Diplopedia a success at US Department of State

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A new study released today by Rice University and the U.S. Department of State's (DOS) Office of eDiplomacy looks at the five-year history of creating and implementing Diplopedia, DOS' use of the Wikipedia-style diplomacy Web 2.0 tool.

Diplopedia is the U.S. State Department's internal knowledge-sharing platform - an unclassified, open-source wiki platform of "how-to" knowledge for America's diplomatic corps.

The paper, "Diplopedia Imagined: Building State's Diplomacy Wiki," is being presented today at the 2010 International Symposium on Collaborative Technologies and Systems in Chicago by its co-authors Chris Bronk, a fellow at Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy and lecturer in Rice's Department of Computer Science, and Tiffany Smith, an employee with the State Department's Bureau of Information Resource Management.

In the paper Bronk and Smith explain how the project allowed the State Department to make its first adoption of open-source software and employ that software to capture, catalog and disseminate the job-knowledge expertise required for working diplomats.

Bronk, a former foreign service officer, and Smith, who was recruited to the State Department as a Presidential Management Fellow, say the paper offers a pragmatic case study for the adoption of Wikipedia-like knowledge bases in government.

"The fact is that State employees who use Diplopedia now have better and more up-to-date information at their fingertips," Bronk said. "In the past, staff and appointees who are regularly changing assignments could take anywhere from six months to one year to learn some of the basic information on their new city or country. With Diplopedia, a lot of the information that would need to be learned firsthand or by making numerous phone calls is now available online with a simple search."

Diplopedia launched in September 2006 as a clean slate with only a dozen or so articles. In just over three years it has grown to more than 10,000 articles written and edited by DOS employees. Among the few differences between Diplopedia and [Wikipedia](#) is that in Diplopedia, users must be registered and edits are not anonymous; page creations and edits are attributed to the person who made them.

Examples of Diplopedia content include a comprehensive collection of information for desk officers, the foreign service officers who act as the in-house experts and go-to officials on a particular country. Diplopedia provides a desk-officer manual, which advises on everything from what to make of department jargon and how to move a paper for decision to how to navigate a new ambassador through the complexities of Senate confirmation and assignment to their mission. Forty briefing portals help DOS employees find and contribute information on specific programs, economic issues and international politics. Recent additions are part of a working space for foreign policy experts to share and collate information that underpins the department's efforts to address a major global issue that encompasses economic, political, human rights and population concerns.

"To be effective, today's diplomat must convey a deeper understanding of his or her country beyond the international headlines," Bronk said. "When you allow staff to create and edit entries, you are allowing a greater product that can be easily shared over time."

Bronk and Smith also offer guidance for the practical issues of providing security and configuration management for the software that makes the wiki work and strategies for coping with bureaucracy in implementing new models of information sharing inside a large organization.

More information: A draft of the paper is available for download on the Baker Institute website at www.bakerinstitute.org/publica … ediaDraft-051810.pdf
Diplopedia listing on Wikipedia: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diplopedia

Provided by Rice University

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