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3

Why Use A Wiki?

A few of the many companies that are embracing wiki use in their organisations include Boeing, Best Buy/Geek Squad, BMW, Xerox, IBM, Disney, DHL, Procter & Gamble, Thompson Learning, Ford Motor Company and Texas Instruments. These and other companies are finding that for communication, collaboration and knowledge management, the use of wikis positively impacts productivity, lowers production costs, increases creativity and innovation, and improves overall team collaboration. This becomes increasingly critical as companies expand globally with dispersed teams working in different time zones. In the book, *Wikinomics: How Mass Collaboration Changes Everything* (2006), authors Don Tapscott and Anthony Williams predict that “as a growing number of firms see the benefits of mass collaboration, this new way of organizing will eventually displace the traditional corporate structures as the company’s primary engine of wealth creation” (p. 1–2).

A Paradigm Shift

As we shall see in examples throughout this book, the culture that emerges from the use of a wiki aligns with Rensis Likert’s System 4 Organization (see Figure 3.1 on p. 10) where subordinate ideas are solicited and used by administrators, communication flows freely in all directions, decisions are decentralised and made throughout the organisation at all levels, and goals are set by group participation (Likert, 1967). Of course, this also requires leadership grounded in Theory Y, which assumes that educators are professionals who accept and seek responsibility (McGregor, 1960). Wiki adoption will not thrive under heavily bureaucratic structures that rely on directives and control.

FIGURE 3.1 Comparison of System 1 and System 4 Organization

<i>Organizational Characteristics</i>	<i>System 1 Organization</i>	<i>System 4 Organization</i>
Leadership	Little confidence and trust between administrators and subordinates	Subordinate ideas are solicited and used by administrators
Motivation	Taps fear, status, and economic motives exclusively	Taps all major motives except fear
Communication	One-way, downward communication	Communication flows freely in all directions
Interaction-influence	Little upward influence; downward influence overestimated	Substantial influence upward, downward, and horizontally
Decision making	Centralized; decisions made at the top	Decentralized; decision made throughout the organization
Goal setting	Established by top-level administrators and communicated downward	Established by group participation
Control	Close over-the-shoulder supervision	Emphasis on self-control
Performance goals	Low and passively sought by administrators; little commitment to developing human resources	High and actively sought by administrators; full commitment to developing human resources

Source: Likert, R. (1967). *The Human Organization*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

In his book *Wikipatterns: A Practical Guide to Improving Productivity And Collaboration in Your Organization* (2008), Stewart Mader explains why organisations across a variety of industries are beginning to use wikis:

The wiki is rapidly growing in name recognition and use in organizations because its simple design and function enables equal

participation by people at all levels of technology knowledge and savvy. On top of that, it has an unprecedented ability to adapt to different uses, bring people together and strengthen teams, and promote a collaborative approach to problems. (p. 4)

The value for educational organisations, regions and schools is that wiki technology is appropriate for novice users, which allows for an easy-to-use collaborative environment that can increase knowledge and cooperation across the entire organisation. Additionally, because the wiki can be edited by anyone, it enables the “flattening” of the organisation where everyone can contribute to the collective knowledge base as well as the planning and implementation of new initiatives, thereby generating more ownership of the initiatives. By bringing the organisation closer to Level 4 Organization (Figure 3.1) than current models, the wiki creates a “paradigm shift” in terms of organisation and participation. This shift is crucial to education organisations that have been striving to become “learning organizations” (Senge et al., 2000), but have yet to move away from hierarchical bureaucratic structures.

In addition to the organisational growth that is enabled by the use of wikis, electronic storage and email management are relieved by the reduction in “attachments” emailed across the organisation. This will make email servers as well as employees much happier! The information and communication flow is clearly expressed in Figure 3.2 (page 12).

The European investment bank Dresdner Kleinwort Wasserstein is one example of the impact of wiki use on organisation resources. Wiki use, which originated through an informal, grassroots process in their IT department, has now spread across the company and has resulted in a 75 per cent drop in email volume and a 50 per cent cut in meeting time, which in turn has resulted in greater productivity and more effective collaboration throughout the organisation (Tapscott and Williams, 2007). Imagine that kind of reduction in email volume and meeting time in your school or district offices. How many more productive hours could your staff find in their current weekly schedules? How much of this time could they use to focus on instruction and student learning?

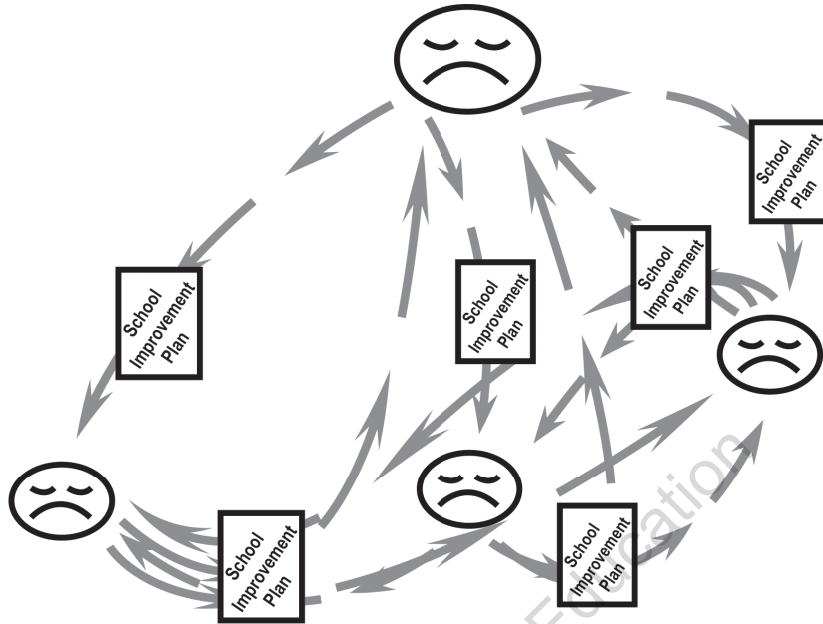
Let’s explore a few examples of how your organisation can be changed through the adoption of wikis.

Scenario: Principal Jones wants to see what other campuses are doing for student intervention.

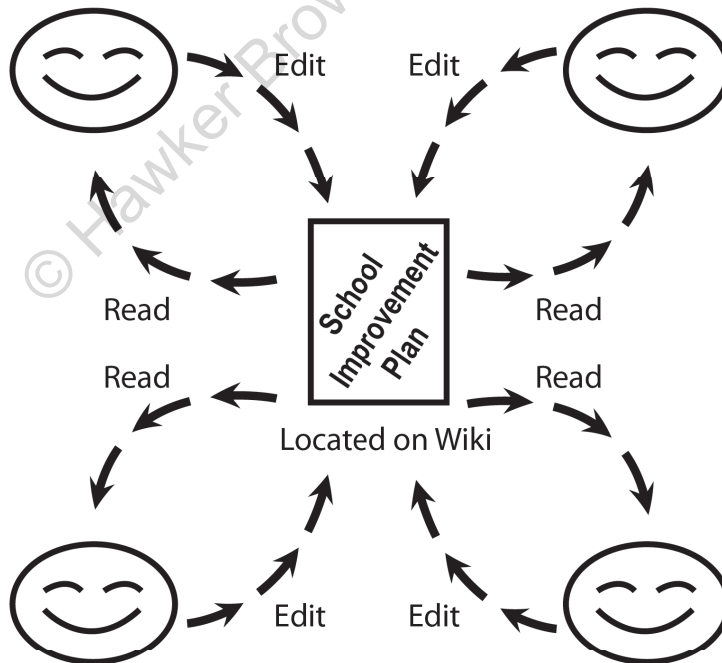
Before Wiki (B.W.)

He emails a few other principals who are friends of his on Monday morning. By that afternoon one of the other principals emails him back with a

FIGURE 3.2

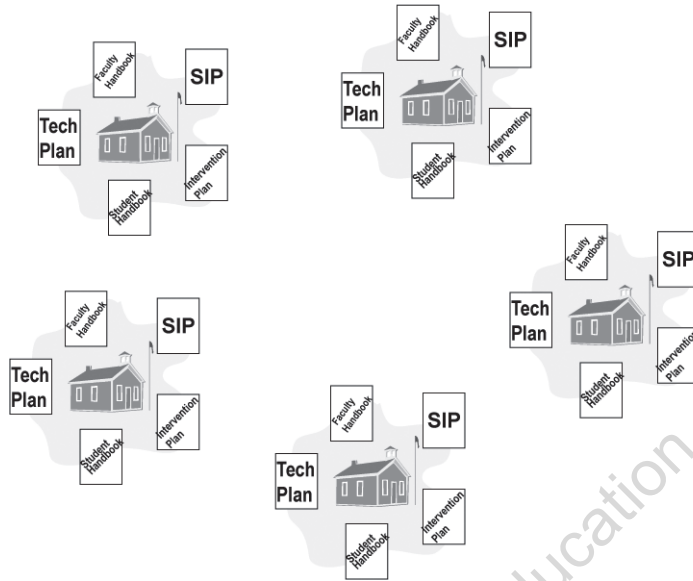


Email Collaboration



Wiki Collaboration

FIGURE 3.3



Word document. The next day two other principals email him back with brief explanations in the emails and another principal forwards the request to his dean of instruction to fulfill. By the end of the week he still hasn't heard from one of the principals. Figure 3.3 provides an example of how documents are scattered around the various campuses and are not easily accessible to personnel on other campuses.

After Wiki (A.W.)

Principal Jones searches on the word “interventions” in the region-wide wiki and within seconds has a list of all the intervention plans for every school in the region. The intervention plans, which are contained on their own pages within the wiki, are complete and up-to-date and provide him with a complete picture of what is happening on other campuses in his area. Figure 3.4 (page 14) provides an example of how documents and plans can be centrally located within a district-wide wiki. After Wiki (A.W.), all documents are located centrally on the wiki and are easily accessible to personnel on separate campuses.

Scenario: A team from Central Secondary School attends a national education conference – paid for with school funds – with the expectation that they will bring back what they learn to the campus to share with other teachers.