An Examination of the Application Scenarios of Enterprise Wikis

Dada Lin, T-Systems Multimedia Solutions GmbH, Technical University Dresden, Knowledge Research Center, Germany

ABSTRACT

Multiple companies are already social software enabled. Enterprise wikis are the most frequently used type. The best-known example of a wiki is the online encyclopedia Wikipedia. Using Wikipedia as an example, multiple companies establish an internal wiki encyclopedia. There are also other purposes for which enterprise wikis can be used. Some companies use the wiki as a news portal, discussion platform, or as a project management tool. In research there is still no adequate systematization of the possible uses of wikis. Therefore, this paper examines the different application scenarios of enterprise wikis and to explore application scenario-related motivational factors. To examine the application scenarios of wikis, a qualitative-oriented case study on the internal wiki of the company, T-Systems Multimedia Solutions GmbH was conducted. Also, the Atlassian Confluence based wiki called 'TeamWeb' in which was introduced in 2008 and has gradually established itself as a global Intranet. A peculiarity of this is that it is not strictly specified, how the staff work with it. In this way, over time many different application scenarios have been established, and now about 56,000 wiki pages in TeamWeb. These wiki pages were analyzed and categorized to application scenarios. The results are discussed further in the article.

Keywords: Application Scenarios, Case Study, Enterprise Wiki, Grounded Theory, T-Systems Multimedia Solutions, Typology, User Motivation

INTRODUCTION

Enterprise 2.0 technologies are now in use in many companies. A study by the Institute of Information Management at the University of St. Gallen revealed that wikis, forums, social networking services, weblogs, feeds and instant messaging are the most popular application classes, and over 60% of the organizations which took part in the survey used them (Back, Friedel, & Weigand, 2011). The “wiki” application class has a role that should be highlighted here. With approximately 88% distribution, the wiki is the most frequently employed Enterprise 2.0 technology.

A special feature of wikis is the exceptional diversity of their potential application. Whereas on the Internet, wikis are mainly employed for article-based lexica which are created collaboratively (e.g., Wikipedia), many more application scenarios are possible within a company context. For this reason, this paper is dedicated
to investigation of the application scenarios and their special effects on framework conditions and the success factors of enterprise wikis.

THE PROBLEM AND THE RESEARCH QUESTION

The introduction and operation of enterprise wikis is no self-starter, instead, the process is beset by a number of difficulties which are specific to the use of wikis. Henriksson et al. (2008) identified a number of different problems in their study. The four most frequently encountered problems are as follows:

1. Too few employees frequently and actively update the wiki with information.
2. The benefits of the wiki are not immediately obvious to the participants.
3. It is difficult to motivate participants to use the wiki.
4. There is not enough time to use the wiki.

It becomes clear that both the motivation and the context of the wiki use are central and therefore critical factors in the introduction of enterprise wikis. Subsequent problems such as incomplete or out of date content could also ensue.

The starting point for the research objective of this paper was the author’s assumption that a correlation exists between the actual application scenario and motivation to use the wiki. Given the large diversity of wiki application scenarios, and their specific differences, general statements on motivation to use wikis are not sufficiently distinct. With the aim of supporting the introduction and operation of enterprise wikis within organizations in a hands-on fashion, this paper attempts to analyze the potential application scenarios and their specific characteristics in greater detail. Specifically, the various application scenarios shall be systematically categorized in the form of a set of ideal application modes. On the basis of a more in-depth understanding of how enterprise wikis can be used, the intention is to obtain further statements on key topics such as user motivation, quality of the wiki content etc. throughout the course of the research process. For this reason, the following research questions were formulated at the start of the research project:

- How are enterprise wikis used?
- What knowledge can be obtained from the way in which enterprise wikis are used?
- Are there application scenarios which are accepted particularly well by employees?

How are wiki problems (e.g., lack of motivation, incomplete or out of date content) associated with the way in which wikis are used?

THE RESEARCH PROJECT

The findings obtained from this study are based mainly on empirical data which has been collected in the T-Systems Multimedia Solutions GmbH (MMS) Company. The MMS develops Internet-based solutions for major companies and medium-sized enterprises.

Since mid 2008, the MMS has been using the TeamWeb. TeamWeb is an enterprise wiki based on Atlassian Confluence (http://www.atlassian.com/software/confluence) and is employed as a communications and collaboration tool to support teamwork.

The TeamWeb is subdivided according to different content spaces. In this way, a separate space is provided for each business and corporate unit, serving as a presentation and working area. All spaces have the same basic structure (home, team, tasks, blog, calendar), making it easier to navigate within new spaces.

To investigate the research questions stated in the previous sections (The Problem and the Research Questions), TeamWeb presents itself as an ideal research subject for a number of reasons:

1. Openness of use: Except for a few exceptions, there are no established rules as to how the TeamWeb should be used.
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