Business Collaboration Meets Social Collaboration: Building a Community for SharePoint Users

New communication technologies are changing the way World Bank Group (WBG) staff work and interact with their colleagues. For example, teams in different locations and time zones can use virtual collaboration platforms for communication and knowledge management. During 2009 and 2010, the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) and Poverty Reduction and Economic Management (PREM) units volunteered to participate in the pilot phase of the rollout of SharePoint, a common work space for teams that bundles a number of functions previously available only as separate applications. At the same time, there was an increase in demand across the World Bank Group (WBG) for a Facebook-type collaboration platform, called “Scoop,” which responded to teams’ need for a virtual platform to support social collaboration. SharePoint had already exceeded expectations, with many staff members from different units in the WBG headquarters and country offices becoming active users, and the number of site requests increasing weekly. This demand brought the need to identify and group all SharePoint site owners and users so everyone could connect, share and learn from each other. This SmartLesson describes how one of the so-called “SharePoint evangelists” came to create a group in Scoop, which quickly started attracting members from all corners of the World Bank Group.

Background

SharePoint, also known in the Bank as “Connect” was promoted as a business collaboration tool of particular value for teams working in operations. It also is a versatile tool with a myriad of uses that ease and enhance business collaboration and improve productivity. The Microsoft trademark gave it instant credibility among staff and within a short period, SharePoint gained popularity Bank-wide. On the other hand, a number of staff members questioned the selection of Scoop, as opposed to SharePoint, as the tool for hosting community spaces (See Box 1).

Initially, it took a bit of extra effort to recruit SharePoint users on Scoop and to help them understand its different possible opportunities. First, we had to identify key users and potential ones. Most of the early users of Scoop came from the LAC and PREM (anchor) units. Within a short time, the group became increasingly popular, which meant a higher number of users within the different units in the WBG headquarters and the country offices.

Box 1: SharePoint and Scoop

As a business collaboration tool, SharePoint’s functionalities are different from those of Scoop:

- Scoop is designed to enable a Web site to become a community. It provides an informal space where staff can create and participate in discussions on any related topic, share useful links, read the latest news, and connect with other staff.
- SharePoint offers these same features, but it is most powerful on document collaboration, issues tracking, project task management, calendar, wikis, and event planning, among other functions.

Scoop is the Bank’s solution for interactive online staff communities.
The team behind the promotion and implementation of SharePoint in the Bank is continuously meeting with the members of the community, face-to-face or on web-conference via Adobe Connect. In addition to attracting new users of SharePoint, these meetings also help to promote the community and encourage team members to continue to use the Scoop Group for dialogue, discussion, learning, and knowledge sharing.

**Lessons Learned**

1) **Bring people together who have something in common, keep it informal, and then watch what happens!**

The above citation from Etienne Wenger, a well-known knowledge management scholar, influenced the pilot phase of Scoop and in the conceptualization of the SharePoint community. The common interest was that all the members either had used SharePoint or were planning to do so. Therefore, we didn’t need to adopt any formal mechanisms for learning or for user engagement. A community-driven approach brought SharePoint users—site owners, regular contributors, and regular users—together and gave each individual an opportunity to share experiences, post a question, learn from others, and connect with best practitioners.

This approach had amazing success! A staff member in one unit would show interest in and learn about another unit’s work. Today, the original group—created from the LAC and PREM units—is rated the second-most-popular group World Bank-wide. It has over 611 registered members, most of whom are from the vice presidency units. All its members have an interest in common: using SharePoint to improve their work.

2) **Select a collaborative-space community leader who is not only knowledgeable in the field of knowledge management but also has a knack for being proactive and reaching out.**

The community leader for a new collaborative space carries a lot of weight on his or her shoulders—including responsibility for providing guidance, recruiting new members, encouraging knowledge sharing and discussions, and above all monitoring all the activity in the space. This is not an easy task, because it has to be combined with the regular work schedule. In our case, the community leader brought valuable experience. Having previously served as the central rallying point for SharePoint promotion and user engagement, he applied those skills and expertise to the Scoop endeavor. The initial target group was staff, first inviting users in the LAC and PREM units—and then all site owners in the World Bank Group—to join and promote the online community among staff in their units. This was a real kickoff, because the Bank has hundreds of site owners and just as many sites.

Another feature that generated a great deal of attention was a summary of examples of best practices from different teams in the World Bank. This is when the real learning began. For example, the staff from Human...
Resources started to learn from LAC, External Operational Communications learned from PREM and LAC Human Development, and so on. The community leader also began receiving invitations to different panels and meetings—from such units as the Reform Secretariat, Operational Policies and Country Services (OPCS), and others—that provided opportunities to promote and sell the Scoop community.

3) The key to active community participation is good—and versatile—content.

Good content is the key to collaboration, and for the content to be good it has to be versatile. One of the most active features in the community is the discussions section, in which users create and participate in discussions to address issues, share new and upcoming work-related events, and provide useful information on training and learning opportunities. Another popular feature is the news page, content is received via Google Alerts and Twitter. It presents a monthly snapshot of news—always revised and filtered by the community leader—and provides information on what organizations and people are doing with SharePoint outside of the World Bank Group.

The richness of the content on the space has increased its popularity and made it an open online meeting place for a wide range of participants, from administrative support staff to senior management.

4) Social-collaboration and business-collaboration tools can be used in parallel—even regarding SharePoint use!

In early 2009, Scoop and SharePoint were promoted throughout the World Bank using different approaches and methods. As a consequence, staff lacked adequate information on the capabilities of each tool, and the results were confusion, resistance, and misunderstandings. The SharePoint community made it possible for staff to gain a better understanding of the purpose of each collaboration tool. And Scoop’s social-collaboration features helped form and strengthen the community of SharePoint users across the WBG.

Note: Now, the SharePoint team is frequently asked for advice on whether a team should use either of the tools—or both, through an integrated collaboration approach.

5) Invite management to get behind the development and implementation of a new service or product—in this case, to participate in and promote the Scoop community.

Because the Scoop community entails a way of working that is new to the World Bank, senior management sometimes need to provide a direct response to ensure that users have accurate and current information. For example, representatives of senior management have participated in several discussions on technical functions, governance, integration with other bank systems, and so on.

Senior management of the Information Solutions Group (ISGIS) have also invited ISG staff to join the Scoop community and participate in its activities. They used their monthly e-newsletters and staff meetings to highlight the number of members participating and the level of activity in the community.

Conclusion

The community of SharePoint users on Scoop has become the point of reference for WBG staff who want to share, learn, discuss, and connect with others using or with an interest in SharePoint. This is how business collaboration has met social collaboration. The Scoop team has received recognition, first with the Superusers Award and more recently by being included in the Scoop Wall of Fame during the WBG’s Innovation Days. Our ultimate goal is to increase the number of users—at headquarters as well as in the country offices—to make it a more vibrant collaboration platform. In fact, staff from countries like Indonesia, the Philippines, France, Romania, Sudan, and Paraguay, just to name a few, have expressed their interest in SharePoint by participating in the community’s discussions. Looking further ahead, we see a new dimension for the community, with SharePoint sites soon becoming available for collaboration with authorized external users - client countries, partners, and consultants.