PeopleWiki website: http://rb.ec-lille.fr/l/PeopleWiki.htm

PeopleWiki: wikis as community tools

Rémi BACHELET

Laboratoire Centrale de Génie Industriel de Lille (LCGI)
remi.bachelet@ec-lille.fr, http://rb.ec-lille.fr
Ecole Centrale de Lille - Cité scientifique
BP 48 – F 59651 Villeneuve d'Ascq cedex, France

Abstract:
The project developed in this paper/poster aims to break new grounds in the use made of MediaWiki by introducing a new type of wiki, addressing smaller, specific communities (e.g. universities, companies),
We call this new type of wiki PeopleWiki. A PeopleWiki project is currently in development at Ecole Centrale de Lille, with the objective of developing an academic PeopleWiki.

The main difference between a PeopleWiki and common wikis is that community members are themselves a subject of the information contained on the wiki: more than a user page, they are (through their vitae, hobbies etc..) the subjects of a wiki page. Thus PeopleWiki are both "normal wikis" when they deal with concepts, history etc... and "special" when they deal with community members. Specific rules for regulating contributions and technical specifications are suggested.

Keys words: Wiki, PeopleWiki, knowledge management, community of practice, Academic Communities, Learning Communities, Professional Communities

This version is: v1.13
Elements to be added later:
- array comparing protection strategies and implementation
- pages and category trees for an academic PeopleWiki
- more references
- developing the conclusion

PeopleWiki: wikis as community tools

Rémi BACHELET

Laboratoire Centrale de Génie Industriel de Lille (LCGI)
remi.bachelet@ec-lille.fr, http://rb.ec-lille.fr
Ecole Centrale LILLE - Cité scientifique
BP 48 – F 59651 Villeneuve d'Ascq cedex, France

Introduction

The idea developed in this paper/poster is to break new grounds in the use made of the MediaWiki OpenSource application by introducing PeopleWiki as an alternative implementation.

Beyond the use which has made implementation of MediaWiki famous as an open knowledge-centred collaborative tool, we suggest they could be community tools as well. Of course the most famous of them, Wikipedia is in many ways a community of users as well, but we argue there is a vast untapped potential that could be exploited by acting upon two levers:

- above all implementing different organizational rules for the wiki,
- and to a lesser extend, improving and configuring its supporting software, MediaWiki.

The main difference between a PeopleWiki and common wikis is that community members are themselves a subject of the information contained in the wiki: more than a user page they are through their vitae, hobbies etc.. the subjects of a wiki page.

Thus PeopleWiki are both "normal wikis" when they deal with concept, history etc... and "special wikis" when they deal with community members. Technical configuration and specifications (e.g. categories or namespaces) are largely adapted to this end. Beyond technical choices, the delicate question to tackle is what rules should be used to handle pages containing information about the community members or community events, since the neutrality of point of view (NPOV) which is key to accepting or refusing contributions in a common wiki, is not fully applicable.

PeopleWiki allow for a better addressing of specific communities, which are mainly of three types:

1. students and alumni of universities or Grandes écoles, like Arts et métiers or University of North Texas
2. the wider network of people working for an organization, like corporate wikis
3. other communities, most noticeably communities of practice, like EduTech Wiki

As shown in the above hyperlinks, some of these communities already have wikis but, we argue, these communities do not develop to their potential, since they mainly manage information about things and concepts from the objective external world rather than about the community itself.

This paper mainly deals with "type 1" PeopleWiki, namely *Academic PeopleWikis*, as our project is currently developing one.

PeopleWiki scope and *raison d'être*

Compared to mainstream wiki communities, PeopleWiki communities are specific: A huge Wikipedia community, like the English-language Wikipedia community has 4M registered contributors and 1,7 M articles.

The communities PeopleWiki target are specific as:

1. they are - much - smaller in size,
2. there is less information to share. Scope is narrower than with an encyclopaedia.

This however makes them quite similar to a wikia community (which is basically fan-based and free-entry). A difference with the wikia communities is the facts that:

3. community members have much more in common (wikia members have shallow relationships essentially meet virtually)

4. the community is closed (while wikia wikis are open, most academic and company wikis have a restricted readership, and though communities of practice's may not be, there are still barriers to entry, linked to expertise essentially)
5. and last but not least, community members are themselves a subject of the information contained on the wiki.

This latest feature makes a big difference, as users have a double status: they are contributors to the wiki, but information on themselves is also paramount. They can have their vitae posted, indicate they are looking for a partner in business, belong (or belonged) to such or such student association. This is a radical difference with wikipedia's policy on personal pages, which states that "The focus of user pages should not be social networking". **Here social networking is indeed one of the main *raison d'être* of the wiki.**

Thus PeopleWikis do not only contain shared knowledge, but are a reflexive tool for a community to know itself. For existing communities, consequences can be far-reaching as:
1. Active community boundaries are extended (e.g. Academic PeopleWikis create occasions for contact-taking between university students and off-campus alumni so that they can help one another).
2. Knowledge volume and accessibility is greatly enhanced, giving many occasions for developing contacts.

On an academic PeopleWiki, a freshman could use the system to find a Guide to Course Choice, Purposes and Limitations of student's associations, history of the university, how to get in touch with alumni with expertise in a given field...

User pages and Wiki Member Pages

On a PeopleWiki, the "shared knowledge" itself is not completely Neutral point of view (NPOV), as it is specifically oriented to help and develop the community. Technically, community members have both a user page and a normal wiki page, which we will call Wiki Member Page or **WMP**[1].

- User page modification is **restricted to the user himself** and is used to make private choices, like voting for elections or choosing a course. By "user page", we mean pages belonging to the user: namespace. User page subpages (i.e. pages like User:Ofol/test) can be created as will and given customizable access rights using such solutions as a the <protect users=> tag, PageProtection extension.

The user page is not for the member to present himself, this is done through a "normal" wiki page, the WMP.
- The edition of this WMP about the user is free, and it can contain a variety of information: contact information, vitae, picture, links to wider social networking systems like personal blog, Linkedin, Myspace or Copains d'avant. What is also important in that the WMP can be categorized as well: "belongs to a given association", has "such or such hobby", is "available for a given type of advice", "is looking for a business partner"...

Now, WMP content regulation is a delicate thing to handle: while wiki are known for controversies and edit wars, information on a person is even more sensitive: what is to be written or not? Where does public life end and become private? Should mild criticism or humour be allowed? What control should the member keep on his own WMP? Moreover, like any Wiki a PeopleWiki needs to be readily accessible to all in order to be up to date, accurate and useful.

In some countries, where databases containing personal information are regulated, WMP can become an issue as well. Essential data privacy rights, as implemented by the Commission Nationale de l'Informatique et des Libertés in France, requires that an individual as the right to access and rectify database information about himself. This is naturally offered by a PeopleWiki, though special care should be taken in such cases as:
- members who seldom use the wiki, and do not monitor their WMP
- inactive, past or deceased members
- people who are important enough to have a page in the wiki, but are not community members and to do not have access to the PeopleWiki

Access to PeopleWiki and information sharing outside the community

A PeopleWiki is dedicated to a community, thus the information it contains is supposed to be internal to the community. Some pieces of information might be of value (e.g. Wiki Member Pages to recruiters). As a consequence, access to the PeopleWiki is limited to community members. But what happens if the community member's job is recruiting? The use made with the information provided must be subject to clear ethical rules and a line must be drawn

---

[1] The concept of WMP is closely linked to the MySpace Wikipattern

between personal use (looking what became of fellow classmate) and intensive unfair use (pillaging WMP to spam alumni with recruiting ads).

Ethical rules are a way to regulation, but another is implementing different access rights for different users. Standard MediaWiki has different access rules, most noticeably for Readers, Editors, Moderators, and System admins, but PeopleWiki often need some degree of access differentiation.

On an academic PeopleWiki professors and students might have different access rights. Likewise, alumni paying their membership fee might be favoured above non-paying members. However the question of reducing reading and writing rights must be handled with care, as wiki quality and usefulness increase with the number of contributors. So the balance between reducing access rights and allowing free access and editing must favour freedom of access on each occasion.

Technically, three protection methods are explored and compared: namespace, category and the <protect users=> tag.

Managing access rights

MediaWiki does *not* have a sophisticated sub-page restriction control built in, and as such it is a challenge to implement it, as this is needed in a PeopleWiki

Technical aspects are twofold: MediaWiki basic configuration and specific extensions

1. MediaWiki basic configuration. This is the 'native' configuration of mediaWiki, as it does not require installing specific extensions. PeopleWiki cutomization is done in two ways
    a. Parameters are entered on the LocalSettings.php on the server. The $wgGroupPermissions page is the most important and allows for a set of operations : Restrict account creation, Restrict editing of all pages, Restrict editing of namespaces,
    b. Sysop and administrators create special pages and configurations
2. Specific extensions for preventing access, e.g.
    a. GroupRestrictions
    b. protect

Defining and managing categories

Since PeopleWiki are about people's professional life and studies, their taxonomy is a bit specific: three types of categories exists.
1. Categories about a permanent state - eg. in an academic PeopleWiki, *graduation year* -.
2. Categories about a permanent state but relating to a temporary mission - eg. in an academic PeopleWiki, *president of the rowing club 2007-2008* -.
3. Categories about temporary situations - eg. *Looking for a job* -.

The first type of category is the one usually dealt with in Wikipedia, it is static, the only special care it requires is how access rights are managed, as read/write access could need some customization can be required - eg. in an academic PeopleWiki, *barring access to more information to dues-paying Alumni* -.

The second type needs some thinking as to the hierarchical in structure of the category tree: should it be
Students association / rowing club / 2007-2008 / president?   or
Students association 2007-2008 / rowing club / president?

The third type needs either periodic cleaning or a good participation so that the information contained on the wiki does not become obsolete. An alternative is to define by default such a state as 'temporary' and to have a regular cleanup.

Success factors

Unlike systems like Wikipedia, PeopleWiki rest on a comparatively "small" community. Wikipedia and wikia rest on a different principle: the number of potential participants is huge, so that even if 1% of them take interest and start editing the wiki, it will suffice.

On the opposite, for the PeopleWiki to be success, it is necessary that every community member is involved in it. So another important point is to design a plan specifying how to involve community members and have them contribute to

the PeopleWiki. A good starting place for this is the idea of WikiPatterns, a wiki website giving a series of Adoption Patterns and Anti-Patterns.

Another major step toward success is "institutionalizing the PeopleWiki", in other word the PeopleWiki should have official support and be compulsory passing point.
Either
- to get some information
- to make a minimum contribution (e.g. opening one's own WMP)

On an academic PeopleWiki, this could be having student project groups contribute a page, describing their project: scope, resources and people involved … and having this contribution being taken into account in grading the project.

Actors: who should run a PeopleWiki?

The status of the actors of a PeopleWiki community more determined than those of most virtual communities: they cannot be anonymous and community or organizational structures exist before and outside the wiki. On an academic PeopleWiki there is no starting equality of status: members are freshmen, postgraduates, professors, administrative personnel, alumni… some of them having more formal or informal influence than others. Likewise, community authorities might want some control over wiki content: e.g. university managers could ask for proper measures to be taken to protect the reputation of the university.

As a consequence, rules and rules enforcement are of a particular importance. The good side is that, since the community members know and have influence on one another, regulation is easier. Not only it can be implemented on the wiki itself (a temporary ban would be effective, since there is no anonymous access), but it can be implemented outside the wiki (a warning by colleagues or your boss is clearly an effective deterrent).

As for all wikis,
- rules and sanctions should be clear and equitable
- some community members should be given special task, like administrators, Arbitration Committee members, AM clerks, stewards, oversight, checkuser.

Wiki actors are not just to be considered as to a problem of access rights within the wiki, the question of hosting and maintaining the server for Wikimedia is also important. An academic PeopleWiki could be hosted by the university, but universities can lack means and competence to run a high-reliability server, thus alternative solutions can be considered like outsourcing wiki hosting and technical administration to an alumni association.

Conclusion

The last thing that needs to be pointed out in this preliminary paper version is the fact that issues surrounding the control of a PeopleWiki are particularly important and need further study. Semantic wiki also represent a very promising development provided a specific ontology of social networks is developed.

Finally, a project by the name of CentraleWiki is to be developed in the coming months at école Centrale de Lille (7000 student-alumni-professors community), with the following objectives:
1. implement/test the technology (LDAP login, <protect> tag, LocalSettings.php ...)
2. establish policy for appropriate use, rules enforcement by the community
3. develop semantic wiki for social networking (ETA june 2009)

References

General references about wikis
- MediaWiki Manual:Preventing access http://www.mediawiki.org/wiki/Manual:Preventing_access
- Kevin R. Parker, Joseph T. Chao (2007) "Wiki as a Teaching Tool" Interdisciplinary Journal of Knowledge and Learning Objects http://www.ijklo.org/Volume3/IJKLOv3p057-072Parker284.pdf
- Augar, N., Raitman, R. & Zhou, W. (2004). Teaching and learning online with wikis. Proceedings of the 21st Australasian Society for Computers in Learning in Tertiary Education (ASCILITE) Conference, Perth: December 5-8, 95-104. Retrieved may 2007 from http://www.ascilite.org.au/conferences/perth04/procs/pdf/augar.pdf
- Gaved, Mark and Heath, Thomas and Eisenstadt, Marc (2006) "Wikis of Locality: Insights from the Open Guides". In: ACM 2006 International Symposium on Wikis: WikiSym '06, 21-23 August 2006, http://www.wikisym.org/ws2006/proceedings/p119.pdf
- Majchrzak Ann, Wagner Christian, Yates Dave (2006) "Corporate Wiki Users: Results of a Survey", Proceedings

of the 2006 international symposium on Wikis Odense, Denmark,
http://www.wikisym.org/ws2006/proceedings/p99.pdf

Wiki adoption
WikiPatterns website Retrieved may 2007 from http://www.wikipatterns.com

Managing access
– MediaWiki Manual:Preventing access http://www.mediawiki.org/wiki/Manual:Preventing_access
– Category:Page Access Control Extensions. Read about security issues with authorization extensions if you plan to use one of those.
– Manual on Preventing access from MediaWiki.org: http://www.mediawiki.org/wiki/Manual:Preventing_access
PageProtection extension.

Semantic wiki
– SemWiki.org - The Semantic Wiki Community http://www.semwiki.org
– Semantic Wikipedia Max Völkel, Markus Krötzsch, Denny Vrandecic, Heiko Haller, and Rudi Studer, http://wiki.ontoworld.org/wiki/Semantic_Wikipedia
– Markus Krotzsch, Denny Vrandecic, and Max Volkel. Wikipedia and the Semantic Web - The Missing Links. Proceedings of Wikimania 2005, http://citeseer.ist.psu.edu/krotzsch05wikipedia.html

Annex

PeopleWiki vs. Wikipedia

Wikipedia	PeopleWiki
Size: Medium to Huge communities (100k to 1kM) e.g. Linguistic community	Size: Small communities (100 to 10k) e.g. University alumnis
Open to new members and anonymous editing	Exclusive to "known" community members for reading/editing
Designed for capitalizing encyclopaedic knowledge	Designed for capitalizing expert and practical knowledge
Not much information about contributors/members	A lot of information about contributors/members - a reflexive tool for a community to know itself
Can use Semantic wiki to link encyclopaedic concepts	Can use Semantic wiki to link people
Specific policies for contributing (e.g. three-revert rule)	Specific policies for contributing (e.g. respect private life)

Pages and category trees for an academic PeopleWiki
This alpha version for CentraleWiki project by Adrien Vercoutere
(To be developed)