Building a Community of Superusers to Leverage a Collaboration Platform

Social networking and collaboration platforms don’t work without people. The most advanced technology won’t achieve results without a devoted user base that creates and shares content. The World Bank’s social collaboration platform “Scoop” prioritizes relationships with users as part of the user adoption and engagement strategy. This SmartLesson describes the original development of Scoop, its initial release for trial among a select group of “Superusers,” and the ongoing refinement of its functionalities to meet the Bank’s business needs. Lessons learned speak to the importance of bolstering the Superusers so they in turn can engage a broader community of users and turn them into champions for social collaboration.

Background

In March 2010, the World Bank Group’s Board of Directors endorsed a knowledge strategy for the institution that identified knowledge as the Bank’s core strategic asset. This strategy highlighted three main goals:

• Improve the Bank’s ability to capture, create, and deliver knowledge to its clients through global technical practices;

• Make the vast amount of knowledge produced by the Bank more impact driven;

• Strengthen the Bank’s global connector role, linking country practitioners and policy makers to sources and centers of knowledge and innovation dispersed across the world.

As part of this work, the Bank’s Reform Secretariat is supporting the development of a platform for social collaboration at the Bank (called Scoop) as a way to promote knowledge sharing within the Bank and to encourage integration of staff into informal networks. Scoop’s founding project management office (PMO) included representatives from Human Resources (HR), Information Solutions Group (ISG), World Bank Institute (WBI) and operational units. The PMO first quietly released Scoop to a small group of Superusers, who were identified as champions for social collaboration. The Scoop team regularly communicates with the group through channels including the Scoop platform, e-mail, Adobe Connect, videoconference, Skype and special offline events. The Superusers crowdsourced the platform’s name, helped the developers customize the platform to meet the Bank’s business needs, modeled best practices, and expanded the platform’s user base. The Superuser Community has since grown to include new Scoop group administrators and other power users from field offices and headquarters. The Scoop team prioritizes the growth of the Scoop Superusers community to support knowledge sharing and increase their capability as champions for social collaboration.

Lessons Learned

1) Involve and empower users in the development process.

In the early days of Scoop, the development team in ISG worked closely with the Superusers group to make frequent small enhancements to Scoop’s open source platform and to deploy a jointly built environment. This allowed users to test the site, offer feedback, and determine their requirements to better use the platform.
As Scoop grew, this agile development was phased out, but Superusers were still the target audience to receive notifications about development updates and to serve as sounding boards for new features. Scoop users contributed to every Scoop upgrade, and they validated the management recommendation that the platform be migrated from its Elgg platform to new social software, Jive.

Based on suggestions from the users, new features and enhancements were added to Scoop: a faster loading homepage, a prominent group announcement box, improved e-mail notifications, a draft-saving function, the Like button, and photo albums.

2) Strengthen community and encourage networking through offline events.

Meetings

Recognizing the Superusers’ time and efforts using the platform and providing feedback, we wanted to make sure they were getting a return on their investment. Scoop Superuser meetings are scheduled every two months to highlight Scoop news, tips and tricks, and to encourage networking among users. These meetings aren’t Brown Bag Lunches (BBLs) or training sessions; they are conversations. Each meeting begins with a round of introductions. Users are often in the spotlight as the meeting’s presenters.

Informal Social Events

A large-scale happy hour in the World Bank Main Complex Atrium was designed to increase awareness about Scoop among Bank staff, and activities at the event included a Scoop profile photo contest, several computer workstations for passers-by to log on, a Superuser Award presentation, and musical entertainment by the Scoop Music Circle group.

The Scoop team also partners with the Web Program office to co-host after-work happy hours with the Scoop and Web communities. These events bring together Bank staff from many different units working in knowledge management, Web, IT, and communications.

3) Value the heightened impact of Superusers and their experiences as an extension of training and support services.

Scoop How-To tutorials teach staff how to post content and navigate the site, but examples from Superusers have created an effective model of peer learning.

- The weekly Intro to Scoop webinar cites specific scenarios using the features of the platform (e.g. practical discussions, insightful blogs), rather than explaining its technical characteristics.

- The Scoop team recommends best practices of Superusers to new users looking for solutions and ideas for their own collaboration needs. Superusers also connect with each other to learn how to use ideas from others in their work.

- Several Superusers, including two sector managers in field offices, have been key presenters at superuser meetings to share lessons learned. At these meetings, Q&A is the main event, with Superusers responding to questions from others the audience.

- In an online activity hosted on Scoop, another field-based sector manager spoke about his experience leading a Scoop group via video blog and answered users’ questions during a two-week online discussion. This geographically-neutral learning opportunity resulted in a summary of best practices for group leaders.

4) Encourage innovative collaboration efforts.

All Superusers are not created equal. The Scoop team grants “Scoop Superuser Awards” to noteworthy contributors. We recognize innovative-use cases and have observed that although “Scooping” is not a mandatory activity, these cases often respond to a real demand. Winners are presented with a certificate from the director of the Reform Secretariat. Examples of awards include:

Members of the Music Circle group play during the Scoop Happy Hour in World Bank Main Complex Atrium.

Joy Kazadi shares the secrets of building the Rural Water Supplies Collaborative community.

Members of the Music Circle group play during the Scoop Happy Hour in World Bank Main Complex Atrium.
Superusers Nina Queen, Anna Coronado, and Julie Bockarie participated in the pilot Train the Trainers program.

- “Mr. Best Practice,” awarded to David Andrews, an administrator of the Transaction Specialist Community Space, for successfully answering countless requests to share his tricks on how to build a successful community.

- “The Virtually Walking Encyclopedia,” awarded to Eliza McLeod for being especially helpful in responding to Wire queries and making library services more visible and accessible.

- “The Humorous Leader,” awarded to Ede Ijjasz for his fearless collaboration leadership and contagious Dilbertmania in the China and Mongolia Sustainable Development group.

5) Say “thank you” early and often.

Gratitude is a simple virtue that reinforces the importance of personal relationships. In online communities, gracious behavior builds and sustains these relationships. The Scoop team takes opportunities to say “thank you” to users, not only because we do indeed appreciate them and their contributions, but also to serve as a model for the role they can play in their own communities. When new users join the platform they are personally greeted, and we continue to thank users who attend our events, participate in a training, offer feedback (positive or negative!), help make a connection, or answer a question. We trust that they extend this graciousness to others with whom they collaborate on the platform.

Conclusion

These lessons are not mutually exclusive or “one size fits all.” The combination of activities complements each other, and helps build relationships over time. We are mindful that users have different strengths and challenges and offer flexible support to meet their needs.

The Superuser community is a major asset to the collaboration program. New initiatives like social collaboration platforms are learning experiences for everyone, and we have struggled with our share of roadblocks including technology glitches and resistance to change from staff. The Superusers’ feedback has been instrumental in building, improving and growing the platform. Their experiences have demonstrated that decentralized teams and communities of practice can achieve results on an online social environment. Their example has created a model for collaboration in a modern Bank.

Superusers Nina Queen, Anna Coronado, and Julie Bockarie participated in the pilot Train the Trainers program.

Ede Ijjasz, Superuser Award winner based in Beijing, meets with other superusers on a visit to Washington to answer questions and share ideas.

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