

Using Wikis to Facilitate Organizational Learning and Knowledge Sharing – The Case of the AACSB Mission Formulation at National Central University

Most organizations' structures are top-down, especially those in Asia. Contrary to this inflexible organization setting, open business model has been widely discussed today with the hope to achieve innovation. How can highly centralized organizations innovate to harness collaborative intelligence? In this paper, we will introduce the case of the School of Management at National Central University (NCU) located in Taiwan, which used wikis to formulate its Mission Statement and Objectives for its AACSB accreditation.

Wikis are web-based hypertext applications for collaborative writing, created by Ward Cunningham in 1995. One of the most important features of wikis is "Democratization of contributions" as Majchrzak labeled. Everyone can contribute into wiki collaboration regardless of his background, position or any other visible features.

Wikis provide a simple way to collaborate. The syntax of wikis is simpler than Hyper Text Markup language (HTML.) This helps everyone provide his opinions without technical barrier.

Updates at wikis are instant and contents can be shown immediately. They preserve all versions of the same documents. Thus wikis help understand the collaboration process and document evolution, and evaluate user contributions. In addition, wikis allow rollback. This prevents documents from malicious editing.

By reserving and comparing all versions, and providing discussions, wikis are not only document repositories but also places where users can trace all discussions, revisions, changes, thinking and so on. According to Nonaka's organizational knowledge creation model, the conversion between tacit and explicit forms of knowledge denotes the process of knowledge creation, where the key "lies in the mobilization and conversion of tacit knowledge." Marwick identified collaboration systems, groupware, and on-line discussion databases as the technologies for transferring tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge. Collaboration, free discussions, edit preservation, and version comparison are features of wikis, through which ideas can be documented and solicited. Thus, we believe wikis can play an important role in the conversion of tacit to explicit knowledge.

Another way wikis facilitate knowledge management is due to its format of collaboration. McAfee argued, "The technologists of Enterprise 2.0 (for example wikis) are trying hard not to impose on users any preconceived notions about how work should proceed or how output should be categorized or structured. Instead, they're building tools that let these aspects of knowledge work emerge." While tacit knowledge is characterized as unstructured, subjective, abstract, and free from fixed formats, wikis can then be a tool to evolve by themselves to match a variety of characteristics of tacit knowledge.

The NCU SOM mission formulation was a five-hour meeting, divided by a lunch break. Before the meeting, each participant was given a preliminary draft of the mission and the objectives. In the 3-hour morning session, professors and administrators formed group discussions and used

MS Word to write their proposals of mission and objectives. Then, the 8 groups submitted their proposals which were shown on the big screen.

In the afternoon, the same people conducted the wiki session. All groups' proposals written in the morning were recorded into their wiki pages seen by every participant. Then, one group's proposal was chosen as the prototype. All groups then edited this prototype and meanwhile the big screen showed the content and updated it every minute. The result of this 2-hour session including instruction of using wikis is a 345-word document in Chinese (which would be longer after translated into English,) to be served as the draft of the mission and the objectives.

A questionnaire with its validity and reliability comprehensively tested were then given to the 37 participants to evaluate the quality, satisfaction, participation, and efficiency. All four dimensions of the wiki session are proven to be statistically significantly better than those of the traditional mode. The result also shows that wikis have helped organizational learning, knowledge sharing, and decision making:

- *Organizational learning*
The beginning of the wiki session was questioned by some senior participants as chaotic, but it took not long time that the participants reached convergence.
- *Knowledge sharing*
Although consensus can be achieved *within* groups, no consensus was achieved during inter-group discussion. The wikis helped groups recognize other groups' intellectual contributions and then incorporated into their own documents. This knowledge sharing helped groups reach convergence.
- *Decision making*
In a total 5-hour meeting, 3 hours for traditional mode and 2 hours for wiki, the draft of the mission and the objectives was created.

Two 2-hour meetings then were held by the AACSB steering committees to finalize the mission and the objectives. They have approved by the college senate.