

APPLYING KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT TO SUPPORT NETWORKING AMONG NGOs AND DONORS

Saqib Saeed, Tim Reichling, Volker Wulf
*Department of Information Systems and New Media
University of Siegen, Hölderlinstr 3, 57076 Germany*

ABSTRACT

IT support for civil society organizations is an interesting area of research. The collaboration between north and south has resulted in a rapid growth of Donor organizations and NGOs. As the NGOs and donors are going specific in their choice of collaborators the number of parameters for selection increases. Hence, it becomes difficult for the staff of civil society organizations to find relevant precise information about potential collaborators. It has become increasingly important to introduce new technologies for effective relationship building between civil society organizations. In this paper we investigate the collaboration between NGOs and Donor organizations and present an idea of how knowledge management technology can contribute to developing an effective collaboration among NGOs and Donor Organizations. We also describe the "organization recommender", a tool for establishing new contacts between these organizations based on common interest parameters.

KEYWORDS

Knowledge Management, NGOs, Donors, Civil Society, Collaboration

1. INTRODUCTION.

As the developing countries known as south are more vulnerable to political, social, economic, institutional, and governance problems compared to developed countries known as north, the developed countries focus on helping developing countries to overcome these problems. With the evolution of north south partnership NGO sector gained much more importance and is considered to be a vibrant part of the civil society. The term, "non-governmental organization" or NGO, came into use in 1945 because of the need for the UN to differentiate in its charter between participation rights for intergovernmental specialized agencies and those for international private organizations (Mostashari 2005).

With the evolution of north south collaboration NGOs became a preferred choice of Donor organizations to distribute finances. A survey in 2007 by Humanitarian Policy Group showed increases in humanitarian funding from \$4.86bn in 2000 to \$9.8bn in 2005. Secondly, the private share in total humanitarian aid which was 13.2% in 2000 has risen to 24.4% in 2005 (Atlinger and Virginia 2007). Another important factor is the shift of donor organizations from a multilateral mode to bilateral in distribution of funding. Donors have now started collaborating directly in distribution of resources as compared to involvement of UN or any other officiating agency (Macrae 2002). Mostly northern NGOs have modified their mode of working from direct involvement in the south to restricting themselves to financial and technical support in favor of indigenization theory (Mawdsley et al. 2005).

There are different objectives which motivate donor organizations to donate. The common objective of funding is their inclination towards helping humankind. The Donor organizations feel social responsibility towards north south divide and try to fill the gap by their assistance and financial aid. Another motive of funding is the potential commercial interest in the southern region. The southern countries have abundance of natural and human resources and are key markets for the north. A strong civil society can provide a stable environment for business and help in increasing the purchasing power of people in that region. Another reason of this relationship to the north is a better understanding of the south and its commitment to democracy resulting in advocacy of issues like equality, empowerment and good governance. (Sattar and Baig 2001)

2. NGO-DONOR COLLABORATION.

NGOs and donor organizations are always interested in collaborating with each other, as the objectives of NGOs and donor organizations widely appear to be coherent and in line with each other, there is evidence that more appropriate collaboration, knowledge exchange and mutual awareness of each other's competencies and activities can improve their work. The increased competition among them to seek funds have necessitated donor organizations to analytically decide which NGOs are more suitable collaboration partners based on thematic sector, targeted geographical region and type of support. (Sattar and Baig 2001) As there are numerous NGOs and donor organizations, the problem on hand is to find out an effective methodology that could help NGOs and donor organizations in finding out suitable collaboration partners based on common interests.

Regarding recent technology from the field of knowledge management (KM), we can observe a significant change of the focus from pure information towards knowledge (Cohen and Pursak 2001, Becks et al 2004, Huysman and Wulf 2004, Huysman and Wulf 2006, Reichling et al. 2007). The role of technology has shifted from managing "assets of knowledge" – which actually aren't knowledge but information – to enabling and fostering informal and self-organized knowledge exchange among the staff (Wilson 2002). In this paper we describe how the expert recommender system can be applied to foster networking and "Expertise Sharing" among NGOs and donor Organizations. The "Organization Recommender"¹ (OR) is the technology being applied to the NGOs and donor organizations.

3. DESIGN CONCEPT.

In this section, we present the design concept of our technological approach of fostering mutual awareness competencies and activities among these organizations. The OR is a web based search engine, similar to Google or Yahoo. Unlike these widely used search engines, OR is exclusively focused on a well defined set of NGOs and Donors to refine the results. The selection of organization may depend on thematic area, geographical region, target group or other distinctive features. Even more, unlike web search engines, multiple sources of inputs like Donors/NGOs websites, NGO directories or newsletters will be used to generate comprehensive and precise profiles of the covered organizations. While the wide variety and universality of engines like Google is an obvious advantage when searching for arbitrary contents on the web, it can trouble the exclusive search for specific contents like web sites of organizations. For instance, a Google search by a potential donor organization for NGOs operating in rural areas of Pakistan, involved in child health care and interested in transnational collaboration will result in huge amounts of results with only a small subset of relevant NGOs.

From experiences with the original Business Finder system (to be published), we know that it is highly important for potential users – those who seek for organizations and those who create and maintain profiles of their organization – to provide precise and comprehensive profiles while reducing the effort for creating them to a minimum. The system design is essentially a mixture of directory approaches and web search engines combined with expertise recommender technology. So, in order to semi-automatically create meaningful profiles of NGOs/Donors, we apply three sources of relevant data (see Figure 1): (1) Contents of a YP like database that covers manual entries of basic data about NGOs and Donors (mostly maintained by regional resource centers in every country), (2) The NGOs/Donor web sites and (3) arbitrary documents that happen to describe the NGOs services, for instance newsletters or flyers. While each of these sources exists independently from the system, the effort of maintaining profiles would be limited to "linking" the data to system. The implementation of OR is based on the Expert Finding (EF) system (Reichling et al. 2007) an expertise recommender system for large or distributed organizations. Its main purpose is creating awareness of activities, expertise and experiences of human actors within the organization in order to foster transparency and collaboration among staff. The EF provides a user interface which allows users to easily

¹Organization recommender is actually an application of the Business Finder (BF) system, which itself is based on the *Expert Finding* (EF) system (Reichling et al. 2007). BF was developed to support networking among small and medium companies in the region of Siegen-Wittgenstein, Germany. The system is exclusively focused on a well defined set of companies. The selection of companies may depend on regional proximity or other distinct parameters.

specify documents or folders on the local file system, specifying path and included file formats (typically doc, pdf, ppt, etc.). From these specifications EF creates keyword profiles which are an aggregate of the textual contents of all specified documents.

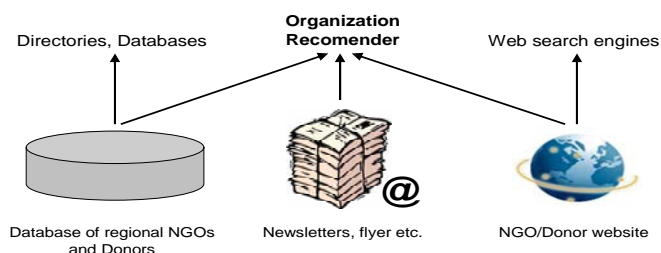


Figure 1 Basic Concept of Organization Recommender Including Three Sources of Data

4. CONCLUSION.

The importance of north south collaborations among civil society organizations is enormous for social and economic justice. In order to further strengthen this collaboration organization need to be aware of the expertise of each other so that effective collaborations can emerge. In this paper, we have proposed concept and design of the “Organization Recommender”, a system to improve collaboration among NGOs and donor organizations. Its main purpose is to mobilize networking among donor organizations and NGOs to create mutual awareness of each other’s competencies. In order to evaluate its practical use, it requires further empirical studies and feedback from the stakeholders for improvement.

References

Ackerman, M.S, et al. 2003. I-DIAG: From Community Discussion to Knowledge Distillation, *In: Huysman, M.et al.Communities and Technologies*, Kluwer, Dordrecht, pp. 307-326.

Altinger, L. and T. Virginia. 2007. *The private financing of humanitarian action 1995–2005* [Background Paper] Available from: http://www.odi.org.uk/hpg/papers/hpgbpaper_monitoringtrends2.pdf [Accessed 20 December 2007]

Becks, A. et al. Expertise Finding: Approaches to Foster Social Capital, *In Huysman, M.and Wulf, V. Social Capital and Information Technology*, MIT-Press, Cambridge, MA 2004, pp. 333 – 354.

Cohen, D. and Prusak, L. 2001. *In Good Company: How Social Capital makes Organizations Work*, Harvard Business School Press, Boston, USA.

Huysman, M.and Wulf, V. 2004. *Social Capital and Information Technology*, MIT-Press, Cambridge MA.

Huysman, M. and Wulf, V. 2006. IT to Support Knowledge Sharing in Communities: Towards a Social Capital Analysis *Journal on Information Technology (JIT)*, No. 1, Vol. 21, pp. 40 – 51.

Macrae, J. et al.2002. Uncertain power: the changing role of official donors in humanitarian action [HPG Report] [Online] Available from: http://www.odi.org.uk/hpg/papers/hpgreport12_screen.pdf. [Accessed 20 December 2007]

Mawdsley, E. et al. 2005 Trust, accountability, and face-to-face interaction in North–South NGO relations *Development in Practice* Vol. 15, No 1.

Mostashari, A. 2005. An Introduction to Non Governmental Organizations Management [Online] Available from: <http://web.mit.edu/isg/NGOManagement.pdf> [Accessed 20 December 2007]

Reichling, T. et al. 2007 Expert Recommender: Designing for a Network Organization, in: Computer Supported Cooperative Work *The Journal of Collaborative Computing (JCSCW)*, Vol. 16, No. 4 – 5 pp 431-465.

Sattar, A. and Baig, R. 2001. Civil Society in Pakistan [Online] Available from: <http://www.civicus.org/new/media/pakistan.pdf> [Accessed 20 December 2007].

Wilson, T.D. 2002. The nonsense of 'knowledge management' *Information Research*, Vol. 8 No. 1. [Online] Available from: <http://InformationR.net/ir/8-1/paper144.html> [Accessed 20 December 2007].