Wikis Across Government Agencies

Tech@State and Wikimania 2012
July 13, 2012

Peter B. Meyer
Office of Productivity and Technology,
Bureau of Labor Statistics

... with lots of advice from others
... not representing the agency, just the named author
Outline: wikis across government agencies

- Three big internal wikis in US government
  - Intellipedia, Diplopedia, OMB's MAX
- Many other wikis in government
- Some design differences
- Purposes
In 2004 the U.S. intelligence agencies reviewed their communication tools and processes (Andrus, 2005; Burton, 2005)

They added web tools and work spaces to their network

Intellipedia wiki across agencies starting 2006

Blogs, tagging, search, messaging, videos

easier search across 16 agencies
Diplopedia

- Intended for sharing procedures (Bronk and Smith 2010)
- E.g. for staff at new posts
- Article count grew linearly with time after 2006 start

Figure 5. Total Articles
Page growth is often roughly linear over time.

Articles in the Karlsruhe, Germany wiki (Stadtwiki Karlsruhe) over time

Source: [http://ka.stadtwiki.net/Datei:Artikelwachstum.png](http://ka.stadtwiki.net/Datei:Artikelwachstum.png) (Hauke Löffler)
OMB’s MAX Federal Community

- Intended first for budget then other groups
- Runs Conflence software
- Can recognize NASA computers on login
- A key capability for the future
Many other examples

**US federal govt**
- DoDTechipedia
- FBI’s Bureaupedia
- EPA wikis
- DOL wiki
- OSHApedia
- NITRD’s wiki
- PowerPedia
- Statipedia
- NIH’s several wikis

**Others doing governance**
- GCPEDI A (Canadian civil svc)
- GovDex (Australia)
- Wikiprogress (OECD)
- Statistics Explained (Eurostat)
- City wikis
- Katrina Help Wiki
- OpenWetWare
- GovLoop
Different wiki designs & uses (1)

All-government versus focused knowledge pool

- GCPedia available across Canadian civil service
- Not all US federal staff have a wiki available & allowed
  - If so, it’s not visible across most of government
  - Or requires frequent login
- Key usability issue: emailing a hyperlink – will it work?
- Cost/complexity of many wikis, admins, namespaces
Different wiki designs & uses (2)

Storing **documents** versus **wiki-text**

- Documents are self-contained, often finished binary files
  - may be hard to search for; authored; dated; formatted; may have intro, conclusion; may have focused audience; may be official; updates require coordination or permission; common on SharePoint & Confluence

- Wikitext is searchable and open
  - fragmentary; multi-authored; unlikely to be official or definitive; can be updated and link to latest sources; open format; can manipulate with extensions, import/export

- Both needed; some mismatch in what’s used/available
Different wiki designs & uses (3)

Reference works vs. Project/team-orientation

- Reference works (like Wikipedia) tend to be
  - Open, descriptive, scientific, for broad audience

- Groups/teams may require
  - Fine-grained security
  - Dashboard or project status summaries
Reference work example: Statipedia

**Past or comparative cases**
- 2004 Economic Census of China
- Hungarian Central Statistical Office
- Hungarian industry classification TEÁOR
- History of BLS Mass Layoff Statistics

**New technical subjects**
- Wikidata
- Data.gov
- Dataset Publishing Language
- Semantic Mediawiki

**Other wikis**
(to learn from)

**Events**
- July 2012 Events
- Conference submission due dates
- Notes on presentations

**Agency practices & policies**
Editing Wikipedia for work

**Critiques and FAQs**

**Source code**
**Rhetorics for wikis in govt**

- Openness, transparency (translucency)
  - Overcoming stovepipes/silos
  - Reduce duplication of effort
  - Clarify & unify procedures
  - Ease training, turnover, emergency management

**Rhetorics against**

- System’s insecure or uncertified
- Organizational culture doesn’t fit
  - Wiki would encourage sloppy or undignified handling of info
  - “Knowledge base” is not our job
Other purposes & imagined futures

“Management visions often do not match the benefits delivered by successful wikis.” -- Grudin & Poole (2010)

- Citizens get their information from wikis
  - And we in govt are in the information services business
  - It’s relevant to know the science and practice
  - Writing for Wikipedia meets our mission directly

- Empowerment
  - Benefit to our personnel – e.g. in enabling to publish good work
  - Users find specialists, who then serve larger audience
  - Together, agencies have vast, diverse resources, expertise, capability, and economies of scale and scope
More purposes and futures

- **Efficient scientific communities** (knowledge management)
  - Support references to evidence → cultural change
  - Shared source material, reference points, mutual awareness, peer review (reduce fiefdoms)
  - Support tools development by our own staff
  - Info on platforms - “discoverable” not “disseminated”
  - Could reduce email strain

- **Support bottom-up and outside-in innovation**
  - Compare practices between agencies
  - Give workers broad opportunity/right to wikis
    - like IG’s office; like freedom of speech
  - Emergent or open-source type innovation
Analogous open source invention process

Literature, source examples ➔ imitation and progress

1860s-1890s aeronautics: 1000s of articles; 100s of patents; 10s of clubs and journals

Shared experiments led to design synthesis

Design was adopted by others. A version of the invention worked and an industry began.

Wilbur Wright’s first letter to Chanute in 1900 says “the apparatus I intend to employ . . . is very similar to [your] "double-deck" machine [of] 1896-7 . . . [. . . with these changes]”
If we want innovation and improvement in government . . .

It’ll help to have a wiki that says what governments do.
Contact Information

Meyer.Peter@bls.gov
202-691-5678