



Global Development Aid through Intellectual Engagement and Social Media

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Abstract:

The International Institute of Social Studies (ISS), an international graduate school of policy-oriented critical social science which brings together students and teachers from the Global South and the North in a European environment, is proposing a framework on the innovative use of widely available technology to support knowledge sharing, joint research and learning.

The reason for proposing a framework is that the world around us is changing. Faster than ever before and this paper argues that knowledge is the missing link in understanding this changing world. And whether you like it or not, social media technology is increasingly shaping our daily life as a way to share and create new knowledge; the knowledge we are craving for to make sense of and decide over new situations.

This paper first outlines why and how there is a future for global development aid by using social media technology. In the second part, the paper describes a framework how organizations can best implement a knowledge sharing initiative based on social media technologies. Thereafter, the paper illustrates the Focuss.Info Initiative (www.focuss.info) as a way how the ISS is enhancing the access to knowledge in the field of global development aid.

Access to knowledge within global development aid

For many years the field of global development aid has worked on overcoming many contradictions. Regional, national and international institutes in this field have been launching projects and initiatives to bridge the gaps between the Global North and South, between being a developed country and a developing country and between facing a brain gain and a brain drain. By only highlighting a couple of these contradictions, it becomes clear that the success or failure of developing a country is closely linked to its access to knowledge.

In order to develop as a country, the people within the country should open doors that were locked before. In other words, they need to explore new territories. To make sense of these new territories and decide over the new things they see, feel and hear, the people should have the newest knowledge. Every country is in this process of developing itself and entering new territories. However, it depends on the level of knowledge within the countries to successfully make sense of and decide over these new situations.

By being successful in steering a country through developments and building upon these, these countries will most probably become more developed than the other. As a result, by developing a country successfully, the developed country ends up in a state of prosperity. This prosperity in often wealth, but also happiness and health, creates a magnet to the ones who live in less developed countries and want to come enjoy the same prosperity. The ones who can make such a move are often the intellectuals or well-resourced people from a country. Through this the already well-developed countries would then get a brain gain and the less-developed countries a brain drain.

Without initiating action on - for example - this brain drain, the Global South could have dire consequences. The continuous stream of professionals to Europe and the Americas is affecting the Global South's development and prosperity. According to Dr Lalla Ben Barka of the UN Economic Commission for Africa, Africa will be empty of brains within 25 years (UNECA, 2008). Even though she argues that this movement from developing countries to industrialized nations is not a new phenomenon, the magnitude of the growing problem demands urgent action as the consequences of brain drain threaten to stunt the overall development of the Global South. Additionally, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) is of the same thoughts. This organization argues that Africa has already lost 1/3 of its human capital and is continuing to lose its skilled personnel at an increasing rate. It is reported that there are now more African scientists in the United States than on the whole of the African continent.

Access to knowledge within organizational management

Not only specific areas of expertise - such as the field of global development aid - are trying to overcome development challenges by enhancing the access to knowledge. Organizations in general are also facing extra-ordinary challenges and increasingly these organizations do highlight the necessity of its access to knowledge. Organizations realize that the world they are living and working in is not that simple as before. New developments are succeeding each other in a rapid pace and even though these developments mostly happen outside the organizations, they are surely affecting organizations from the inside.

The technological developments such as Internet and mobile communication are connecting the digital world as a whole. As a result, most people can get information for nearly nothing without any difficulties and make sense of this information through their

social networks without a doubt. The one who can run this process most successfully will generate new knowledge rapidly and eventually make decisions which are more innovative than others. This means that the innovative (or in organizational jargon 'competitive') advantage is increasingly depended on the exercise of specialist knowledge and network competencies.

However, organizations do also have to struggle with the demographic developments of this time. Where technology is connecting the digital world as a whole, the current demographic situation in - especially - Europe and North America - is disconnecting the real world as a whole (Tapscott, 2009). Many people will soon retire and organizations do not have a new workforce to fill in the empty spaces. Therefore, organizations are emphasizing on becoming better in knowledge sharing by network-based working and learning.

The move to a network-based working and learning environment introduces a new way of working and designing organizations. This move should be adopted by institutes and non-governmental organizations in global development aid, but also by organizations and even the society. The systems we all have lived in for so many years were designed to manage production factors such as land and labor. As a result, our lives formed around controlling these production factors since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution for more than 200 years. However, if organizations and society are so focused on the access to knowledge, knowledge should be the new factor of production. This new production factor was introduced by David Bell. According to Bell (1976) we are moving to a New Economy - a fundamental economic change resulting from the acceleration in the accumulation and availability of knowledge (Grant, 2002; p. 134) where knowledge is seen as a new factor of production (Drucker, 1993) - focussing on intangibles rather than tangibles (Stewart, 1997) which results in a predominance of services over goods (Grant, 2002). While knowledge is the new production factor, should we control knowledge the same we did as with the previous 'industrialized' production factor?

Experience have already taught us that controlling knowledge is not working. In the 1990s many organizations jumped into the field of knowledge management and they started to spend a large amount of money in setting up the technology to capture and codify knowledge, but unfortunately - in most cases - the technology was not being used. Subsequently, critical case studies were published which showed that "human, social and cultural factors are typically key determinants of the success or failure of knowledge management initiatives" (Hislop, 2005; p. 44).

Should we therefore abandon technology in knowledge sharing initiatives? No! While technology connects the world as a whole, we should implement the latest Internet and (mobile) communication technologies. These technologies make it easier to create networks that enhance knowledge sharing and learning. However, implementing a strategy that embrace these latest technologies is far more complicated. The strategy should also include the issues linked with human, social and cultural factors. To assist you in making sense of what does work for your organization and what does not, the next part of this paper will show you a framework for an organizational strategy to create a knowledge sharing network based on the implementation of the latest (mobile) technologies. The framework consists of a knowledge sharing culture and structure.

The knowledge sharing culture and its competences

The strategy starts with people who are taking up the latest (mobile) technologies seriously. People who are advocates. Within organizations you can think of the librarians

who could take up this role of advocates, because they are the ones who already have a broad experience in being advocates as they have organized and executed many courses in 'being-literate-to-do-your-job-in-the-best-way'.

In the 1980s librarians started with computer literacy, because there was an enormous increase of computer automation in organizations. Staff members were required to know how to work with computers and, as a result, librarians took up the task to induce staff members how they best should use all of these new computer tools.

Thereafter in the 1990s, when computer automation in organizations became common sense, digital information grew enormously and the Internet - a place where everybody could store and share their information - was infiltrating in people's daily life, the librarians recognized the urgency of information literacy. Librarians argued that if they are not the safe-guards of qualitative information anymore, the librarians should make sure that other people know how to evaluate information and based their decisions on qualitative information.

Currently, not only librarians, but also organizations are facing the challenges of the newest (mobile) technologies such as social media. Social media tools let us form social networks in which individuals act, but the network of individuals also provides resources such as social memory that individuals and groups can exploit. Norberg and Cumming (2009) argue that the successful management "would then depend upon the inclusion of individuals and groups with the appropriate roles in a network".

This brings me to the next dimension of literacy: network literacy. Individuals should know what kind of roles they should fulfill in order to create a high level of centrality in the network. It is believed that such a position in a network could hypothetically have a large impact on the control of information and knowledge flow. As a result, a crucial competence of individuals is that they will occupy roles such as brokers and/or facilitators and therefore they should also have networking competences.

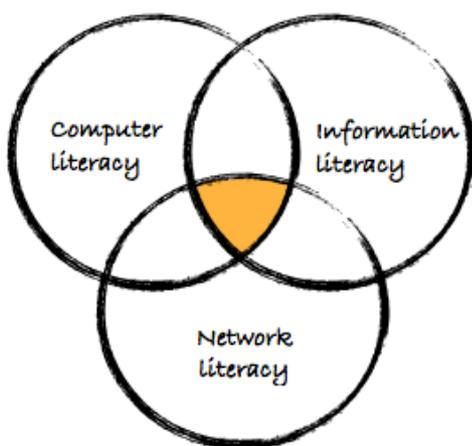


Figure 1: Librarians' cross-road on literacy

The knowledge sharing structure and its transparency

Successful management does not only require us to say: let's start with social networking via Twitter or Facebook and we have a knowledge sharing network. It is far more

complicated to initiate a structure that provides a network for collective resources such as social memory. Let me explain to you this by giving a small anecdote.

Many of us have played with Lego. By mixing bricks of different shapes and colors, it is possible to build different objects (from cars to houses to space ships). This sounds like an easy thing to do. However, appearances are deceiving! In most cases, people cannot manage without the instructions to make sense of all the different bricks and decide over which brick should connect the other in order to build the particular object.

This small anecdote can also be translated into the issue of social media. Social media is everywhere and is increasingly shaping our daily life as a way to share and create new knowledge. With social media we communicate (by (micro)-blogging and social networking) and collaborate (by using Wikis and social-bookmarking) through different types of multimedia (by photo-sharing with Flickr and video-sharing with YouTube). As a result, all these different tools – social media tools – create a lively environment where people can tell their own stories, connect with other people who are telling their own stories as well and, as a result, engage each other.

In order to create a network where people engage each other through lively conversations, the trick is to successfully combine social media tools. Organizations should make sense of all these different tools and decide which combinations will best work for them. This means that there are different combinations of social media tools that can add value to the organization. That is why it is difficult to only give one instruction (as highlighted in the Lego anecdote) to build a knowledge sharing structure based on social media technology.

While there is a huge diversity in social media tools, these tools all have one key characteristic in common. This characteristic is transparency. The reason why organizations become more transparent is because social media tools promote conversations which are open, informal, direct and easy in use.

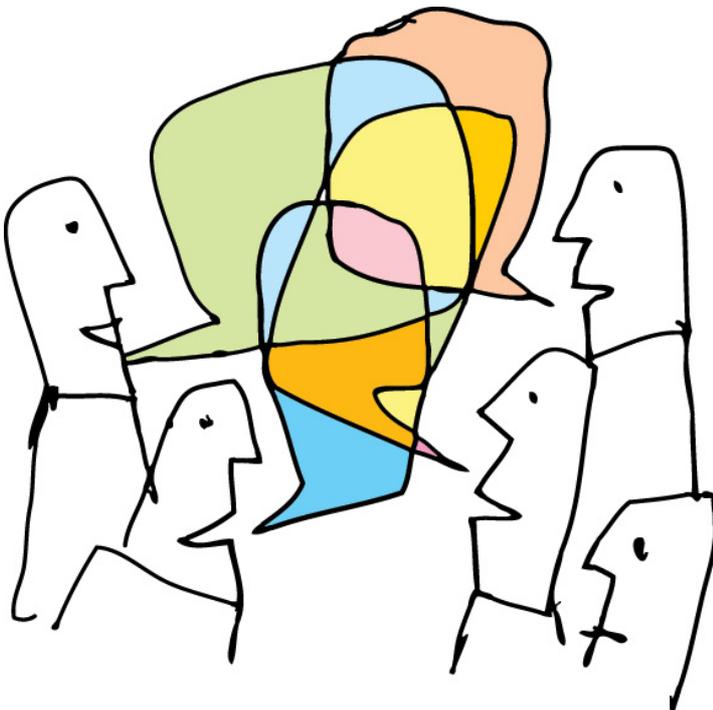


Figure 2: Social media tools promote open, informal, direct and easy conversations. Image is from: http://www.piercemattiepublicrelations.com/2008/10/public_relations_strategies_si.html#more

Open, because everybody – or perhaps a preselected group of people – can follow what you are doing. On [Twitter](#), we can read more about everything you thought worth sharing with the world, and others can tap into these pieces of knowledge when they feel like. On [Delicious](#), we can see which websites are important to you and perhaps others can learn from them too.

Informal, because by starting a social networking profile, through [Facebook](#) for example, you can mix personal and professional roles and lower the threshold for others to connect with and learn from you.

Direct, because people can connect to you, through Skype or the live-chat function of [Facebook](#), whenever they want, as long as you are connected to the Internet (and this is quite often).

Finally, easy in use, because new technologies – such as smart-phones – are making it easier to stay connected to your social media tools and update them wherever you are and whenever you want.

As you can see, there are many different social media tools which have all been designed for saving and sharing different types of knowledge. As a user of all these different social media tools, you will probably know how and where to relocate your knowledge. However, the people who should learn from what you are saving in the social media tools only see snippets of your knowledge. This is called 'fragmented knowledge'. Additionally, the more people you follow through social media tools, the more 'noise' (information overload) you get. So why should organizations embrace social media tools when these tools generate fragmented knowledge and an overload of information?

Information overload and fragmented knowledge are more useful than useless. Firstly, because they result in unexpected opportunities. They create less limited boundaries to the scope of your view and, as a result, make it more likely that you may find things you did not even think to look for.

Secondly, because they result in future needs. It is one thing to find something you did not know you needed right away; it is a whole other skill to be able to recall knowledge that seemed marginally useful at best in the past, but crucial in the future. By using social media tools, it is relatively easy to recall this knowledge.

Thirdly, because it maximizes recall. Scientists argue that it is not necessarily the case that an overload of information will lead to not remembering very much of it. On the contrary, people make decisions based on their long-term patterns of fragmented knowledge. As a result, social media tools move learning to a co-evolutional process.

Organizational design for a knowledge sharing culture and structure

To seize the opportunities of social media, the existing organizational culture and structure of hierarchical control and direction must change sufficiently to encourage and reward engagement; engagement that should be impartial, proper and professional.

Therefore, I believe that librarians should aim at rolling out internal and external initiatives. Internal initiatives are – for example – required to teach staff members how to use social media as a tool and technique to share information and collaborate, but also required to assist top management in change management practices. External initiatives could aim on

engaging and collaborating with stakeholders surrounding an initiative by co-creating given tasks with the ambition of creating a desirable and valuable output. To realize this, organizations should become open and transparent – and thus trustworthy – to encourage external stakeholders sharing their knowledge. It is only then that organizations can form or join online communities of interest around issues of relevance in order to become more informed, responsive, innovative and client-focused.

Is there an example how organizations successfully launched internal and external initiatives in order to get a knowledge sharing environment? Yes, there is. At the beginning of this paper we illustrated the necessity for the field of global development aid to enhance the access to knowledge. Within this particular field, the International Institute of Social Studies (www.iss.nl) initiated the Focuss.Info Initiative (www.focuss.info). The remainder of the paper will describe this initiative. This description of Focuss reflects earlier mentioned framework to create a knowledge-sharing environment.

The Focuss.Info Initiative's knowledge sharing environment

The Focuss.Info Initiative (www.focuss.info) is maintained by, on one hand, a collaboration between students, researchers and individual practitioners and, on the other hand, local, national and international institutes. These different parties have all in common that they are working in the field of global development aid. The aim of Focuss is to promote new information sharing and networking skills among peers in the domain of global development aid. Through this objective Focuss improves access to information and knowledge, a fundamental human right that strengthens democracy, and supports human rights. This objective also corresponds to the work of UNESCO, which helps to develop effective 'infostructures', including developing information standards, management tools and fostering access at the community level.



Figure 3: Website screen shot of www.focuss.info

The knowledge sharing structure of Focuss consists of two social media tools. These are the Google Custom Search Engine (Google CSE) and social bookmarking.

The Google CSE is a social media tool provided by Google that allows you - as a web developer - to include a search engine on your own website. Additionally, web developers can select which websites should be indexed by the search engine. As a result, web developers create a specialized search engine rather than a generic search engine.

Social bookmarking is the second social media tool used by and embedded within Focuss. Social bookmarking is a way to store, organize and share favorite e-resources on the Internet. By saving favorite e-resources on the Internet instead of on the local computer, the e-resources are also open to others who might be interested in the area(s) you are bookmarking in.

By mixing these two social media tools in Focuss, the initiative offers a specific search engine that indexes e-resources from the social bookmark collections of students, researchers and individual practitioners in the field of global development aid.

However, should students, researchers and individual practitioners actively be involved in selecting and saving their e-resources for the sake of Focuss? No! As Focuss is an initiative that is promoting new information sharing and networking skills among peers in global development aid, it emphasizes more on how peers should manage their valuable e-resources through social bookmarking rather than to promote the search engine. The search engine is just an example of how personal knowledge is re-used for the benefit of the group - the field of global development aid - and the creation of collective knowledge. Therefore, the initiative stresses that peers should acquire the newest information sharing and networking skills in order to work more efficient for themselves and more effective in their own domain of global development aid.

To make sure the field of global development aid is up-to-date with these new kind of information sharing and networking skills, Focuss is a collaborative initiative with partner institutes from all over the world. Through these institutes, the Focuss coordinators are influencing members of these institutes about what the new way of working is. However, as the initiative also aims at bridging the gap between the Global South and North, it is also required to induce peers from areas that used to be less accessible before.

That is why Focuss supports the work of workshop facilitators from Africa, Asia or South-America both financially - by giving out awards - and intellectually - by providing workshop facilitators with direct access to support via the Focuss coordinators and the visitors on www.focuss.info. After giving out an award, the workshop facilitators from the Global South will roll-out local workshops for scholars and professional in global development aid in the use of information sharing and networking tools.

There are only two requirements the workshop facilitator needs to comply to. Firstly, he or she needs to emphasize on social bookmarking with regards to information sharing and networking. This is a requirement, because the search engine incorporated in the website of the Initiative is only harvesting and indexing the websites that have been selected as value and stored in social bookmarking accounts (such as Delicious.com) by peers in global development aid. The ones who are social bookmarkers and who save valuable e-resources in their social bookmark collection are also being shown on www.focuss.info. This makes the initiative transparent, because everybody can see who is adding what to the search engine. As a result, the person who often saves something in his/her personal social bookmark collection, will automatically also become more visible on www.focuss.info and could become a knowledge broker among his/her peers.

Who is adding what?

[from iaald] Nouveau directeur désigné à la tête du CTA
 about 16 minutes ago

2010 - CTA
Read More →

iaald
 via Focuss social bookmarker
 Delicious/network/focuss.marker

Figure 3: News ticker on www.focuss.info indicating latest entry to search engine

Secondly, the workshop facilitator is required to maintain a diary of the workshop on a weblog located on the website of Focuss. Every workshop facilitator will have his or her own space on the website. Through this, the workshop facilitator can get more information from the readers and connect with workshop participants before and after the workshop, but it also gives the workshop facilitators a platform to show how they persuade a local community to use social bookmarking.

Promoting ICT skills and tools aimed at, and done by peers in the global development domain

Focuss.Info Initiative

Google Custom Search Search

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« Focuss info Ghana workshop Video - Part 1 | Main | Focuss info Ghana workshop Lecture notes »

Focuss info Ghana workshop Video - Part 4

Thursday, February 4, 2010 at 4:35PM

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Figure 5: Dairy of a workshop facilitator from Ghana on www.focuss.info

The value that the initiative is getting out of this, is that an increasing number of peers in global development aid are starting to embrace social bookmarking as a tool to organize their favorite e-resources and they are indirectly sharing their favorite e-resources with everybody who is interested in these resources, because it is saved on the Internet.

Focuss is also a valuable tool, because it gives an overview of different ways to persuade people to use the latest information sharing and networking tools and technologies from local communities in Africa, Asia and South-America. This means that the area of global

development aid gets a better understanding of how global knowledge sharing works best by engage peers intelligently in promoting the latest information sharing and networking tools.

Conclusion

The Focuss.Info Initiative is a good example of a knowledge sharing environment. By sponsoring peers to become workshop facilitators, Focuss encourages engagement. Focuss also reward engagement by giving workshop facilitators and the ones who start with social bookmarking a global platform - www.focuss.info - on which their contributions are visible. As a result, the reward of engagement is that the person who is actively involved in social bookmarking strengthen his/her position as an indispensable networker or knowledge broker within the field of global development aid.

All with all it should be clear by now that a knowledge sharing environment can be realized by encouraging the use of the latest information sharing and networking tools, because these tools enhance information and knowledge sharing through networking. Additionally, because these tools are open, informal, direct and easy in use, the knowledge sharing environment - such as the Focuss.Info Initiative - becomes transparent. And transparency is required in order to establish an impartial, proper and professional knowledge sharing environment.

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