Capacity Development Brown Bag Lunch (CD BBL) Series: June 30, 2009 Presentation Brief

"Unlocking User Participation with Web 2.0 Technology"

Web 2.0 technology (SNAP, Teamworks, Blogs, Wiki's, Social Networking sites e.g. Ning, Facebook) is increasingly being used for knowledge sharing and active collaboration as a recognition of their exceptional ability to handle such processes is growing. Indeed the BDP KM Knowledge Strategy for 2009-2011 rests on the technological platform of Teamworks which is Web 2.0 technology. Early use of this technology however, has come back with mixed results and its effectiveness has not truly been recognized. One reason for this is that the benefits of such technology are often not being felt as there is an inability to generate the critical mass of users required for such benefits to become realized. The question then, and the focus of the CD BBL on June 30 2009, was how to develop the necessary user base? Put another way, how to unlock the capacity of these technologies?

What is immediately noticeable with this dilemma is that to have users sign up, it is easiest if there is already a substantial number of existing users. This "catch-22", however can be overcome and this begins with a shift in the perception of this technology. At the moment there is a wide spread opinion of Web 2.0 as very much a novelty for those with spare time on their hands (e.g. youth) and is something of an indulgence. This mentality however must shift if any organization is to effectively implement a strategy which seeks to utilize this emerging technology. It must shift to a mentality which sees Blog's, Wiki's, Social Networking Sites, as an essential and effective means to achieve numerous objectives, especially those falling under knowledge and project management. In the shift to a mentality of essential and effective, essential is less of an issue as effectiveness. Rather than sharing photos of what someone did with friends on the weekend over Facebook, the sharing that occurs within the context of the UNDP, perhaps in the future through Teamworks, is with crucial knowledge covering a wide array of development issues and documents from best and innovative practices to case studies and reports. Furthermore, the contributors in

online discussions are well respected practitioners in their field with a solid foundation of knowledge, sharpened with many years of experience of putting that knowledge into practice. It is essential that people over geographically dispersed areas have access to the collective UNDP body of knowledge and it is through this technology that access can be given. The question though that must be addressed and clearly answered in any strategy paper for implementation of this technology is how can it be assured that the use of SNAP, Teamworks, online working groups etc. will reach its full capacity and be undeniably effective. The issue boils down to sustained user participation over the long-term.

In the article "6 ways to make Web 2.0 work" by Michael Chui, Andy Miller, and Roger P. Roberts (*The* McKinsey *Quarterly* Feb. 09) six management imperatives are put forth in solving the above issue. Fifty companies who were early adopters of this technology were surveyed and among the questions posed was simply whether or not they are satisfied with their use of Web 2.0. 50% stated that they were not. Examining the reason for this dissatisfaction showed that there were three main impediments. Impediments of implementation included organizational structure, an inability of managers to understand the new levers of change, and a lack of understanding about how to create value with Web 2.0 tools. Clearly, if how value is created through the use of such

technology is unknown, efforts will be haphazard and tertiary in developing any strategy.

The first of six imperatives outlined by Michael Chui et al. which must be acknowledged in the development of any real strategy is that *the transformation to a bottom-up culture needs help from the top*. With the view that initiatives on Teamworks or other Web 2.0 platforms are grassroots experiments, managers run the risk of also associating a "build it and they will come" philosophy. While the grassroots take on the initiatives is apt, the idea that simply creating a user group, or the like, and it will then become widely used and effective is absolutely false. Generating a thriving user base leading to successful initiatives requires a different leadership approach. Senior officials and others in positions of influence should become a role model. This includes active participation while at the same time leading through informal channels. At Lockheed Martin when a senior executive wanted to pass policies determining adoption of Web 2.0 and volume of contributions, the executive set the bar by creating a personal blog which was kept up-to-date, informative, and relevant. Subsequently there has been wide spread acceptance and an increase in collaboration with this technology.

What was further discovered through the research of the fifty companies was that applications which generated the most value often were those which were both unexpected and came from the users. Thus, *the best uses come from users – but they require help to scale.* Efforts which prescribe the preferred use of a Web 2.0 platform, such as Teamworks, would therefore go awry. Rather a more thoughtful approach could be to see what works and then up-scale that application. After which, once users become accustom to using a certain feature of a working group for instance, which

they like, attention can be given to direct the users to other features offered which are more aligned with the intended use.

Going back the original point of the need to change the mentality which sees Web 2.0 as a novelty, it is precisely because of this that such technologies are often considered separate from mainstream work. In the past when technologies would replace existing tools it was necessary that people begin to learn and use the new and improved technology. However, Web 2.0 is slightly different. Rather than replacing existing methods, which is does to a limited extent, it can be seen as more of a complementary or alternative method for knowledge sharing and collaboration. While the promise of this technology is that it can do the above mentioned processes better than previous methods, older methods can still be used. In light of this, participation with wiki's, e-discussions and the like, becomes seen as another "to do" on an already crowded workflow. As the "normal" workload piles up, energy and attention typically declines and participation becomes minimal and irregular. Never should the initial fanfare of a new group, platform or similar launch of a Web 2.0 group, page etc. be seen as having accomplished overcoming the issue regarding user participation. The goal should be on a sustainable basis and over the long term. In order to achieve this, what needs to be known is that the highest change is achieved when the use of this technology is incorporated into the user's daily workflow, i.e. *what's in the workflow is what gets used*. The suggested method to accomplish this is to modify the way work is typically done such that the technologies are relevant to how staff do their jobs, not added to the work they do at their jobs. An example of how this is done in practice can be seen with SNAP. Reporting on work progress through the features available offer an archived record of tasks, information on current tasks, and can be filtered for example by, the staff member who has been assigned the task, the percentage of completion, and due date. This avails a supervisor with a comprehensive method for project management.

An interesting aspect relating to the implementation and establishment of a user base is that traditional methods of management do not work in this case. Management by objectives, standardized bonus pay for use, and individualized feedback do not seem to work and fall short of the mark. Non-monetary incentives however, have shown to work. *Appeal to the participants' egos and needs – not just their wallets.*

Otherwise people will contribute enough sole to meet benchmarks laid out, with the quality of those contributions being of generally low quality. Recognition within the relevant communities of Teamworks, rewarding enthusiasm, and acknowledging the quality and usefulness of contributions is suggested.

In establishing the essential initial user base, success comes in targeting users able to create the critical mass of participation but who can also add value in their own rite. *The right solution comes from the right participants.* Michael Chui et al. however do note that which individuals will turn out to be the best participants is unclear and that a thoughtful approach is necessary. Suggested is a strategy which targets tech savvy and respected opinion leaders.

Historically, the initial reaction to technology has been one of fear. There is understandable discomfort with using Web 2.0 as it is considered to be a self-organizing technology which has limited quality and content control which can reflect upon the organization in a negative light. However, it is possible to *balance the top-down and self-management of risk.* Policies which establish a reasonable balance between freedom and control are possible. A common example is with the prohibition of anonymous posting.

During the CD BBL discussion which followed the presentation an important question was raised regarding accessibility for those in developing and least developing countries. For instance, does the use of this technology mean that such organizations which are working in the field and have very limited access to a computer, let alone the internet, mean they are being marginalized. Should a method of knowledge sharing and collaboration which uses a technology not available to all concerned parties be used?

This critique is quite important as often those with the fewest of resources in rural areas are in fact the ones who need access to knowledge resources and collaboration the most. However, there is a growing number of cases where Web 2.0 technology is being used in rural areas. In particular, farmers in Uganda are sharing local knowledge on growing/harvesting methods rather than relying on foreign experts. It should be noted that in general, the use of Web 2.0 within the UN system is very much between UN offices where connectivity is not an issue. However, some partner organizations may have slightly less capacity for such connectivity. In these cases effort should be made for "light weight" versions which require less computing power. As much as possible the platform should be made as light as can be while retaining the essential features. Teamworks, is looking into this and, is attempting be as "light weight" as possible.

When stakeholders in a project include those who have limited means to interact through Web 2.0 clearly such use ought to be deemed as a secondary means of knowledge sharing and collaboration, with traditional methods being the primary method. In light of this, caution should be given in training sole on new Web 2.0 platforms as the "be-all and end-all" solution for knowledge sharing and collaboration. Older, more established methods should certainly continue to be taught.

Six elements for unlocking the user participation needed to increase the capacity of users to achieve increased gains with knowledge sharing and active collaboration among other processes, through this technology, and which need to be considered when developing strategy papers are therefore:

1. **The transformation to a bottom-up culture needs help from the top**

2. **The best uses come from users – but they require help to scale**

3. **What's in the workflow is what gets used**

4. **Appeal to the participants' egos and needs – not just their wallets**

5. **The right solution comes from the right participants**

6. **Balance the top-down and self-management of risk**

A seventh element based on the discussion would seem to be that the use of such technology should not be the sole method of knowledge sharing and collaboration when UN partners could become marginalized in doing so, and that what is used should be "light weight" to the extent possible. Additionally, training on Web 2.0 as a means for knowledge sharing and collaboration should not supersede training of previously used methods.

While the integration of this technology does require a certain degree of adaptation, this should not be taken as a reason for dismissing the technology. Likewise, early efforts to use Web 2.0 for enhanced collaboration and knowledge sharing which have not been as effective as promised, should not be taken as a sign to abandon the technology altogether. Rather, lessons can be learnt and new strategies developed. This technology does have the capacity to add tremendous value to the work of the UNDP and other organizations. Some recognize this already while others will in the future.

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