

Editorial

Stewarding technologies for collaboration, community building and knowledge sharing in development

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This edition of the Knowledge Management for Development Journal explores how international development practitioners find new ways to work together using Internet technologies. The lens used in all the articles foregrounds human processes; technologies take a complementary and interdependent role. In the framing of this space between design and deployment of tools, we pay attention to both technology and social practices that groups and communities use in their application of technologies to their work.

This practice of working the relationship between technology and social practices is called ‘technology stewardship’. In the forthcoming book *Technologies for Communities of Practice* (working title), Etienne Wenger, Nancy White and John Smith describe technology stewarding as a way of adopting ‘a community’s perspective to help a community choose, configure, and use technologies to best suit its needs.’ In paying attention to a community’s perspective on its choice of technologies ‘stewarding attends both to what happens spontaneously and what can happen purposefully, by plan and by cultivation of insights into what actually works.’

Through stewarding, specific technological expertise is provided to a community, based on its particular needs. This could be anywhere along its life, from initial to mature states. It can be a critical part of community development, facilitating the emergence or growth of a community, for instance when a tool allows people to connect for the first time (Wenger *et al.*, forthcoming).

The potential of technology stewardship in international development is limited only by our imaginations. Theoretically, technology allows people not just to acquire information, but to produce and share it. It enables people to work across organizational, geographic and national boundaries. It facilitates connections between people who can share knowledge and create meaning and understanding together. But to fulfill these possibilities, we need to learn how to build bridges between the technology and our human needs.

In a development context, such bridging involves a set of specific challenges, not only in terms of technology deployment: dealing with diverse access to technology and infrastructures, fostering collaboration between different cultures, languages and discourses. In this context, the technology steward serves the community, attentive to the cultural biases and power relationships that are embedded in the tools and the practice.

Such a task is challenging. Technology stewardship is rarely the role of one person, but rather is fulfilled by several people within communities. As such, the art of technology stewardship is both a technological and a process one, fostering technologies for communities that allow people to work together across time and distance.

In the articles included in this issue, the specific issue of technology stewardship is explored, in different contexts. In many of the contributions, technology stewardship is implicit, and the term is rarely used explicitly. Nonetheless, the practice is described in every article.

Three articles are included that offer concrete stewardship practices. Vic Klabbers and Nynke Kruidierink dive into the specifics of selecting and using technologies in the context of addressing a community's needs – focusing on roles and responsibilities before getting enamored with seductive new technologies.

Next, two articles share examples of technology stewardship towards bridging knowledge divides and developing more effective sharing of research outcomes. In a survey of Nigerian academics' use of Internet technology, Oluwaseyitanfunmi Osunade, Oluwaseun Foluso Phillips and Oluwasesin Ojo note several areas where stewardship can aid in the adoption of new technologies. Ismael Pena Lopez offers technology stewardship practices in his tips for implementing a Personal Learning Portal (PLP).

A case study by Titi Akinsamni, Andrea Aranguren, Manju Chatani, Nynke Kruidierink and Theresa Stanton reviews the development and application of the Dgroups platform. By tracing the influence of technology stewards who were also facilitators and tool users of the platform, they demonstrate the mutual dynamics between communities and technology.

The intersection between technical and process stewardship inherent in the application of technology is explored in Margarita Salas Guzmán's case study. She highlights how organizations can facilitate technology stewardship by helping balance process and technology, particularly at the community and country level. Josien Kapma's case study reinforces the changing nature of community interaction with the introduction of technology. While drawing on a Portuguese context, her lessons will resonate with technology stewards and community facilitators irrespective of geographical context. 'An important consideration is that, in both urban and rural, developing and developed settings, web 2.0 is not merely the next step in technology, but has the potential to completely transform the interaction and organization of professional practice.'

Next, Neil Pakenham-Walsh focuses on facilitative stewardship, identifying processes to enhance the nature of a community's technology, and overcome its shortcomings. Lars Hasselblad Torres identifies the underlying considerations in making technology choices, in a case study of a citizen participation programme.

The interview with Dina Mehta reminds us that we may all find ourselves as inadvertent technology stewards in times of need. What it means to become a technology steward is vividly portrayed in Giacomo Rambaldi's story about creating a 'mash up' of tools for his community, primarily driven by his passion for the community. Anna Maron and Mikel Maron share a story of overcoming organizational resistance by using stealth stewardship to meet a real community need – even when the organization may not have seen itself as ready to adopt new technologies. In taking on stewardship roles, we also have our larger community to rely upon: in this issue's Community Notes, Michelle Laurie recounts how the KM4Dev community helped her with blog stewardship, all mediated through the technology of a discussion list and wiki.

Technology is with us. It is increasingly important to know how to steward its use effectively in international development work. By defining this new practice, and, more importantly, sharing our experiences, we edge towards the use of tools and technology in ways that can support and extend the work of the communities we serve. We hope you enjoy this edition of the KM4Dev Journal and perhaps even start envisaging yourself in ways both large and small, as technology stewards for your own communities.

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