



Wikis as Knowledge Management Tools

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For many organisations, knowledge is the most critical asset, and in modern work environments that might be spread across geographically diverse regions or organised into virtual teams, managing knowledge is growing more difficult. The formalised practice of Knowledge Management has been the subject of research and corporate application for more than two decades now, but many of the initiatives have not delivered the promised business improvements because of their complexity and their focus on technology rather than human aspects of knowledge.

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Today's wiki software has matured to a point where the technology 'just works'. The concepts are simple and developers have put a great deal of attention into the usability and social aspects to make wikis fun and easy to use. Even though wikis are not traditionally described as 'Knowledge Management' tools, they are now in a position where they can deliver many of the long awaited benefits of Knowledge management.

The knowledge management benefits are actually a side effect of using a wiki. A wiki site is usually installed for reasons other than knowledge management, such as as a intranet, a project management tool, a collaborative working tool or as a solution to some other important business function. The knowledge management features of a wiki site can emerge from its usage as users incorporate wiki work methods into their day to day work processes. The key knowledge management processes of capturing tacit knowledge and disseminating explicit knowledge can happen automatically without any extra effort from users. Features such as recent changes, document history through version control, comments and simple hyperlinks can turn a simple page from a container of information into a source of knowledge.

The open nature of wiki software encourages communication and collaboration and capture of information about the organisation that remains as a permanent and accessible knowledge base. The low entry barrier to wiki usage promotes its use and further more, the dynamic nature of a wiki site allows it to change and grow with the organisation and its people.

As a wiki consultant, I find that the knowledge management aspects of wiki installations are one of their great selling points for enterprise adoption.

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