

Good practice exchange from a Web 2.0 point of view

The arrival of the 2.0 paradigm seems to have a strong influence on all activities related to knowledge sharing. Good practice exchange is one of these activities. In Web 2.0 what we find is collective creativity oriented not only to new forms of content creation and access, but also to the explicit building and fostering of new social forms of collaboration. Taken in the broadest sense, this creativity in social interaction spans from infrastructures (Grid Computing for example) to actual people organized in communities. These communities are based on personal contribution and, of course, collaborative creation of content and knowledge.

We frame the discussion about the impact of 2.0 on good practice exchange by setting it in the general framework of knowledge exchange in communities of practice. We have proposed a view of good practice exchange that is based on both sociological exchange theory and the findings of research in complex organization design. Both take as a departing point the difficulties that arise in creating communities of individuals that progress if they cooperate. A simple model that integrates social, knowledge and technological considerations was used to assess the main characteristics of several ongoing initiatives. We used its dimensions as a guide for the evaluation and clustering of projects and services. They were mainly in the area of practice exchange in eGovernment but also in other, more general, areas.

In this paper we summarize our findings, explore three significant initiatives and try to identify future trends in the interconnection of good practice exchange and 2.0 potentialities.



Roc Fages

Goldmundus



Ramon Sangüesa

Worldwide Minds and Technical University of Catalonia

Keywords

Web 2.0, communities of practice, good practice exchange

“ Going 2.0 means opening up to individual contributions coming from people in the internal organization and in the external environment. ”

1 Introduction: good practice exchange in context

In order to see how 2.0 is related to good practice exchange, we had to find a common analytical ground to encompass the activities of two areas apparently unrelated. The prevailing interpretation of Web 2.0 is associated mainly with technology, although from the very beginning it seemed that 2.0 technologies were inherently social and related to cooperation through common knowledge creation, sharing and interchanging (Saveri, 2005). On the other hand, one can isolate knowledge interchange as the main activity in good practice exchange initiatives. Therefore, we abstracted the characteristics of both the technologies and the actual initiatives by using the framework of *social exchange*, based on knowledge (Blau, 1964). We did so as a way to unify the whole discussion social collaborative knowledge exchange and collaborative technologies. The latter are, at the same time, the core of new economic and social relationships as well as their main facilitators (Benkler, 2006). In viewing both technological and social dynamics under the same conceptual framework, one can see a different picture of the usual setting for good practice exchange arising.

Communities of Practice (CoP) (Wenger, 1998) are usually taken as a convenient starting point to characterize the environment where good practice exchange most frequently takes place. And it is precisely this environment what is being changed by the disruption in social dynamics spawned by Web 2.0 technologies. The original Community of Practice concept is undergoing important evolutionary changes due to the arrival of 2.0 technologies (O'Reilly, 2005; Hagel, 2007).

1.1 Good practice as a situated knowledge exchange

Good practice exchange can be modeled as a knowledge exchange between the members of a community. It does not take place in a vacuum, but in a situated cultural community framework. This is the type of knowledge that defines CoPs (Wenger, 1998; Brown, 1991). The interchanged knowledge is very practical and situated. The motivation for exchange between individuals lies not only in increasing their personal stocks of knowledge for their own individual benefit, but also towards increasing the knowledge of the whole community they belong to. This has been observed in very different sectors and actors whether they are multinational companies, governments, or intergovernmental citizen initiatives. CoPs are becoming more and more virtualized and organized in terms of networks (Deloitte; Wellman, 1999; Fischer, 2001; Borgatti, 2003; Greve, 2004). Precisely the fact that corporate multi-company groups (Moran, 2004), non-profit organizations and other entities using the CoP approach are increasingly resorting to virtual means of performing their actions, opens the door for a greater exposure to the impact of 2.0 technologies.

Networks of Practice seem to be evolving fast into the dominant way to exchange knowledge (Gloor, 2002). This, in turn, may change in significant ways the social practices and dynamics previously identified in CoPs.

1.2 Web 2.0 and CoPs

2.0 technologies have been equated to the Read/Write Web or a Web that is based on user generated content and mass collaboration. It has also been defined as well as the social practices and economic possibilities opened by having this kind of technological facilitators. In Web 2.0 what we find is collective creativity oriented not only to new forms of content creation and access but also to the explicit building and fostering of new social forms of collaboration. Taken in the broadest sense, this creativity in social interaction spans from infrastructures (Grid Computing for example) to actual people organized into communities (Atkins, 2004). These communities are based on personal contribution and, of course, collaborative creation of content and knowledge.

2.0 affects CoPs by providing new possibilities for the learning processes that typically take place inside CoPs. These processes are based on exchanging tacit and explicit knowledge. They also rely on the building of personal relationships around learning. 2.0 technologies affect both activities. By facilitating a

new type of emergent dynamics and new opportunities for unrelated people to find similarly-minded and more knowledgeable fellows, these technologies also potentially offer more dynamic and emergent ways for the creation and organization of CoP. In a way, these new possibilities are at odds with current ways of creating and managing CoPs and practice exchange. Consequently, good practice exchange schemas have to take into account all these new possibilities if they want to reap the benefits that 2.0 technologies bring with them.

2 The model: what are we looking for?

We describe here some insights gained from working on a project on Web 2.0 and good practice exchange (Fages, 2007). This project worked by examining a substantial number of web sites using 2.0 technologies in some form or another in order to support different types of knowledge exchange.

In order to cluster and assess the 300–odd sites we reviewed, we tried to create first a simple model of practice exchange environments. This model has three different dimensions which, in some degree or another, have been used to characterize and compare networked communities. These dimensions are:

- the social dimension
- the knowledge dimension
- the technological dimension

The *social dimension* refers to all the basic behaviours and conventions of interaction between members of a community that define its collective dynamics. The enforcement of rules dealing with reciprocity (Fleming, 2003), the creation, diffusion and enforcement of norms as well as the management of trust and reputation (Gallivan, 2001) form the basis of this dimension. With it we tried to assess if there were clear mechanisms (technological or other) to cover these aspects. We used previous work in the design and assessment of artificial communities (Pujol, 2005) as well as sociological works on community development. Some of them have been recently used to initiate new sociological approaches to the study of Web 2.0 (Beer, 2007).

The *knowledge dimension* deals with which type of knowledge is exchanged and under which forms (Teigland, 2003). Good practice can be exchanged in terms of cases, advices, referrals (to documents or other sources, including people), for example. Also it can be expressed in diverse degrees of explicitness and in different formats (Jimes, 2003). We used as a guide to define this dimension previous works on knowledge use and creation in CoPs (Wenger, 1998).

Finally, *the technological dimension* refers not only to the actual technologies being employed to support several collective and individual functions and activities, but to the extent to which the metaphors of technology actually create a new standpoint from which to look at communities and the production and interchange of knowledge that takes place within them. We used as a guide previous works on the socio-technological interplay that occurs in cooperation platforms and CoPs (Saveri, 2005), (Steinfeld, 2007). Here is where 2.0 gets in (Beer, 2007). It is interesting to remark that, up to now, most of the work on the technological basis of CoPs still separated the technological aspect from the rest of dimensions of a CoP (Wenger). It was usual to see that the technological side of CoPs adopted a “technological management” perspective. Instead of seeing technology as a component that coevolved with the needs of the CoP or facilitated new practices and dynamics, the view was different. Traditionally, technology arrived to the development of a CoP as an auxiliary tool. One of our observations is that, contrarily to the traditional CoP approach that uses technology as a support of an existing CoP, Web 2.0 technologies seem to facilitate the spontaneous evolution of new communities on account of the exchange of knowledge and the activation of collaborative learning that they are meant for.

The remarkable aspect of 2.0 is that, by contributing knowledge and creating social cues associated to the knowledge contributors, they allow the emergence of new social relationships, and therefore *allow*

new communities to be built from the bottom up. Therefore, the use of these technologies creates new social and knowledge dynamics. Groups and communities are formed from the mutual recognition of people who were previously unrelated. For example, Flickr.com, (Graham, 2006) with very simple technology for uploading photographs and letting people tag them, has helped create actual communities of practice around photographic techniques. People who had never previously met started to connect through Flickr.com by detecting other individuals who contributed their own photographs and expressed interest not only in sharing them, but also in meeting people to improve their photographic skills. Some groups do, in fact, get together physically. They periodically go on photographic tours and their members mutually assess their works and progress. They interchange the roles of novice and master dynamically, by recognising proficiency by peers. This is very similar to the evolution of apprenticeship that takes place within a classical CoP. But this kind of community started not from a pre-existing organization, but spawned from the availability of technology. Instead of the typical process of detecting a CoPs and providing it with appropriate technology, the process here seems to proceed the other way around.

There were other auxiliary aspects that we took into account when examining the characteristics of each site.

Coupling: we tried to assess to which extent the technological 2.0 tools used in a site were suited to the goals and social practices that the initiatives tried to attain and maintain, and how much potential for evolution the current technological choice allowed (Vast, 2004).

Market dimension: the extent to which interchanges were built on an expectation of return in terms of economic value. This value could be either in monetized form or in other type of worth convertible unit, for example reputation. Most communities work without an identifiable fast return for the contributions of each individual (Kollock, 1999), (Trier, 2007). However, some are based on explicit market structures. Others share a common understanding that each step in an exchange is one of a set of possible “investments” in each member’s future reputation, knowledge or status (Wasko, 2004). Some exchange sites presented themselves as “markets” for ideas or for experts.

Management: here we assessed the degree of separation between the roles of managers and members of the community. “Managing” here refers not just to the administration of the site or technological platform but also to conflict resolution, attribution and recognition of roles, norm enforcement, goal setting and discussion... and mechanisms for changing the management.

Innovativeness: an evaluation of how innovative an initiative was in terms of allowed social practices and innovative technology used (extensions of 2.0 or innovative combinations thereof).

3 General assessment

We explored circa 300 sites that either presented themselves as professional knowledge exchange communities or had evolved into a community for knowledge exchange from the provision of 2.0 technologies.

After reviewing them, we could see several clusters arising:

Generic Communities: sites that are built as platforms for general knowledge interchange, i.e., they are not focused on a specific sector or targeted to a specifically professional audience, but have a strong component of knowledge interchange and favour some types of collective learning or, at least, community formation.

Business and Professionally Oriented Sites: sites in which knowledge interchange, whether it is based on 2.0 technologies or not, is the main activity for professionals. Exchange here is taken in a broad sense, be it getting advice, obtaining personal referrals, seeking business building

activities or other. We include here sites that supported knowledge interchange for any business as well as those that were designed for a specific business sector.

National Initiatives: sites built around structured programmes to foster knowledge interchange among officials in government departments as well as other stakeholders. We have mainly focused on those initiatives that used 2.0 technologies and collaborative practices.

International Initiatives: similar to the previous one, but on an international scale.

eParticipation, Service Initiatives and Social Movements: knowledge interchange sites that addressed typical aspects of e-Participation, specifically in the relationship between citizens and government decision-makers, as well as initiatives created by citizens that worked towards some kind of effect on the government. We also included social movements not strictly related to government decisions. That is, platforms that used knowledge interchange to build up groups, communities and momentum for social action.

Inclusion: initiatives related to the social inclusion of alternative or marginal and disadvantaged groups.

Health: sites addressed to either exchange knowledge on health issues or to generate communities for different health goals (helping members gain information about specific illnesses, information about health institutions, etc.).

Sharing Q&A: sites that exchange answers to general or specific questions. Sometimes they explicitly gave support to a market-like institution.

Platform Generators and General Software: these are sites that either provided software tools (commercial or not) for creating collaborative platforms or offered a comprehensive set of software applications which, once combined, resulted in a fully operational platform for collaborative knowledge interchange. One important aspect of 2.0 technologies is the possibility to reconfigure them to be better adapted to new functions. The difference with other types of technology may be the simplicity of this step. It can be done by the same people that are meant to use them. One example of this could be mash-ups.

In all these groups there are significant variations along each of the three dimensions that constituted the model. For example, general sites do not have always very clearly stated norms and conventions. For most of them it is not clear how contributions are going to be assessed by the community. Most national and international initiatives around professional knowledge exchange still do use a 1.0 technological framework. That is, they use intensively forums, mailing lists, portals and data repositories but, comparatively, make less use of technologies for tagging, or social networking. In general, in national and international initiatives the type of interchanged knowledge tends to become quite structured as opposed to general focus sites.

Some general sites for expertise exchange not only function as a “market” for ideas or experts but they explicitly monetize the interchanges by assigning higher prices to the best experts. The quality of the experts is not centrally assessed but is a function of aggregated user satisfaction. In most cases, this amounts to the implementation of a voting mechanism that sometimes follows 2.0 technologies similar to well-known experiences like slashdot.org, or Digg.

The interaction by means of audiovisual content is increasingly being used as a means to create “social objects of interest” (Engeström, 2005). That is, a mechanism by which people first get into contact by discovering a common interest about a “social object” (document, reference, etc.). For example, a site for entrepreneurs set up with the backing of Fortis Bank is using entrepreneurs video presentations and tagging as a way to facilitate further knowledge exchange and to initiate new groups dynamically.

Audiovisual content complemented by tagging and searching is extensively used in general focus sites (Youtube, etc.) and in some sites addressed to e-participation (Zexe.net, for example).

The integration of implicit content and people recommendation functions linked to descriptions of the profiles of members in the community is also an aspect that can be seen in general focus sites (Facebook, for example) but not yet in more professionally oriented sites. An interesting exception is the UK's Government GovX initiative (<http://www.govx.org.uk/>).

We try to illustrate better some of these aspects in the following description of three significant experiences that span from models closer to the 1.0 framework than to 2.0 technologies, to others that fit better into the social exchange practices implicit in the 2.0 framework.

The reference to all these experiences as well as to some of our assessments of them can be accessed at the wiki egov20cases (<https://egov20cases.wikispaces.com/>), set up for sharing knowledge about these topics. (See also "State of the art in Good Practice Exchange and Web 2.0" at <http://www.epractice.eu/document/3974>)

4 Three significant experiences

From the whole list of examples reviewed in the report "State of the Art in Good Practice Exchange and Web 2.0" (Fages, 2007), we have selected three experiences (described in more detail in the aforementioned report) and used our simple model to review them.

These experiences are:

- Development Gateway Communities (<http://topics.developmentgateway.org>)
- eCatalunya (<http://ecatalunya.gencat.net>)
- Meetup (<http://www.meetup.com>)

We considered Development Gateway Communities (*dgCommunities*) relevant because of its international dimension. In the case of *eCatalunya*, we considered it to be a good CoP managed by a public body with an adequate coupling with web 2.0 concepts, as well as the good combination between online and offline dynamics. Finally, *Meetup* is a similar experience to the second one but managed by a private institution, with less coupling with Web 2.0 concepts but with a very good combination between online and offline dynamics.

4.1 dgCommunities

URL: <http://topics.developmentgateway.org>

Typology: International initiative

The screenshot shows the dgCommunities website homepage. The header includes the logo and tagline 'Knowledge Sharing and Collaboration Worldwide'. The navigation menu has 'ONLINE RESOURCES HOME', 'Member Log In | Join Now', and 'What is in this site?'. The main content area is divided into sections for 'Development Effectiveness', 'Economic Development', 'Human Development', 'Environment', and 'Education', each with a list of sub-topics. A search bar and a 'GK3 Conference' banner are also visible.

Description:

dgCommunities is an online network of 29 communities with 36,000 members. It is aimed at knowledge sharing and collaboration among development professionals worldwide. Its communities cover major topic areas with more than 200 partnering organizations. It is part of the Development Gateway Foundation (DGF) programs. DGF provides web-based tools to make aid and development efforts more effective. It offers innovative solutions that increase access to critical information, and helps in building local capacity and bringing partners together for positive change.

The Development Gateway Foundation is a nonprofit organization. It was established by the World Bank in 2001. Governments, nongovernmental organizations, and private sector entities work with the foundation to extend their global reach, enhance the tools it creates and share best practices. The development of the Aid Management Platform is guided by a steering committee with representatives from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the United Nations Development Program, and the World Bank. Country Gateways are run by locally owned entities in 45 countries. Other partners, for example, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, sponsor specific dgCommunities, or manage a community themselves, such as, for example, the United Nations Population Fund.

Alexa statistics (07/31/2007):

Percent of global Internet users who visit this site: 0,0012%

Traffic Rank : 121.317

Page views per user: 2,1

Investment (In thousands)

Revenue: 10,901\$

Expenses for the DG Communities program: 1,914\$

Management:

DGF offers the platform and services for each dgCommunity. Each community is managed by coordinators and guides, who are appointed by their cooperating organizations and have to respect the principles of DGF. A dgCommunity can be created by an individual or private/public group, by themselves or in partnership with others. DGF has the last word about the creation of a new dgCommunity. It analyzes the proposal for its creation and finally approves it or not.

Online/offline dynamics:

DG Communities work, basically, online.

Online Dynamics:

The online dynamics of each community is led by their guides. Knowledge is distributed via document archives, forums, newsletters, and RSS feeds.

Coupling with Web 2.0:

This initiative does not couple much with Web 2.0 concepts. Although it uses online services as, for example, web pages, a document repository, an email alert system, newsletters, forums and RSS feeds, it is not easy to initiate collaborative work or to develop extensive interactive knowledge sharing.

Market dimension: The exchange of knowledge is made indirectly, through content in documents or newsletters. Some communities use forums as a direct way of exchange knowledge between people. All in all this organization is similar to an expert market, but the free membership opens the possibility for it to function as an *ideagora* (Tapscott, 2006).

Knowledge dimension: The knowledge exchanged is factual (data, statistics,...) and procedural (practical procedures).

Observations: The success of each community depends on the capacity of the team in charge of it to periodically renew the contents. When this happens, the rest of members feel comfortable to introduce also their own content and share it with others (i.e. eGovernment Community).

4.2 eCatalunya

URL: <http://ecatalunya.gencat.net>

Typology: National initiatives

Description:

eCatalunya is an online environment set up by the Catalan Regional Autonomous Government in Catalonia, Spain. Its goal is to provide an inclusive platform for knowledge interchange and community growth among all professional communities that in one moment or other deal with the Catalan Regional Government.

Its technological design and development started in 2004. It opened in June 2005. It is currently used by 5,000 registered users. It is organized around several interconnected portals which are thematically oriented. Each one hosts a variable number of Communities of Practice which can decide by themselves whether or not be open and share all information with other communities.

The initial design of eCatalunya had 2.0 technologies in mind. In consequence, any single group can use the platform to draw tools from it and adapt them to their perceived needs for community building. Each community can integrate several types of tools: wikis, blogs, forums, newsletters, rss creation and management, automatic alert for new content creation, new topics, new membership, email; audiovisual document sharing and tagging; textual document tagging and sharing; visualization of the social network of the group and connected communities and tools for recommendation of content and referral of people (recommender systems based on collaborative filtering); tools for measuring the activity in each community including the growth and structure of social networks.

Alexa statistics (07/31/2007):

Not registered.

Investment:

600,000 euros (initial investment, it included development of the technical platform)

Management:

There are no permanent employees as such. Personnel from the Technical University of Catalonia are in charge of new developments and several members of each community volunteer as administrators. Each community has evolved differently and some have effectively generated their own leaders which are among the most dynamic and effective groups. All in all, the technical workforce (UPC and Generalitat) is around 12 people. Dynamization involves 5 more people.

Financed by:

Generalitat de Catalunya (Catalan Autonomous Government).

Time in operation:

Since June 2005.

Management concept:

Publicly funded.

Online/offline dynamics:

Most of the activity of eCatalunya takes place online. Different communities, however, have evolved different balances between online and offline activities.

The most active community –Justice- has developed a set of practices for offline and online settings. Frequent seminars are organized to discuss topics raised in online discussions. There is also a policy of knowledge sharing for all documents and presentations not only among the group's members but also among the rest of the online community in general. All documents of the Justice Department community are online under Creative Commons or similar licenses, for example.

Coupling with Web 2.0: eCatalunya was created as an environment to learn more about Web 2.0 and its application to eGovernment. So from the very beginning it included in its technical platform some type of 2.0 tools (from blogs to tagging). On the other hand, it left ample room for the evolution of communities with the interaction of the 2.0 technologies. For example, it was envisaged that through automated referrals and recommendations new members could be 'discovered' and invited to join a community. This, of course, hinged on the analysis of contributed knowledge.

Some technicalities have implications for the openness that characterize 2.0 technologies. Currently, it is difficult for a community to set up its portal on its own hosting services. They have to actually issue a petition to the project leaders and then resources are allotted in the Generalitat hosts. This is in contrast to most Web 2.0 technologies that can be easily downloaded and deployed. Not to mention the peer to peer architecture of some Web 2.0 solutions. The fact that this is not the case in e-Catalunya may block the way to true self-organizing technical infrastructures and communities. The occurrence of roundabout ways to create and connect communities seems to indicate that this is becoming a problem for the most open communities and active members.

Market dimension:

There is no provision for the monetization of the created knowledge and no mechanisms for ranking reputation or any other incentive that can be said to add to the market dimension of the communities.

Knowledge dimension:

Most knowledge interchanged in e-Catalunya is technical and formalized. At least that is what is going on in most communities through knowledge repositories. However, there is a lot of advice seeking and giving that goes on through blogs, wikis, and forums. The elaboration of practical, tacit knowledge is reinforced in some cases through face to face discussion meetings.

Observations:

e-Catalunya has to be seen as a project that aims at changing the actual practices of work within the Catalan administration by drawing it towards a more collaborative mindset. At the same time, it is a lever for trying to create a more “Open Administration”. The initiators of the project acknowledged that officials and professionals and, in general, citizens should relate to each other independently of existing organizational divisions. e-Catalunya is seen as a first step towards building a program for R+D in eGovernment in Catalonia, an R+D department of the administration on itself, so to speak. However, the technical solutions imposed by current practices within the administration and the current limitation of use to only government officials and selected collaborators are limiting its original openness.

4.3 Meetup

URL: <http://www.meetup.com>

Typology: e-Participation (social movements) and service initiatives

Sign In Register Start a Meetup Help

Whatever your interest. Wherever you are.

Some of October's 83,956 Meetups:

New York City Italian Language, Food, & Culture Meetup
"People are very openly engaging and conversation flows naturally."

Anne Arundel County Ron Paul 2008 Meetup
"This group displays a passionate team spirit and it shines through with their ability to get the job done."

Atlanta 'Beyond the Secret' Meetup
"It was an exceptional event"

Paris Expats Meetup
"It was an exceptional event"

Enter an interest:

e.g. Knitting, Moms, Dogs, Baseball

Country ZIP Code

USA

GO Or, browse [all interests](#) or [all cities](#)

TIME "A convenient, non-threatening way to connect to other people who share similar interests and live nearby."

Newsweek "...helps groups of strangers organize monthly powwows at local watering holes."

TORONTO SUN "...it's important to stay true to your passions or interests, whatever they may be... An

Description:

MeetUp is an online platform which helps local interest groups in organizing face-to-face meetings (from 'Stay at home Moms', to 'League of American investors' or 'Victory Motorcycles'). MeetUp acts as a virtual meeting coordinator by providing a routine monthly date and time for meetings, giving members a limited choice of locations to vote on, and asking them to RSVP online to indicate if they are planning to attend the scheduled meeting. Its focus is on helping to coordinate people and groups as well as giving them tools for knowledge sharing, discussion and mobilization.

Alexa statistics (07/31/2007):

Traffic Rank: 1,289

Page views per user: 7,1

Investment:

Private investment by MeetUp founder Scott Heiferman. In March 2006 a joint investment was announced by Omidyar Network (of the eBay founder group), Draper Fisher Jurvetson, Esther Dyson, Allen & Company, and Senator Bill Bradley.

Team:

35 people in Customer Support, groups Support, Engineering, Software, Design, HR, Development, Financing, and New Projects.

Financed by:

Revenues from MeetUp members.

Time in operation:

Since 2002.

Management concept:

MeetUp just offers its platform to create face-to-face meetings to whoever wants to start one. However it gives support to the leader of each MeetUp Group, called Group Organizer, either directly or via a department in MeetUp.com (The Organizer Center).

The functions of a Group Organizer are:

1. Email MeetUp members through the MeetUp.com website.
2. Poll members about anything, from how to name a MeetUp Group to where to have MeetUp events.
3. Tell people what MeetUp is about by managing the name, description, photos and agenda.
4. Spread the word using custom MeetUp signs, flyers, business cards and email.
5. Select Assistant Organizers to help in the running of the MeetUp.
6. Control MeetUp Group membership by approving and removing members.
7. Pay the MeetUp Group fee.
8. Collect member dues and event fees.

The group organizer can appoint at least 20 Assistant Organizers, who help in scheduling new events, maintaining information about current events, creating and managing polls, editing MeetUp descriptions and keeping in communication with members as well as controlling their behavior.

These assistants, on the other hand, have no authority to change the name or location of a MeetUp group, change its economic aspects (types of payments), appoint or remove other Assistant Organizers. Therefore, the organization is not completely flat; instead, it maintains some level of hierarchy.

Online/offline dynamics:

MeetUp.com uses online dynamics to facilitate offline meetings.

Online, in the Meetup.com platform, anyone can create a group and receive support as a Group Organizer. Each organizer, online, can manage the group as described previously and invite other members to share ideas, photos, messages, and stories. They also can start offline events related to this knowledge sharing activities.

Probably, the most important aspect of MeetUp is the type of offline dynamics it generates from online activities. The most salient activities are MeetUp Group meetings which are very focused on a given topic. Previously to the meeting and after its completion, a strong activity arises online, for preparing the offline meeting and dynamics and to reflect later on its development. This is the basis for some degree of group learning.

Coupling with Web 2.0:

MeetUp couples in a very adequate way with the Web 2.0 concepts. Apart from offering digital tools like Forums or Message Boards (closer to the 1.0 Web technologies), it offers several 2.0 tools to facilitate social interaction and collaborative work (photos, videos, TV Channels, RSS feeds, eMail alerts, etc.)

Market dimension:

What is exchanged in MeetUp is either knowledge in a general form (solutions to problems, factual information, information about social benefits...) and referrals. Both tasks are done either in a direct (one to one or broadcasting to the group) and indirect from (through photos, videos...). We can suggest that it is an expert knowledge exchange market, but sometimes it works closer to an ideagora (Tapscott, 2006).

Knowledge dimension:

There is a thorough exchange of both tacit and explicit knowledge.

Observations:

The interesting lesson of MeetUp is that the online interaction exists to facilitate the face-to-face interaction (Virtual Handshake, 2006). In contrast, when it appeared, experiences like Ecademy and Ryze were just online communities that created offline meetings to strengthen the group.

Different authors doubt about the real success of MeetUp, in spite of the big number of communities it hosts. When Meetup started to charge a fee per group they thought that communities would fall down. The truth is that they did, but communities 'only' reduced from 194,472 before the fee announcement to 18,368 in November 2006. So, it survived and not only by its revenues but basically thanks to the 'easy-to-use' online group managing and information system that is very helpful to organize offline meetings and to share knowledge and referrals.

5 Trends

Technology changes, and 2.0 technologies are no exception. In consequence, we try to ascertain what might be in store as Web 2.0 technologies go on. 2.0 is an inherently social technology, so we will try to relate the technological evolutionary path with other changes that are led precisely by the use of this type of technology. We'll try to sketch the foreseeable interplay between technology and social trends.

5.1 Technology: What one can easily see

2.0 technologies are presently in full development. A visit to sites such as "Everything 2.0" (bobstumpel.blogspot.com) can give a panoramic view of more than 1,000 software applications in the 2.0 arena. Let us see where the new developments might point to.

5.1.1 New sources of connection

As the example of Twitter.com (<http://twitter.com>) has forcefully shown, personal activity can be a source of information that can lead to discovery and, eventually to personal connection and knowledge sharing.

Activities tend to cluster themselves into some peculiar contexts and spaces. So, it is not strange to increasingly see more and more applications and technologies that extend online interaction to offline settings. For example, those relating to personal activity and geographical information. The tagging of photos and their connection to precise geographical maps such as the ones offered by Google is a trend currently under full development (<http://panoramio.com>). Social networking applications that make

use of this information to locate similar people are in current use in mobile technologies (for example, <http://plazes.com>). Many sites can make use of APIs from Google and develop new collaborative applications on knowledge that are based on geographical information. This has already been pinpointed as an area for the bottom-up creation of collaborative knowledge from citizens, for example in local eGovernment initiatives.

Context varies along the day so it is only natural that most of these solutions make or will make extensive use of mobility technologies. The expected increase in web navigation on mobile devices is bound to have an impact on collaborative sites and it may co-evolve coherently with geographical and geographically-based activity technologies.

The audiovisual format as a preferred means for knowledge expression and personal presentation is on the rise. The more collaborative an interchange site is, the more it integrates audiovisual interaction from the beginning. This, in conjunction with the enhanced possibility of using mobile devices hints at an increased ability and possibility to contribute knowledge on the fly from everywhere in different and more expressive formats.

If the current trend in collaborative audiovisual content creation, edition and editorial decision making continues (for example in Assignment Zero: zero.newassignment.net) it may easily happen that CoPs will integrate this knowledge and sometimes include real time broadcasting of media upstreamed from mobile devices. Some collaborative learning spaces make use of this possibility. For instance, one can see Sclipo.com as the audiovisual equivalent to a wiki. It has been recently extended to allow on-demand delivery of audiovisual expert advice via video streaming technologies.

5.1.2 Semantic Web

Some of the benefits of collaborative technologies hinge critically on the correct summarization and connection of content and personal profiles. This is crucial to extract the most important keywords and concepts that help identifying relevant knowledge and people, locate them and recommend one to the other. This is a particularly difficult aspect of social searching technologies and social recommenders. Some authors argue that this may be overcome with semantic technologies (Berners-Lee, 1998) as, for example in the area of trusted connections between people. The FOAF (FOAF, 2007) standard protocol for personal profile description and sharing shows a possible path for this. Independently of the final dominance of this initiative on the whole web, even if it's just partial, it has a great potential for all technologies that are focused on community articulation. Not only could it help finding more precise profiles and derive sounder inferences about interests, competences and other personal qualities with respect to knowledge, but it could also facilitate knowledge translation between different domains (i.e. taxonomy transformation) and, in this way, it could help lowering the barriers to the integration of different CoPs that derive from differences in language and in concepts used by different communities, which is a well-known problem of networked CoPs (Fischer, 2001).

5.2 Trends in organization

2.0 technologies are mainly technologies for groups and communities. So it is important so see what is happening in this area.

There is a trend to see organizations in general and companies in particular as a collection of communities built around knowledge and learning. This is in accordance with the "community based" and "knowledge based" views of the enterprise and, in general, of human organizations (Hagel, 2007), (Kogut, 1992).

The main asset of an organization in that view is not only the knowledge it possesses but also its capacity to learn. "Learn" has to be taken as an increasing ability to adapt and anticipate to changes in the environment of the organization. The organization form that is better suited for an increased pressure and speed in adaptation seems to be the network (Fairtlough, 2005) and networks (Carley,

1994) are built on the same grounds for contribution and recognition that have characterized successful CoPs. This, in terms of organization both calls for a more networked inner organization as well as for a more permeable interface with larger personal, professional and company networks. This is what has been called an “Open Organization” view of the companies (Chesbrough, 2003).

The evidence that this type of organization indeed does provide competitive advantage (Chesbrough, 2003) and the well-publicized success of initiatives such as Procter and Gamble’s “Connect and Develop” or Elly Lilly’s “Innocentive” (Huston, 2006) have spawned a growing movement towards implementing the open business models that give sustainability to these initiatives. The most extreme form of this boundary-less form of network and community organization can be seen in “Crowdsourcing” (Tapscott, 2006) that seems to increasingly be a way to both integrate users in the company and to augment its overall learning and anticipation ability, i.e. the competitive edge of the company. All these approaches have to be managed by very dynamic means. Not surprisingly, the use of 2.0 technologies in companies that have taken the crowdsourcing path is also very high.

In comparison to businesses, governments seem to be relatively slow in integrating the 2.0, “open” approach. Possibly due to legal limitations and because of an organizational model that is far from the “open” perspective, governments may in the future face pressure to “open up” from tech-savvy citizens that are becoming familiar with collaborative technologies and the collective coordinated modes of action they facilitate. Up to now, the most visible impact of collective technologies has been expressed as a complementary but strong lever in political campaigning (as in the case of the Spanish test messaging campaigning against the government after the March 2004 Madrid bombings). However, this is a change that has no impact yet on government organization. It seems that new eGovernment organizations could be forced to coevolve with the spread of collaborative technologies and an increased awareness on the part of the citizens of the values associated with these same technologies. Pioneering initiatives in participation are giving way to more direct involvement in government activities (for example, through collaborative rule making systems). A look on trends in social dynamics may give us some clues about what is yet to come.

5.3 Trends in social dynamics

Recent surveys on the use of internet technologies and the attitudes of their users (Castells 2007) show interesting patterns within the tech-savvy segment of the population:

1. They are more critical in their reasoning.
2. They exhibit more solidarity, expressed by their involvement in social movements (both online and offline).
3. They tend to cooperate with more people (both online and offline).
4. They have a critical view of authority.
5. They expect being well regarded in terms to their contribution and expertise whether online or offline.
6. They have higher awareness of Creative Commons and other alternative schema for dealing with intellectual property.
7. They have a tendency to express themselves in audiovisual terms.
8. These traits are stronger the lower the age of the surveyed population is.

All this may hint (Castells, 2007) at a more cooperative, critical and socially conscious future. It may very well turn differently under the pressure of other factors, but the trend seems to be there. This, combined with the increasing existence of “cyberactivism” and technological platforms for political action (epetitions, Moveon, Meetup, Webcitoyen), may result in a more demanding citizenship with respect to government in general and to eGovernment in particular. The implications of this trend on eGovernment initiatives don’t need to be stressed. Of course, it doesn’t mean that critical citizens will

only relate to government by means of pressure and opposition. There is also room for cooperation at all levels of government, from legislation to urban planning and citizen services.

6 Possible lines of action in adopting the 2.0 approach

The interaction of 2.0 technologies, good practice exchange and eGovernment gives a wide range of opportunities and, consequently, individual people and organizations have to have a clear picture of their own goals and focus to choose and adapt to the possibilities that fit best to their situation and goals.

2.0 technologies are basically collaboration technologies. In that sense, they are natural allies for good practice exchange communities. However, they induce dynamics and create expectations that have to be well understood and managed. They are potentially disruptive. 2.0 technologies are basically levers for bottom-up, emergent dynamics and transient organizations. They bring with them the inherent possibility of more disruption of present control structures (decision making, conflict resolution, goal setting, etc.).

2.0 technologies and their associated group practices cannot be adopted in a haphazard, improvised way. Plan ahead. Decide if there is a real need to disrupt the current dynamics. Ask simple questions:

1. Is there room for improvement in knowledge quality?
2. Is there a need to increase participation and contributions from community members?
3. Is there evidence of the existence of knowledgeable people that have not been “discovered” even if they have been contributing good practices?
4. Would the community benefit of easier interconnection with people?
5. Are there problems with personal profiling?

If most of the answers to this type of questions hint to a change, it is time to plan for the simultaneous deployment of 2.0 solutions and the introduction of new rules, norms and conventions within the organization.

“Planning” in this context, however, is a very misleading word. One has not to “design” or even “design with evolution in mind”. One has to “design an evolution”, i.e., create the landscape to let evolve a system –of people and technology- towards increased collective learning levels. The creation of healthy social dynamics is crucial if one adopts 2.0. Otherwise, it generates frustration and resentment, since a new technology has to be learned and mastered and little change is brought about.

It is important to isolate the atomic behaviors that with the help of 2.0 technologies will yield improved good practice exchange. As in any networked collaborative endeavor this boils down to defining a set of practices that ensure the right balance between personal effort and communal success. It is important to think of a coherent, well-thought and widely agreed set of specific behaviors for specific situations in the different contexts that configure a community: decision making, conflict resolution, goal setting and, most important, rewards and penalties.

7 Conclusion

We have proposed a view of good practice exchange that is based on both sociological exchange theory and the findings of research in complex organization design. Both take as a departing point the difficulties that arise in creating communities of individuals that progress if they cooperate. We used this approach because it easily helped us modeling the social component that Web 2.0 technologies offer. We devised a simple model that related the technological, social and knowledge dynamics of all these settings. It was used as a guiding reference to find and evaluate relevant web sites that hosted knowledge exchange communities. These communities were classified and in so doing we found some insights that explained some of their successes and failures. These insights pointed at the need to attain

a fine balance between culture and technology, between individual motivation and reputation and group benefits. More importantly, it seems that the “value charged” Web 2.0 technologies need to be deployed and used with ample room for co-evolution with social uses. In that sense, they introduce a different technological perspective on the natural setting for good practice exchange, i.e., CoPs. Instead of developing first the community and then manage the technology to support it, Web 2.0 hints at a more radically bottom-up phenomenon by which communities might evolve from the collective use of searching, discovery and collaboration tools associated with 2.0. We tried to highlight all these points by using three relevant experiences in the areas of eGovernment, international development and citizen’s movements. A more thorough discussion can be found in (Fages, 2007).

Going 2.0 means opening up to individual contributions coming from people in the internal organization and in the external environment. The environment of administrations are citizens. More than seeing them as “clients”, as the recipients of government activity or, alternatively, as constant and stark critics of governmental actions, they can be seen, in true 2.0 fashion, as possible collaborators. And not only collaborating in the results of government actions but in the actual processes of designing strategies, regulations and actions that eventually will impact most directly on their daily lives. This goes beyond Citizen Relationship Management and raises expectations and cautions on the citizens’ side. Some “participative” schemas can be seen as the most negative variant of “crowdsourcing” from the part of the administration. Starting not with the whole, undifferentiated mass of citizens but with exchange communities that are already interacting with government may be a good initial move towards a more collaborative view of administration and government.

References

- Atkins, D. (2004) Report of the National Science Foundation Blue-Ribbon Advisory Panel on Cyberinfrastructure. National Science Foundation, USA. . [Accessed July 28th 2007].
http://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=cise051203.
- Beer, D. and Burrows, R. (2007). Sociology and, of and in Web 2.0: Some Initial Considerations. Sociological Research Online, Volume 12, Issue 5, [Accessed November 2nd, 2007]
<http://www.socresonline.org.uk/12/5/17.html>
- Berners-Lee, T. (1998). Semantic Web Roadmap. [Online description. Accessed. October 30th, 2007].
<http://www.w3.org/DesignIssues/Semantic.html>.
- Blau, P. (1994). Exchange and Power in Social Life. New York: Wiley.
- Benkler, Y (2006). The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom. Yale University Press.
- Borgatti, S., and Cross, R. (2003). A Social Network View of Organizational Learning: Relational and Structural Dimensions of ‘Know Who’, Management Science.
- Brown, J. S., & Duguid, P. (1991). Organizational learning and communities-of-practice: Toward a unified view of working, learning, and innovation’, Organization Science, 2(1), pp. 40-57.
- K. M. Carley, and M.J. Prietula (Eds.) (1994). Computational Organization Theory. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Castells, Manuel; Tubella, Imma (Eds.) (2002). Projecte Internet Catalunya (PIC): la societat xarxa a Catalunya [research report online]. UOC. [Accessed July 28th 2007]
<http://www.uoc.edu/in3/pic/cat/1/intr/intr.html>.

- Deloitte Consulting. Collaborative Knowledge Networks. Driving workforce performance through Web-enabled communities. [Report online]. Deloitte Consulting. [Accessed July 28th 2007] http://www.affinitiz.net/enterprise/deloitte_knowledge_networks.pdf
- Engeström, J. (2005). Why some social network services work and others don't — Or: the case for object-centered sociality [Accessed May 12th 2007] http://www.zengstrom.com/blog/2005/04/why_some_social.html.
- Fages, R. and Sangüesa, R. (2007). State-of-the-art in Good Practice Exchange and Web 2.0. Epractice. [Accessed July 28th 2007] <http://www.epractice.eu/document/3974>
- Fairtlough, G. (2005). The Three Ways of Getting Things Done. Triarchy Press.
- Fischer, G. (2001). Communities of Interest: Learning through the Interaction of Multiple Knowledge Systems. 24th Annual Information Systems Research Seminar In Scandinavia (IRIS'24), Ulvik, Norway, Department of Information Science, Bergen, Norway: pp. 1-14.
- Fleming L, Waguespack D. (2003). Merit, Status, or Networking? The Emergence of Leaders in a Technological Community. Harvard Business School Working Paper, Aug 28.
- FOAF, The Friend of a Friend Project. Online Webpage. Accessed October 30th, 2007. www.foaf-project.org/
- Gallivan, M. J.: (2001). Striking a Balance between Trust and Control in a Virtual Organization: A Content Analysis of Open Source Software Case Studies, Information Systems Journal 11: 277-304.
- Gloor, P.: (2002). Collaborative Knowledge Networks, eJETA electronic Journal on E-Business Technologies and Applications, Vol 1, No 2. <http://www.ejeta.org>
- Graham, Jefferson (2006). Flickr of idea on a gaming project led to photo website, USA Today. [Accessed 13th June 2007] http://www.usatoday.com/tech/products/2006-02-27-flickr_x.htm
- Greve, A. (2004). Creativity in complex innovations: Using social networks to create knowledge. Paper prepared for SUNBELT XXIV, Portoros, Slovenia, May 13-17.
- Hagel, J. (2007). Community 2.0., Edgeperspectives [Accessed November 2nd 2007]. http://edgeperspectives.typepad.com/edge_perspectives/2007/03/community_20.html
- Huston, L. and Sakkab, N. (2006). Connect and Develop: Inside Procter & Gamble's New Model for Innovation. Harvard Business Review. March 2006.
- Kogut, B. and Zander, U. (1992). Knowledge of the firm, combinative capabilities and the replication of technology. Organization Science, 3(3):383-397.
- Kollock, P. (1999). The Economies of online cooperation: Gifts and public goods in cyberspace. In: M.A. Smith and P. Kollock (editors). Communities in cyberspace. London: Routledge, pp. 220-239.
- Jimes, C., Lucardie, L. (2003). Reconsidering the tacit-explicit distinction - A move toward functional (tacit) knowledge management, Electronic Journal of Knowledge Management, Volume 1 Issue 1 pp. 23-32.
- Moran, J., Weimer, L (2004). Creating a Multi-Company Community of Practice for Chief Information Officers, In P. Hildreth and C. Kimble (eds.) Knowledge Networks: Innovation through Communities or Practice. Chapter 11. Idea Group Publishing.

O'Reilly, T. (2005). What is Web 2.0? Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software'. Created 09/30/2005. Accessed 6/6/2007.

<http://www.oreillynet.com/pub/a/oreilly/tim/news/2005/09/30/what-is-web-20.html>

Pujol, Josep M., Flache, Andreas, Delgado, Jordi and Sangüesa, Ramon (2005). How Can Social Networks Ever Become Complex? Modelling the Emergence of Complex Networks from Local Social Exchanges. *Journal of Artificial Societies and Social Simulation* 8(4)12

<http://jasss.soc.surrey.ac.uk/8/4/12.html>

Saveri, A. Vian, K. Rheingold, H. (2005). Technologies of Cooperation', Institute for the Future Report. SR-8987, January 2005.

Steinfeld, C., Pentland, B., Ackerman, M. & Contractor, N. (Eds.) (2007). Communities and Technologies 2007: Proceedings of the Third Communities and Technologies Conference, Michigan State University.

Tapscott, D. and Williams A.D. (2006). *Wikinomics: How Mass Collaboration Changes Everything*. Portfolio; First edition.

Trier, M., Bobrik, A. (2007). Analyzing the Dynamics of Community Formation using Brokering Activities. In Proceedings of the Third Communities and Technologies Conference, Michigan.

Teigland, Robin (2003). Knowledge Networking: Structure and Performance in Networks of Practice. Stockholm: Stockholm School of Economics. [Accessed July 17th 2007]

<http://www.hhs.se/NR/rdonlyres/4165BDC8-C42C-43CF-8EEF-57DCEB0939BC/0/TeiglandthesisKnowledgeNetworking.pdf>

Vaast, E (2004). The Use of Intranets: The Missing Link between Communities of Practice and Networks of Practice? Chapter 18 in Hildreth, P & Kimble, C (eds.), *Knowledge Networks: Innovation Through Communities of Practice*, London: Idea Group Inc.

The Virtual Handshake (2006). [Online page. Accessed. May 25th 2007]

<http://thevirtualhandshake.com/wiki.html?page=Meetup>.

Wasko, M.M, Faraj, S. & Teigland, Robin (2004). Collective Action and Knowledge Contribution in Electronic Networks of Practice', *Journal of the Association for Information Systems (JAIS)* , Special Issue on Theory Development, 5, 11-12. <http://jais.isworld.org/articles/default.asp?vol=5&art=15>

Wellman, B., Gulia, M. (1999). Virtual Communities as Communities. In: M. A. Smith and P. Kollock (Eds.): *Communities in Cyberspace*, London: Routledge, S. 167–194.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice — Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Wenger, E., White, N., Smith, John D., Rowe, K. Technology for communities. [Accessed July 10th 2007]: <http://technologyforcommunities.com>.

Authors

[Dr. Ramon Sangüesa](#)

Head of innovation (Citilab)
Partner (World Wide Minds)

<http://www.epractice.eu/people/8753>

[Roc Fages](#)

Consultant in Strategy & Innovation and Digital
Communication
Goldmundus

<http://www.epractice.eu/people/419>



The European Journal of ePractice is a digital publication on eTransformation by ePractice.eu, a portal created by the European Commission to promote the sharing of good practices in eGovernment, eHealth and eInclusion.

Edited by P.A.U. Education, S.L.

Web: www.epracticejournal.eu

Email: editorial@epractice.eu



The texts published in this journal, unless otherwise indicated, are subject to a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-NoDerivativeWorks 2.5 licence. They may be copied, distributed and broadcast provided that the author and the e-journal that publishes them, European Journal of ePractice, are cited. Commercial use and derivative works are not permitted. The full licence can be consulted on <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.5/>