Paper: Tools of Engagement: Using Social Media to Capture Non-Profit Organizations' Stories

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Abstract
Presents results from qualitative interviews with individuals working in non-profit organizations near Edmonton, Alberta. The findings point to the importance of stories as information sources used within the organizations, with social media playing a key role in capturing those stories and engaging with the community.
Résumé

1. Introduction

Knowledge Management (KM) is concerned with identifying, creating, storing, organizing and disseminating organizational knowledge (Baskerville and Dulipovici 2006; Benbya et al. 2004). KM has its roots in business, so its early developments focused on large, for-profit organizations (Prusak 2001). KM creates value for an organization (Dalkir 2005) by utilizing organizational know-how and experience to meet goals and objectives efficiently and effectively. Limited research explores KM in Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs). These organizations are people-driven, task-oriented groups with common interests (Teegen et al. 2004), which often represent humanitarian or community-level work. Although many scholars recognize the benefits of adopting KM in small and medium-sized NPOs (e.g., Gregory and Rathi 2008; Lemieux and Dalkir 2006), little research explores users' knowledge needs to inform the design of KM practices in NPOs. This paper presents the results of a project (funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada) that explored the use of social media as a KM tool within non-profit organizations. The findings point to the importance of stories as information sources used within the organization, with social media playing a key role in capturing those stories and engaging with the community.

2. The Power of Stories for Knowledge Management

Stories provide insight into events and address the "cause and effects of those events" (Brown and Duguid 2000). Stories can be easily remembered and understood, providing shared views and supporting learning by hearing from others (Brown and Duguid, 2000; Barker and Gower 2010). Barker and Gower (2010) note that storytelling is "an excellent business tool" that can be used in 'change management' and organizational learning (299). Many authors (e.g., Santoro and Brézillon (2005), Brown and Duguid (2000)) suggest that stories are tools used to share information and knowledge. According to Acosta et al. (2004), "storytelling is a natural way to communicate tacit knowledge" (2) and can be used for converting tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge (Nonaka 1994). Although it may be easy to codify explicit knowledge (e.g., from email or memos), codifying implicit or tacit knowledge from people's minds is more difficult. It is important to include the context and activities related to specific events, but it is challenging to extract contextualized knowledge and make it explicit (Santoro and

Brézillon 2005). Storytelling can help because "just as knowledge, stories draw meaning from their contextual information;" further, they "are an appropriate way of telling what happened and, at the same time, can externalize groups' tacit knowledge" (Santoro and Brézillon 2005). Stories and storytelling are useful for acquisition and distribution of knowledge within organizations (Lukosch et al. 2011).

3. Digital Storytelling and KM Practice
Historically, stories were told verbally; digital media now play important roles in storytelling. For Snelson and Sheffield (2009) digital storytelling "is the process of creating a story with digital media such as images, text music and audio narration." Klamma et al. (2009) indicate that both non-digital and digital stories have the power to draw and hold people's attention and help them remember stories for a longer period of time through the application of "interesting plots, involved emotions and strong expressiveness of narrations" (623). Alexander (2006) notes that new practices of storytelling will emerge with newer digital tools. For example, podcasting and blogs (Alexander 2006), and specific sites, such as writely.com, wiki.com and flickr.com, etc. (Barak et al. 2009) are useful tools for storytelling.

There is also much discussion of the power of social media for KM. Web 2.0 tools, such as blogs, wikis and image sharing sites (Black, 2007; McNutt, 2008), are useful for managing knowledge, sharing content and fostering collaboration (O'Reilly 2005). van Zyl (2009) argues that "asynchronous communication methods, such as blogs and wikis, can increase productivity and work flow efficiency." The collaborative potential and ease of use of these tools (Razmerita et al. 2009) make them potential candidates for KM for small and medium-sized NPOs (Huck et al. 2009), as does their low cost (Razmerita et al. 2009). However, current research has not explored the value of social media tools for NPOs in depth.

4. Research Design
Qualitative interviews were conducted with individuals working in fifteen small or medium-sized NPOs near Edmonton, Alberta. The sample was drawn from a provincial registry of charitable organizations, volunteer directories and other listings of NPOs. Potential participating organizations' websites were assessed for geographic reach, activity areas and social media presence, with the final sample selected using maximum variation criteria. The sample included hospitals, health organizations, food banks, shelters, student associations, advocacy groups, legal education centres, cultural foundations, and public libraries. Sixteen individual and small-group interviews with managers and staff examined social media in KM practices. Interviews were semi-structured and explored KM practices, social media use, and challenges and outcomes of social media implementation. Each interview was 60-120 minutes and was completed between August and December of 2012. Grounded theory analysis of field notes and transcripts identified key emergent themes.

5. Findings and Discussion
Many common knowledge needs were identified in the analysis, including the need for: proper record-keeping; the skills and tools to facilitate administration of staff and resources; and, the alignment of internal and external communication structures, programs/services and expertise, with the organizational mission and goals. Participants

characterized the types of knowledge to be managed in various ways and mentioned "stories" or "anecdotes," explicitly, as particular forms of knowledge informing the organization. One participant notes "*We have procedural knowledge, policy knowledge, which is relatively documented and stored on a staff web and manual, very traditional sort of knowledge. We then have a lot of anecdotal knowledge, customer shared experience knowledge, tips, and tricks, and less hard stuff that is often shared on blogs on our [staff intranet].*" Another participant, in an association for nurses and caregivers, states: "*knowledge related directly to what we're working with, so knowledge around, I guess for us, it would be family caregivers. Like, what are their experiences? What are people experiencing? What are their stories? What are common themes that occur in people's stories and in people's situations in people's lives?*"

A categorization of types of knowledge mentioned across the dataset suggests three distinct classes, with implications for internal knowledge management, knowledge transfer, and staff training:
1) *Procedural knowledge* (knowledge related to policies, procedures and administration)
2) *Expert knowledge* (expertise and experience of the knowledge community within which the organization participates)
3) *Community-generated knowledge* (the stories that emerge from the community)

A process is suggested by this characterization of knowledge: i.e., community-generated knowledge informs the mission and goals of the NPO, which in turn generates procedural and expert knowledge. Expert knowledge is used to produce products, programs or services for (the betterment of) the community, which ultimately drives the community to generate new knowledge valuable to the organization: i.e., "success stories." While this cycle of knowledge creation is ubiquitous, the amount of each type of knowledge, and the degree to which they interrelate, differs between organizations. One participant, representing a children's hospital foundation, explained that when he referred to his "sector" he meant other Canadian children's hospitals, not other regional NPOs. Before the interview he (and other participants) had not considered his organization comparable to other local NPOs, since their goals and the groups they served varied dramatically.

Social media serves many purposes, but the common use among participants is for promotion – i.e., telling the organization's story. This includes promoting specific information (e.g., reports, events, campaigns) and generally "raising awareness" of the organization and/or the issues it represents (e.g. poverty, illness). Two online social networks were ubiquitous (i.e., Facebook and Twitter), but their patterns of use differed. Facebook was used to maintain existing relationships and was the preferred vehicle for sharing "success stories." Twitter, however, was considered more versatile, facilitating the need for promotion without being time-consuming. Twitter also permitted NPOs to engage new audiences or communities relevant to their mission through the use of hashtags. Similarly, perhaps the most valuable function of Twitter was that NPOs could identify and engage local "influencers" – e.g., local celebrities with their own audiences on Twitter. Twitter also served as a "gateway" allowing online content to appear on other social media.

"Success stories" proved one of the more interesting findings. This form of community-generated knowledge was used to highlight the importance of social issues addressed, as well as the organization's success in that effort. "Success stories" are valuable because, unlike other promotional strategies, they connect with an audience on a deeply emotional

and personal level. Charities often rely on this strategy; telethons, for instance, often feature individuals' hardships in narrative form to encourage viewers to donate. Social media provide platforms where stories can be shared or requested and generated organically. Former clients reconnected with the participating NPOs via Facebook, either sharing their own (unsolicited) stories or being asked if the organization could share their story online. This knowledge practice appears to be unique to NPOs and will be explored in depth in this paper.

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