

Wiki where you work?

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Do corporate wikis work? Two University of Alberta researchers say they can, providing they fit the corporation's culture and provide for the needs and interests of their users and editors.

PhD candidate Lisa Yeo and Ofer Arazy, an assistant professor in the Alberta School of Business, say that using wikis as a form of corporate knowledge management can be beneficial. However, some [concessions](#) need to be made in terms of how wiki "knowledge" is posted to support people's needs for recognition with their company. If companies want their wiki to work, it cannot be held to rigid corporate constraints on [knowledge sharing](#) and management. Yeo and Arazy based their findings on recent research conducted while studying and working with project teams at a major technology corporation.

A virtual cornucopia of corporate knowledge?

Yeo says that companies always seem to struggle with knowledge management, and finding a relevant and purposeful means of sharing information is often elusive. The wiki would seem to be a viable solution, she says, because it allows for informal yet dynamic [teamwork](#), allowing users to input and [share information](#) in different areas and from different locations. Allowing input from multiple sources, such as other departments, allows for a larger field of knowledge and provides the potential for greater connectivity between colleagues across different corporate areas. Yet, she points out, there still needs to be some internal process that ensures the accuracy of what is being posted. Her research indicated that a rating system for entries may be an effective way of

ensuring the validity of data.

"Some sort of rating mechanism that says 'I used this before'—we see it in reviews, right? This idea might help you at least rely on that information," she said. "As a contributor, if you know that more people read your work and rely on it, we have motivational literature that says that makes you want to contribute more."

Attribution versus anonymity

Part of the attraction of the wiki is its anonymity. Changes, especially in Wikipedia, are made incognito. But in the corporate world, Yeo notes, showing potential and demonstrating knowledge are assets that help managers decide who should receive salary increases or promotions. However, she says that some contributors may be happy to share their knowledge anonymously simply because they can add to the knowledge management conversation. To allow both types of wiki contributors to coexist and flourish peacefully, companies may need to make some concessions in both the corporate structure and the wiki programming.

"There are a few places where we can change the wiki; we can do technical changes to the wikis that will help support some of the motivations or incentives that organizations have for individuals," Yeo said. "[But] let there be the drive-by edits for people who aren't completely involved in the team but know the right answer to something."

The wiki way: Not right for all companies

Whether or not an environment will be able to successfully develop a wiki comes down to the corporation's culture. Companies that work within rigid silos would likely not find much success using wikis because

information sharing is an important part of wiki culture. Knowing how to successfully work with others is also a core skill when working with wiki development, Yeo says. For companies that truly want to embrace the wiki experience, flexibility and openness are crucial to the success of this type of project.

"There are certain things in the corporate culture that you want to change to meet the wiki way of [work](#), but you don't want to force the wiki way into the constraints of certain organizations," she said. "The nice side is this open flexibility, but if you don't have an organization and a corporate culture that is supportive of that, I don't think that it is going to be very successful, no matter how hard you try."

Provided by University of Alberta

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