appointment to teach a class, much of the training content delivered could be forgotten. In the past, this resulted in additional training time on part of faculty mentors.. Hence, there was a need to provide faculty with a knowledge repository that allows continuous access to information regarding various facets of the LMS, online pedagogy, policies and procedures. It was desirable that this repository could be updated by all faculty, that it is easy to maintain, and where information can be retrieved quickly Thus, it was decided to create a wiki to supplement the FTP at U21Global.

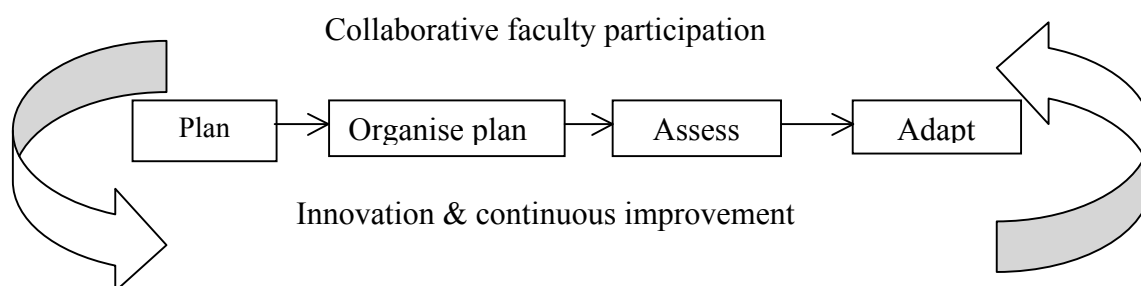


Figure 1: The U21Global model of the T&D wiki infrastructure

Embracing “a new art and science of collaboration called wikinomics” (Tapscott & Williams, 2006, p. 3) will ultimately lead towards a new competitive standard of peering on a global level. We believe that a solid T&D wiki infrastructure will not only give the geographic dispersed online faculty a feeling of integration, but allow the faculty member to immediately apply new knowledge gained. Basically, the use of wiki technology will allow for the emergence of workforce collaborating efforts among faculty (Tapscott & Williams, 2006). Furthermore, the use of wiki is a great way to manage knowledge, as it allows for narrative to be stored and for its thread to be re-called on demand (Gordon, 2006). This was instrumental for us, as we needed a training tool that allowed for an on-demand and collaborative type of T&D function.

The U21Global wiki is a faculty community resource tool. Figure 1 presents a T&D wiki infrastructure we use to deliver T&D to our global faculty. Faculty can access wiki via our LMS by selecting the ‘Faculty Community’ link. The **planning** stage includes various committee items and ideas that help us to create new and edit current wiki content. The ideas are **organised** into major groupings, such as 1) About U21Global, 2) Learning Resources, 3) Research, and 4) Managing Disciplines. The Learning Resources grouping is the one that addresses all of our T&D content. Here, various functionalities, as well as how-to’s are addressed. What is important from a T&D perspective is that wiki allows to visually represent certain screens from our LMS, which enables to illustrate certain functions faculty will use when conducting a course online.

There are two components to the **assessment** of our T&D wiki site, namely the use of this tool by all faculty members and the reflective component this tool gives each user. wiki allows users to have control of their input and the navigation of their content, making them a part of the creation of new knowledge, and allowing them to expand and grow the evolution of our online environment. Hence, after viewing edits and additions made by our colleagues, we may **adapt** some of our functions, policies, and procedures according to their valuable input given on our wiki pages. Wiki T&D pages also allow the

faculty members to enjoy reflective learning, as they have time to read pages several times before deciding to edit or add knowledge.

A crucial component of the above model is that we can observe a circular motion of collaborative participation, innovation, and continuous improvement between all components of the model continuously.

Preliminary findings in the use of wiki at U21Global

During the organisation phase of wiki deployment at U21Global, the faculty managers and learning design team contributed primarily by dividing various topics amongst themselves. The content for each wiki page developed by them was made available to all faculty through the wiki on its formal launch date of 15th May, 2007. As of 25th July, 07, the Faculty Community wiki had statistics relating to its usage as displayed in table 1.

Table 1: Preliminary statistics relating to the usage of Faculty Community wiki at U21Global

Statistic	Value
Total number of wiki pages	180
Total number of hits at all pages in the wiki	16,954
Average number of hits per wiki page	94
Total number of hits on the main (home) page	8818
Total number of edits on the wiki	3227
Average number of edits per wiki page	18

The preliminary statistics show that almost half of the total hits have occurred on the main page of the wiki. A closer examination of the 'history' of edits in various pages of the wiki gave a startling revelation that as of 25th July, 07 (after more than 2 months of the launch of the wiki) not a single edit to any of the wiki pages was made by faculty members (apart from the in-house faculty managers and the learning design team). This finding posed a challenge to the researchers prompting them to rethink the strategy of collaborative faculty participation in sharing and creating knowledge as proposed in the model.

Conclusion and future direction

The success of any university teaching professional development (T&D) effort, especially with a collaborative tool such as wiki, requires the involvement of participants in order to initiate and sustain university growth and teaching changes (Angula, et al, 2006). Faculty may appreciate this training tool and see it as a benefit in that it gives them additional knowledge to better perform their job. In addition, wiki is expected to:

- Promote collaboration, strengthen partnerships, and increase network building among faculty
- Provide ongoing professional developmental support "Connected faculty community" approach
- Increase and enhance creativity and innovation through the application of reflective thinking
- Initiate a holistic approach to faculty T&D

At U21Global, the use of wiki for faculty T&D is still at a stage of infancy and we are yet to experience full participation from our entire globally dispersed faculty. We understand that the living system approach is crucial here, namely making a difference and continuously moving forward at every level i.e. individually, collaboratively, as well as organisation-wide, adding value to every stakeholder of both the organisational and individual system. We anticipate that our current T&D wiki Infrastructure model (Figure 1) may need to be revised, as we consider the following applications to strengthen professional and community development participation by all:

- Survey faculty to receive feedback about how they see wiki as a T&D tool and what would help them in the use of wiki
- Involve faculty managers to provide initial scaffolding to faculty in order to overcome their initial inhibitions in using wiki
- Create faculty groups by common subject to be moderated by a faculty manager through continual interaction
- Integrate the use of wiki as a T&D tool in the initial Faculty Training Programme (FTP)

Finally, we suggest investigating if and how this faculty collaborative T&D wiki model may be far-reaching in its interplay with other elements of the online learning environment.

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Proceedings errata corrected 2 Nov 2007: p.360 change "Elizabeth" to "Evelyn" in the copyright notice.

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