PLANNING FOR A SUCCESSFUL CORPORATE WIKI

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Abstract. Corporate wikis are increasingly being adopted by enterprises as a solution to various organizational processes. Subsequently a significant number of research works have started focusing on providing results on both successful and unsuccessful corporate wiki implementations. Nevertheless, the scope of these studies is usually limited on a specific organizational case or focuses on a limited set of aspects of the wiki adoption, e.g. either the technological or the cultural one. Our objective in this work is to provide an overview of the key factors affecting the successful implementation of an organizational wiki, by analyzing thirty case studies reported in the research literature. The result of this analysis is the identification of a core set of common best practices to be taken into account by stakeholders when planning the integration of a wiki within a corporate context. In this way, the study aims at contributing to the planning and the realization of more successful corporate wiki implementations with enterprise environments.

Keywords: corporate wikis, computer-supported cooperative work, enterprise information systems, knowledge management.

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1 Introduction

Since the early beginning of the 21st century, the world changed in a way that could hardly be imagined some years earlier. After the personal computer revolution of the 1980's and the boom of the World Wide Web in the 1990's, one even greater invention took place: web user collaboration. Indeed, up to that time, the idea of millions of interconnected people collaborating with one another had never, through the entire human history, been so widely implemented. And even better: this implementation works. The success of a variety of ventures, ranging from collaborative content creation communities – such as YahooAnswers – and social networking sites – such as MySpace and Facebook –, to content sharing applications, like Flickr and YouTube, proves it.

The main feature of this new computing era, often called Web 2.0, is user collaboration. Among the most prominent paradigms of this movement stand wikis; a technology which enables distributed users to collaboratively work towards the creation of online content, by building and enhancing one another's contributions. The wiki technology is successfully used by one of the most influential and referenced sites of the web, namely Wikipedia. First appearing in 2001 and growing ever since, the Wikipedia model has proven that it is possible to effectively harness user knowledge into structured, qualitative content - and hence, it has opened the way to numerous other content collaboration efforts.

The success of Wikipedia, combined with the potential of producing significant knowledge value in a simple and efficient manner, soon attracted the attention of the corporate world, leading an increasing number of organizations to invest on the adoption of the wiki technology.

The advantages that they see in this investment are many. As indicated by a significant number of success stories [1-8], wikis can render corporate collaboration more inclusive and efficient, by actively involving employees and stakeholders into the organizational knowledge building process. They can also help build and maintain a solid experience base within the firm, a feature significantly appreciated, since expertise re-gaining is more than often translated into high costs, in terms of both time and resources. Wikis are also efficient in supporting organizational communication, as well as in complementing or, in some cases being an alternative to, other currently used business collaboration technologies.

As a result of the above, wikis are nowadays used to facilitate a broad range of organizational processes within the enterprise. These include the collaboration of dispersed corporate teams in document co-authoring efforts, the formulation of inhouse communities of practice, the gathering of organizational tacit knowledge, as well as a number of more specific processes, such as customer relationship management, software development and project administration.

Despite the advantages they can gain an organization, the road to implementing a corporate wiki is not always obstacle-free. A number of non-successful ventures [9,10], indicate that, as with any technological solution, careful planning needs to take place prior to establishing a corporate wiki, in order to avoid the frustration, resource waste and innovation setback that a failed implementation might bring on.

Therefore, as the use of corporate wikis leaves the initial stages of enthusiastic acceptance and it faces reality, and in a time where knowledge is considered to be one

of the most valuable assets for the survival of an organization in the global marketplace[11,12], a question that inevitably arises is: how can wiki-based user collaboration be effectively implemented so that it can really create value for the organization?

In seeking an effective means of implementing a corporate wiki, one may need to answer a number of related questions:

- Which should be the expectations and which are the anticipated constraints of using a wiki within a corporate context?
- Which are the important parameters that need to be taken into consideration by stakeholders and employees wishing to benefit from this new medium?
- What can the management do to support the implementation of a corporate wiki?
- How can the employees be motivated to use the newly introduced technology?
- Which technical characteristics need to be taken into account when selecting a wiki platform?
- Overall, is there a clear process to follow in order to simplify and to smoothen the integration of a wiki into the corporate working environment?

In this context, a considerable number of studies reporting on the issue of implementing a wiki within a corporation can be found in the research literature. Depending on their context and focus, i.e. whether they are applied or more theoretical, these studies provide significant results on a variety of aspects concerning the successful implementation of a wiki within a corporation. However, their results are usually limited on the specific organizational case that they describe. As such, they do not cover all the aspects that need to be taken into account when planning the adoption of an organizational wiki. In addition, depending on the scope of the case study, some works may focus more on the technological aspect of the wiki adoption, while others may deal with the cultural or motivational aspect of this implementation. Nevertheless, in their effort to plan for a sustainable corporate wiki, stakeholders need to have an overall view of the factors that have proven, according to previous experience, to affect this venture. A study, therefore, which would combine the results and observations of a diversity of case studies and viewpoints, to provide an overview of the key factors affecting the success of an organizational wiki would be of critical importance

In this paper, and based on the results of analyzing thirty case studies reported in the research literature on the use of wikis in enterprise settings, we identify the factors that are most frequently reported to affect the success or failure of a wiki within a corporate context. The article thus aims at familiarizing stakeholders in a variety of organizational levels – including team leaders and project managers, organizational change or IT experts, communities of practice and individual employees – with the particularities that the use of the wiki technology most commonly presents and, in this way, to support the future implementation and sustainability of more successful corporate wiki stories. The rest of this paper is organized as follows: section 2 presents the most important findings of the related research literature and section 3 presents the research methodology followed for the identification and analysis of the selected case studies. Section 4 – constituting the main contribution of this paper – presents the identified best practices regarding the successful planning of a corporate wiki implementation. Finally, section 5 concludes with the main findings and future research directions of this work.

2 Related literature

The most significant part of the available research literature on wikis focuses on either the educational domain or on Wikipedia, the popular wiki-based encyclopedia. It is only in the last few years that another type of studies, which pertains to the use of wikis on the corporate domain, has started to emerge. The focus of this latter type of works, a significant number of which constitute the set of the case studies analyzed by the present research effort, refers mostly to the implementation of a wiki on a specific corporation.

The studies that extend this focus on more than a single or a few enterprise cases, seeking to tap the broader picture and provide overall planning directions and guidelines are still very few. Among these, the study of Wagner [13] uses three media choice theories to evaluate the potential of enterprise wikis as a means of facilitating communication and collaboration within the enterprise. The study bases its results on 32 corporate wiki implementation case studies. It concludes that enterprise wikis present the potential of enabling and leveraging corporate communication, provided that specific aspects often related to their open nature, such as free-riding and conflict of values are adequately addressed.

Another multiple case study is the one performed by Stocker and Tochtermann [14]. This study draws its results from three corporate wiki implementation cases. It concludes that the examined corporate wikis indeed facilitated knowledge sharing among the employees and improved the corporate documentation processes.

Finally, the works of Poole [15] and Grudin [16], which categorize enterprise wikis into three categories, are also relevant to the scope of the present work in the sense that they perform a meta-analysis instead of providing direct implementation results. Specifically, the aforementioned studies provide a taxonomy of enterprise wiki genres, based on a corporate wiki application on a large organization. Three genres are in this context identified: single contributor wikis, which are used as personal information management tools, group wikis, which are used as tools to facilitate corporate team collaboration and in-house corporate encyclopedias, functioning as an enterprise-wide knowledge repository. These works also highlight three important commonly occurring issues of corporate wiki implementations, namely the need to align individual contributor and management expectations, the need to organize content in a flexible manner, as well as the requirement to position the wiki in the existing corporate culture.

The present work seeks to add to and extend the aforementioned research literature domain, by analyzing the results and the observations over thirty reported corporate wiki implementations, and in this way to identify a set of common patterns that influence the result of a corporate wiki implementation. By highlighting some of the most important factors affecting the problem-at-hand, the study therefore aims at facilitating the realization of more successful enterprise wiki ventures.

3 Research methodology

To identify the enabling and restricting factors of applying and using a wiki within a corporation, the following methodological steps were applied:

1. Selection of the case study dataset

To select the dataset of the case studies that would be used as the basis of the study, initially an extensive search of the relevant recent academic literature was performed. The criteria that a study should fulfill in order to be included in the selected data set were that: a) the application domain of the described wiki implementation should specifically be an enterprise setting (thus not including settings such as the educational one or studies focusing on Wikipedia), b) the study should be an applied and not a theoretical one and c) it should provide results, either in a qualitative format, e.g. through interviews, reported user viewpoints or questionnaires, or in a quantitative format, e.g. through a log analysis of the wiki usage, or reports on the number of page views and edits. In addition, the study should clearly report on the perceived outcome, i.e. whether the corporate stakeholders and employees deemed the specific wiki implementation successful or not.

2. Basic profile building of each study

Thirty case studies were selected during step one [1-10,17-36]. Twenty six of the selected studies report beneficial, positive or successful results [1-8,17-23,26-36], while the results of the remaining four are reported not satisfactory or unsuccessful by the corporate stakeholders involved [9,10,24,25].

The next step included identifying the basic profile characteristics of each study, to determine the scope that could be covered by the fusion of their results. From all the features that could be used to characterize each study, a number of basic features were selected, on the basis that almost all the studies provided the respective information. Other features, for which a significant number of studies did not provide information, were not included. The profile of each study thus consisted of the following basic information elements:

- *Company size.* The selected studies were found to focus on small enterprises (less than 50 employees 7 studies), medium (less than 100 employees 11 studies) and large-sized (more than 100 employees 12 studies) corporations.
- *Company specialization.* The studies were found to describe corporate wiki implementation experiences from a variety of different specializations including research (8 studies), manufacturing (1 study), consultancy (2 studies), educational services provision (2 studies), design (1 study), media/entertainment (3 studies), publications (2 studies), software

development (8 studies), crisis management (1 study) and non-profit organizations (2 studies).

• *Target organizational task.* The purposes that the reported corporations implemented the wiki for also varied. Five different target wiki usage activities were identified, ranging from general company activities, such as knowledge codification (8 studies), or the facilitation of collaboration between the members of corporate communities of practice (4 studies), to more specialized corporate processes such as the ones related to the development of information systems (10 studies). Other procedures include interaction with third parties (6 studies) and inter-organizational communication and collaboration (2 studies).

As one may observe, the studies cover a broad range of different organizational cases and corporate settings, providing the diversity potential that the present study seeks.

3. Extraction of the reported wiki enablers and constraints

The next step was to extract the enablers and constraints reported by each study regarding the specific wiki implementation performed. Initially, these factors were depicted using the language of the specific case study and then, when they referred to the same notion, they were codified using the same terminology.

4. Grouping and analysis of the identified enablers and constraints

The final step was the grouping and analysis of the identified enablers and constraints. During this step the extracted factors were used in conjunction with the respective study results, to identify common patterns of wiki success or failure across the examined cases. Some representative pattern strategies that were used to mark a specific factor as a common enabler of a corporate wiki implementation, are the following:

- a) A study, characterized by specific factors, reports success, whereas another study, implicitly or explicitly reporting the lack of these factors, reports failure or partial failure.
- b) A study attributes its success to one or more specific factors and the latter are also supported as success-contribution elements by other studies.
- c) A factor has not contradictory meaning, i.e. there is no case of some studies supporting its success building capacity, while others supporting the opposite.

The success-enabling factors of a corporate wiki implementation, which were identified using the above pattern building criteria, are presented and analyzed in the following section, along with a reference to the case studies that support them.

4 Setting up a successful corporate wiki: Best practices and affecting factors

Based on observations made over the successful and unsuccessful stories mentioned in the selected studies of the research literature, as well as on a specific set of studies focusing on the enablers and constraints of the use of wikis in corporate settings [13,16,37-40], one may distinguish four main categories of factors affecting the successful intergration of a wiki within a corporate setting: 1) the cultivation of a wiki culture within the enterprise, 2) the selection of the appropriate wiki platform to suit the needs of the organization, 3) the encouragement of user participation and 4) the maintainance of the achieved results (Figure 1).



Fig. 1. Planning for a successful corporate wiki

4.1 Cultivate a "Wiki Culture"

The first important step in establishing a successful corporate wiki is the cultivation of an open, knowledge sharing culture inside the corporate environment. Overall, this step involves two main prerequisites: ensuring management support and providing users with the appropriate knowledge sharing incentives.

4.1.1 Ensure Management Support

Wikis typically function better within flat-based, rather than within strictly hierarchical knowledge structured organizational contexts. In other words, if knowledge is implicitly considered to be a personal, rather than a corporate asset, users will be reluctant to share, as this might limit the chances they stand towards inner competition. Thus, as a number of the examined case studies support [9,14,19-21,23,26,41], for the organization to actually benefit from the capabilities of a wiki system, the management should embrace the need for a non-hierarchical, open and bottom-up knowledge sharing culture, actively urge users to share their knowledge inside the corporation and promote interaction, dialogue and feedback among the prospective wiki users.

4.1.2 Provide Knowledge Sharing Incentives

Apart from realizing the need for establishing an open, sharing culture, the management is also important to provide prospective wiki users with incentives for sharing their knowledge [5,9,17,20,33,42]. The four incentives that seem to have the most impact include incorporating the wiki to the daily routine of the employees, providing recognition for one's contributions, building a safe-to-contribute environment and promoting team spirit.

The active integration of the wiki into the daily collaboration and communication processes of the organization is one of the most important factors of its success. To ensure this integration, one could follow two patterns: a) actively support the use of the wiki over other communication tools such as face-to-face meetings or e-mail exchanges and b) perceive the time that the employees will spent on contributing to the platform as productive work time and not as an extra activity, e.g. by allocating a specific number of working hours per month to tasks related to one's involvement with the corporate wiki.

The second important incentive refers to authorship recognition both by the management and by one's colleagues. Authorship recognition, e.g. in the form of "top participants", increases the perceived self-efficacy of the employees and their benefit they see in sharing their knowledge, and forms a strong sharing motivation [43,44].

Furthermore, a common employee concern, often leading to low corporate wiki participation levels, is that sharing work-in-progress may negatively affect the assessments they receive. Therefore, another incentive for knowledge sharing is the development of a working environment where the contribution of unfinished work is perceived as part of the development process and it is positively evaluated.

Another means of motivating employee sharing is to promote team spirit and to cultivate a sense of trust and identity inside the corporate wiki community. Possible ways to achieve this is by encouraging users to create personal profile pages and by promoting the building of closely connected, self-managed collaboration units inside the corporate wiki, such as communities of practice. Complementarily to positively affecting participation, the creation of a group identity has also been found to increase the social responsibility for one's actions and the commitment to common welfare, thus preventing "free riding", i.e. the situation in which the number of views is significantly higher than the number of user edits. Apart from fostering the development of team spirit, the trust levels that have already been established within the corporation can be used to promote the wiki acceptance [10]. Specifically, as a number of studies suggest [13,14], initially introducing the corporate wiki to small groups, which have already established a sense of trust, and then broadening its use to larger, more anonymous teams can prove significantly beneficial.

4.2 Select the appropriate platform

A second step towards a successful corporate wiki implementation refers to selecting the platform which is most appropriate for the needs of the organization. A number of issues that need to be taken into account to facilitate this selection include the level of complexity, structural support, quality assurance and workspace awareness provided by the platform. Based on the analysis of these issues, provided in the following, as well as using available web resources that present and compare the technical characteristics of a variety of wiki platforms [45-47], one may identify the platform that best suits their organizational needs.

4.2.1 Adhere to simplicity - customize if necessary

Two additional aspects, important for the selection of a corporate wiki platform, are simplicity and customization. That is, the selection of the simplest possible wiki platform, which can meet the specified organizational requirements, can help reduce the complexity of learning to use the tool and in this way it can boost user participation [19,48].

A simple core platform can then be extended with the exact additional functionalities that the organization requires [7]. In fact, many organizations seem to prefer selecting a simple, usually open source, platform and to customize it to fit the needs of their own enterprise setting, rather than using a ready-to-use solution. A typical customization process, refers to extending a core wiki platform to support more complex file formats, compared to simple text, such as tables, spreadsheets, executable code, as well as enterprise simulation models [6,28].

Finally, instead of customizing a platform and owing the equipment that is necessary for its hosting and maintenance, another option is using already customized wiki solutions, which are offered as a hosted service by dedicated companies[49].

4.2.2 Provide structural support

A major issue often reported is the loose content structure that wikis inherently have [3,6,7,17,20,26,27]. Although the open editing nature of the wiki technology facilitates informal sharing, collaboration and innovation creation, yet it also tends to produce unstructured knowledge content, which in turn may result to difficulties in navigation and querying, as well as in the insertion and retrieval of useful information. On the other hand, enforcing a very strict information organization schema, e.g. through static intranet solutions, is by far not the optimal as it limits creativity and collaboration capabilities.

A variety of solutions exist to ensure structural support, while maintaining the open collaborative nature of the wiki. A first solution is the manual content maintenance, by a person or a core group of persons, often referred to as "wiki gardeners", responsible to ensure the correct classification of the inserted information and to maintain the consistency of the corporate experience base_[3,17,26]. Another popular solution refers to enforcing a specified content structure through simple means, such as predefined topic taxonomies [29,30,33], or more advanced ones, like techniques that organize the wiki content based on a synergy of machine and human intelligence [50] or the utilization of semantic web technologies [2,22,31]. This latter solution,

which facilitates context-based access through the provision of mechanisms such as tag-supported navigation and semantic querying, seems to successfully address the issue of structural support and for this reason it tends to be increasingly used by corporations wishing to integrate a wiki to their organizational activities.

4.2.3 Ensure content quality

One of the mostly often mentioned issues regarding the implementation of corporate wikis, refers to the need to ensure their content quality [2,3,8,20,25,26,41,51]. Ensuring quality of the wiki content is important for two reasons: it can help cultivate a notion of trust among users that the content they have contributed will not be misused and it can also ensure that one will find qualitative information that can indeed add value to their work. A first means to ensure content quality in a wiki platform include establishing membership criteria to restrict editing only to a specific community of corporate users [23,35,52]. This can help maintain the level of exchanged information high and on-topic, while it can also help avoid vandalism issues - often encountered in case the wiki is open to the wide public, e.g. in cases of corporate wikis used by news organizations. Differentiated group permissions can also be applied to further ensure content confidentiality, a factor important especially to large-scale enterprise settings.

Another means of ensuring content quality is using, manually or automatically assigned, quality tags [2-4]. In the manual form of this method, a central documentation team can monitor the wiki pages, mark them according to their quality and resolve arising quality issues. More advanced methods of automatic quality assurance, for instance through the use of peer review processes and automated expert identification mechanisms, can be also applied [53].

4.2.5 Provide Workspace Awareness

An additional important issue to consider when selecting a corporate wiki platform is the provision of workspace awareness, i.e. mechanisms that inform users regarding content changes, inserted comments or contribution dates [32]. Visualization techniques are a popular means of achieving this type of awareness and enhancing usability [1]. These techniques can be applied on document level, to enhance individual user collaboration, or across the wiki pages, to enable stakeholders, such as project managers, to better coordinate the processes served through the wiki. Finally, automatic notification mechanisms, such as RSS feeds, can also be applied to inform users regarding workspace changes, and thus to further strengthen the effectiveness of their collaboration within the platform [4,18,28,54].

4.3 Support User Participation

Having established an effective wiki sharing culture inside the organization and having selected the wiki platform that best suits the organizational needs, the next step towards a successful corporate wiki implementation is to ensure satisfactory user participation. Two main activities to ensure the above include effectively training the users and pre-populating the wiki with already existing corporate content.

4.3.1. Train users

User training is reported to be a highly significant factor to the success of a corporate wiki platform and it should consist of guidance regarding both the cultural and the technological aspects of the tool[10,17,20,23,29,30,36].

As far as the cultural aspect is concerned, training should focus on introducing employees to the wiki knowledge sharing culture discussed above, so that they will be motivated to share experiences and ideas with colleagues and build the open environment necessary for the wiki platform to create value for the organization.

Apart from the cultural factor, training should also familiarize employees with the technical aspects of the wiki platform. This is important since even if the proper sharing culture has been established within the organization, employees and the stakeholders may still be reluctant to change the traditional collaboration means they have been using. Even in case that users eventually adopt the tool, if proper training has not been initially provided, then they are likely to interpret the wiki in terms of more familiar to them technologies [55] – such as static knowledge sharing solutions – a fact which may lead to its less effective use.

Technical training could include introducing users to the interface and functionalities of the wiki, to its navigation mechanisms, as well as to its content development syntax. This type of training can take place both prior to the launch of the wiki, through introductory sessions and workshops, as well as throughout its use, through the provision of guidelines, help pages and training areas, often referred to as "sandboxes", inside the platform [4,5,18,23,29,30,52]. Finally, the extent of the necessary training can be determined taking into account the level of familiarity with new technologies that the target user group already possesses.

4.3.2. Pre-Populate the wiki

Users are less likely to see future value and contribute to an entirely blank wiki platform and, thus, another means of boosting user participation – according to a significant number of studies – is to pre-populate the wiki prior to its launch [1,6,8,14,20,25,26,35]. The pre-population content can be retrieved from various sources potentially used within the organization, such as static HTML intranets, documentation databases, discussion forums or e-mail communications.

4.4 Maintain, monitor, evaluate and enhance

The last step in establishing a successful corporate wiki, mentioned by almost all the examined case studies, is to constantly monitor, evaluate and maintain the results achieved, to ensure that the platform will produce long-term value for the organization. A number of means can, in this context be used to monitor the wiki integration in the corporate environment. These means include observing the user activity history, provided by most of the wiki platforms in a textual or visual way [1], or applying social network analysis to analyze and measure the activity levels inside the wiki and provide an insight to the collaboration aspects that need to be maintained, enhanced or supported.

5. Conclusion and future work

In this study, using results and observations drawn from thirty case studies of wiki implementations in corporate environments, we identify and analyze a number of issues that can affect or restrict the success of a corporate wiki. Overall, it seems that the effective implementation of a wiki in the enterprise is a mix of several factors, involving both a technological and a cultural aspect (Figure 2). The management should seek to support both these aspects in order to create the basis for a sustainable corporate wiki implementation, which will indeed create value for the organization.



Fig. 2. An effective corporate wiki implementation involves both a cultural and a technological aspect

Future work can include further extending this work to include potential additional factors revealed as new case studies are being published. In addition, this work focused on the identification of the common aspects that affect the adoption of wikis in an enterprise setting. Future work can include extending this analysis to different levels of granularity, e.g. depending on the company size, its specialization or its inherent organizational culture.

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