



The Knowledge Hub – Hotseat Session 26th February 2010

Steve Dale – [Knowledge Hub video presentation](#) transcript:

Just a brief introduction to the knowledge hub, about what it is. I think the best way of explaining this is to think in terms of you, have you ever had problems finding information amongst all over conversations going on out there? Yes you can do a Google search and you might be lucky and find the information relevant to you, but the fact is these days there are more and more conversations and they are increasingly disaggregated. Anybody can set up a new network, anybody can actually blog and twitter about things. What the Knowledge Hub will do is bring all these conversations, whether they are tweets, blogs, community conversations or feeds from individual websites, all of that information can be pulled together in one place.

The clever bit that the Knowledge Hub does is be able to aggregate all this content in one place and make some sense of it. We can then link information (data) to conversations, so that we can identify where the conversations, say, around planning or efficiency are happening. So using the knowledge hub, you as a person looking for that information or wanting to participate in those conversations or discussions, or looking to get knowledge will actually know where to go because the knowledge hub will signpost where these key conversations are happening.

The add value to this is, because we are bringing data in as well, data on things like efficiency and performance, people using the knowledge hub can start creating their own value added applications. They can start looking at things like 'mash-ups' and comparing performance against benchmark data and other statistics. So we're encouraging people who use the knowledge hub to create their own applications and make them available through things like an application store, so that anybody in can use these as 'widgets' that work with iGoogle or their iPhones or other PDA.

So I'm happy to give you anymore information as part of this hotseat session and will try and answer any questions that you have.

The following is a transcript of the Knowledge Hub 'Hot Seat' on-line question and answer session that took place on 26th February 2010 on the [IDeA CoP Platform](#).

Further information about the Knowledge Hub is available at:

<http://www.local.gov.uk/knowledgehub>

CoP Legacy

Rosanna Alam, IDeA

Thanks for the presentation about the knowledge hub which I found really useful. My question is about this current CoP website and what will happen with it? And how does it fit into the Knowledge hub?

Answer

The current platform will be 'gracefully' retired and all active CoPs moved to the new platform. This is likely to be over a protracted period of time - e.g. 12 months+. Of course we'll aim to do this with the minimum amount of disruption to users, but in all honesty I don't think it will be an entirely transparent process. We'll keep everyone informed on status, and there will be plenty of notice given about the migration plans.

Filtering knowledge and social media

John Mitchell, South Lanarkshire Council

From what you've outlined the knowledge hub looks ambitious, exiting and challenging. I've only a limited understanding of its capability and implications, but can you explain:

How might it enable new knowledge and creative ideas to emerge from the variety of sources it plans to draw on? I believe that Google Buzz initially had some problems with filtering out the cacophony of voices. Will Khub face similar challenges?

How might it overcome resistance to the use of social media in parts of local government? The barrier here I'm thinking about is the policy of many IT departments to block social media, such as social networking and personal sites - a theme in a couple of CoPs. If it successfully integrates social media, might some people still be in a position of being (partially) disconnected?

Answer

The Khub opens up all sorts of possibilities for richer conversations and knowledge sharing. For example, those councils that are willing to share performance data can establish their own benchmarking clubs. Seeing where your authority compares to a similar authority doing similar things will potentially open up new lines of enquiry (e.g. what actions do I need to take to improve from 5th to 4th and who can I contact?)

Filtering out the noise is going to be one of the tests of success for the Khub. The whole idea is that it will 'push' relevant information to you based on (a) your personal profile and (b) your activities (a bit like Amazon's 'people who have ordered this, also ordered this'.....except we're not selling anything!)

As for the 'blockers', I don't think the Khub will have a lot of influence on those who are determined to block social media, though we are aiming for a very high security level, so the fact that it's an environment for professionals working in local gov (including agencies and 3rd sector), there may be less resistance to using it.

Knowledge Hub and IDeA Knowledge and a question about terminology

Heather Teare, IDeA

How will the Knowledge Hub fit with the LGA Group policy to give LGA members only access to key information? How will key information be defined?

Also: what are 'mash ups' and 'widgets' in terms of the Knowledge Hub?

Answer:

I'm not sure I know what 'key information' is, so don't know if this will answer your question: There will be a sophisticated access and security system that supports organisational, group or individual permissioning. If any content is identified as confidential, we can limit access to a group (e.g. of members) or an individual.

A mashup is where two or more data sources are processed to create a value-add product. For example, using crime statistics to show a 'heat map' of crime hotspots when mapped against Google Maps or Google Earth.

A widget is an application that runs in a browser - which could also be a smart/mobile phone. For example, there could be a widget that gathers all updates on planning applications and displays them in your browser. We want to encourage the social innovators (and geeks) out there to start developing widgets for the Khub.

Data standards

Helen Williams, Socitm Insight

I'm interested that you mention datastore, mash-ups etc. Will there be open data standards (e.g. RDF or RDFa) coming out of the Knowledge Hub for local authorities? Will it be LAs putting information in the datastore or will it be things like the CLG local data exchange that as I understand it will be information the CLG holds as opposed to data contributed in a structured format from LAs themselves.

Answer:

We will be supporting open data standards such as RDFa, and data content will be sourced from both Gov and Local Gov. It is hoped that in the fullness of time we will be able to use open linked data, but any open dataset could be sourced. We're hoping that the Gov open data initiative will encourage more public sector organisations to release their data.

How will you validate the information as being true / correct

David Botham, Education

The obvious question is - how will / can you validate that the information being entered is correct. Particularly as volumes grow.

That is the big problem with the Internet. Some people believe that whatever they read is true - that is not the case. Sorry to put a damper on it but we have to move from being idealistic and trusting into reality.

Bad information is worse than no information at all.

Answer

How right you are! We will only be taking data from attributable sources. It will be as good or as bad as the source. The key think is that

we will know the provenance of all data, and if there are errors with it, users will be pointed to the source.

We are also considering a set of quality standards against which sources can be judged. We like the simplicity of ['8 Principles of Open Gov Data'](#). Also looking at the ['Open Knowledge Definition'](#) (favoured by [CKAN](#), which 'powers' [www.data.gov.uk](#)).

A question about timing

Lawrence Hall, IDeA

Hi Steve, Hi everybody else, and welcome to our final session of Facilitation Now! which seems to have kicked off already! Steve can I ask you a question about the timing of the Knowledge Hub? When's it going to be ready and what can we expect when it goes live? Will there be a phased in approach?

Answer

The schedule is as follows:

- 1. ITT/RFP issued to potential suppliers mid-March 2010.*
- 2. Short-listed suppliers end mid-April 2010*
- 3. Final selection end May 2010*
- 4. Contracts end June 2010*
- 5. Development of first product(s) August 2010*
- 6. Alpha launch September 2010*
- 7. Beta launch October/November 2010*
- 8. Live operation December 2010*

Phasing is still to be agreed, but priority will be to get the community functionality working first, and then the data (mashups, APIs etc.)

Information validation

Tim Milner, IDeA

Before Steve gets going, I'm interested in your point, David, and agree it is a concern that always raises its head when the topic of social media and online information rears its head, but it's also an argument for not having the internet at all! People have their own filters for picking out, checking, and trusting credible and validated information - I suppose they will still need to use their own compass in this case, and that won't change. How do we know to trust what Steve is about to say?

In a lot of cases (blogs being a good case), ideas and thoughts are the key thing - they may be not proven or factually approved, but may spark your own ideas, or provide a new angle at analysing a piece of data, for example. Filtering those out would be a disaster to progressive thought. Though yes, if you are writing a dissertation on a subject, you would indeed be a fool to take as your source whatever comes your way (through e.g. Knowledge Hub's aggregator) without checking very carefully the credibility of that information first of all.

NB. This is a general thought, rather than anything related at all to the Knowledge Hub - I'll leave that to Steve!

Answer

Part of what we're trying to do is have community validation of data - both data sets (data itself) and the metrics that are used. So for example, what we hope to do through the Efficiency Exchange is allow people to have some say over which benchmark metrics they think are valuable, which need more work and which are just plain worthless. Part of that is what it measures, but part of that is also about the quality of the data sources that lie behind them. So for example if you think measuring something might be really valuable BUT you know that the data collection on this area is particularly poor because of your own/sector experience - that metric won't have as high a community validation rating.

Themes

Hilary Tanner, IDeA

I'm interested in the idea that the knowledge hub could bring people and content together under themes or shared professional interests e.g. planning. How would this work? How intelligent would the system be? Could it pick up on your interests in the way Amazon does (I'm a big Amazon fan) and make recommendations?

Answer

There are two core elements that will support the 'intelligence' of the system in identifying themes. One is the 'social graph' - a term which I think originated with Facebook, and which identifies your relationships with friends, colleagues, peers etc. The other is the activity stream, again, commonly associated with Facebook or LinkedIn, which gives you information about what your friends/colleagues are doing, what they've posted, which communities they've joined. Using these systems in tandem will

enable you to pick up useful tacit knowledge on who's doing what and where. If you've 'friended' a fellow planning officer and he/she joins a community that you hadn't heard of before, the chances are you will also go and look at that community, because of your declared shared interest.

The social graph is updated with all the new contacts you make (or remove) and is therefore continually evolving.

By the same process, other peoples' social graph will be updated with information about you (provided you've accepted them as a friend/colleague).

To summarise, we're going to be using the best of breed technology to make all of this work effectively.

Rise of the machines and scalability

Tim Milner, IDeA

Please don't make it too intelligent, Steve. Have we learnt nothing from '2001: A Space Odyssey', 'Moon', 'Westworld' and the like?

But I would be interested in hearing about how scalable the system will be, though. Not sure if that is the correct term, but will it be able to adapt to new developments in the sphere of information-gathering, online trends, technology etc.? Basically, as far as you can see into the future, can we expect to see it in some shape or form in 10 years, as opposed to, say, being replaced by something totally new?

Answer

Good point Tim - though I wonder if HAL could do any worse than what we have now (recession etc.)?

One of the key aspects of the Khub is that it will be built as an open framework, that will enable any web service to be plugged in with minimal (and usually no) development. We will be using open standards such as Open Shared and OpenID. The whole idea is to try and make it 'future-proof', and provided we stick with open standards (my mantra) we should be able to keep up with the changing technology landscape.

Knowledge Ecology

Michael Norton, IDeA

I know one of the key things is the Knowledge Ecology part of the Khub where you will be creating the relational links between data.

The other part is creating the relational links between the people and yesterday I heard Dr Janine Nahapiet talk about the knowledge ecology is a relational ecology.

Could you tell us a bit about the plans for people side of the knowledge Ecology?

Answer

I've always thought that the technology is the easy bit. The difficult bit is the culture and behaviours, which I've lumped together into this term 'knowledge ecology'.

There's quite a lot going on within this work stream, though possibly not quite joined up yet. There's Ingrid Koehler's Social Media Strategy, which tackles a whole range of things, including training, leadership, coaching, etc. There's also whatever lessons we learn from the Working Together (ex Partnerships and Places), and Tobacco Control pilots in terms of user engagement, plus working with David Wilcox on game development and simulation, plus drawing in a wider cohort of potential experts and users through the [Social by Social](#) network.

But not forgetting of course the head start we have in advocacy from the KM team at IDeA, the many expert Facilitators, and indeed all the current users of the CoP platform. I think that the landscape looks a lot different now to what it was when we started out with the CoP platform, so I'm greatly encouraged by events such as this.

Council access to social media

Ceri Wild, IDeA

Just following on from John's previous points, I'm aware that SOCITM released a report in January urging councils' IT managers to refrain from blocking access to social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter. But what more can be done to ensure the progress of projects such as the Knowledge Hub are not obstructed by the IT protocols of some councils in relation to accessing social media? Out of interest, is there any research available to suggest what proportion of councils currently bar access?

Answer

Yes - there is research on what numbers of councils block access to social media tools - it was in the SoCITM report and the numbers are shockingly high (for some blocking - not every place blocks everything).

As part of the Knowledge Ecology we're supporting culture change and a shift of attitudes and practice. As absolutely great and valuable as the SoCITM report is - it was behind a subscription wall - meaning that it was not openly accessible. We're bringing out some of those key lessons and more in a joint report we're producing with NESTA - called Local by Social which outlines the innovation, improvement and efficiency opportunities of social media in local gov. And we're also bringing out a councillors guide to social media - they must lead the change. Look for that in the next month.

We're also supporting practitioners on the inside through the Social Media Community of Practice - and there will be lots more to announce soon

I live in hope that attitudes are changing, and in fact I have collated a report using [Steph Gray's](#) excellent software app that checks whether a particular service is blocked. I'll upload to the Library as soon as I get a chance.

People vs. Subjects

Roger White, HelpGov Ltd

Steve – you say there are two core elements that will support the 'intelligence' of the system in identifying themes:

- the 'social graph'...which identifies your relationships with friends, colleagues, peers etc.
- the other is the activity stream...which gives you information about what your friends/colleagues are doing, what they've posted, which communities they've joined.

How does this match with subject-based searching/linking as opposed to person/relationship-based?

An example I have in mind is that I have been on a few CoPs where someone's raised the topic of employee suggestion schemes. I've posted once or twice on the subject but then notice a query, maybe a few months later on a completely different CoP. Now where did I

post my previous brilliant original thought? I really want to go in and hover up all the relevant references to the subject. My “friends, colleagues, peers” are irrelevant as I don’t know most of the people concerned and have had no contact, electronic or otherwise with them.

Answer

Ah, this is the secret ingredient! We'll be making the most of semantic web search for all content on the platform. How effective this will be in finding (and connecting) those nuggets I'm not sure, but we'll be looking into products such as [Open Calais](#) for automatic entity extraction, plus using reference data from esd toolkit to connect data.

Suffice to say I do believe that an effective search engine is important and we'll be looking closely at best of breed apps as part of the procurement process

Success

Craig Titterton, IDeA

Looking into your crystal ball, 12 months on from the launch of the Khub what will success look like?

Answer

This is a tad ambitious in thinking all of this will happen within 12 months of launch but this is what we're using to measure success:

Practitioners will say:

- *It is easy to find out who shares my interests*
- *I will be happy to share my interests and experience with others*
- *I am recognized and credible for my own expertise*
- *I can quickly find out how other people are responding to my service challenges*
- *We can engage with each other in a variety of ways and develop approached together*
- *We can test our ideas with other people, nationally and internationally*

- *I will provide information to others on the performance of my service*
- *I will compare performance in my service area with others and engage with others to understand the differences*
- *I will participate in the challenge of others and seek to learn from my progress and achievements on my improvement journey*

Councilors will say:

- *It is easy to find out who shares my interests*
- *I will be happy to share my interests and experience with councilors, officers and the public*
- *I am recognized and credible for my own expertise*
- *I am recognized and credible for my democratic leadership role*
- *I can quickly find out how other people are responding to challenges similar to those in my area*
- *We can test our ideas with other people, nationally and internationally*
- *I am comfortable sharing performance information*
- *I can easily find out how to access support and training to help me develop my local leadership role*
- *I am assured that council officers have access to best practice and support nationally and internationally*
- *I know where to go to get up to speed quickly with policy and service areas*

Councils will:

- *Understand their own strengths and weaknesses (level of self awareness)*
- *Have rapid access to experience of other councils in the development of its own approaches*
- *Be responsive to new ideas and ready to adopt them*
- *Be recognized for its own expertise and is ready to share it*
- *Encourage their staff to innovate and engage with others outside the council in the development of ideas*

- *Be open about its own performance and seeks support and challenge from others*
- *Be willing to engage in the challenge of other councils and provide support for their development*
- *Be supporting and encouraging itself to innovate*

Local Government

- *Is ready to learn quickly and can respond quickly to new challenges and responsibilities*
- *Avoids duplicate development and co-produces wherever possible*
- *Is imaginative, innovative and open to new ideas from internal/external sources*
- *Is confident, imaginative and ambitious*
- *Can identify those at risk and help address poor performance*
- *Can identify common problems and assemble evidence for common solutions*
- *Is self-aware, can define shared requirements and speak with a shared voice*
- *Is aware of its own performance and is open to challenge*
- *Can signpost to the 'best of breed'*
- *Manages central/local relationships*
- *Can learn quickly from others (International Government Unit)*

However, who was it that said "I never make predictions...especially about the future"?!

Taxonomies and metadata

Paul Geraghty, Councilsites.co.uk

Are you going to be using a known taxonomy to identify concepts and cross link them, if so which ones are you going to be using?

If you are going to be using one, explain why you are going out to Open Calais.

Answer

We're going to use whatever the esd-toolkit has got. They've already agreed to provide reference data, controlled vocabs and ontology's for the Khub. I don't know which taxonomies we'll use - this is something to be determined once we've started the technical build. If I have any say in it, we'll avoid using IPSV - which (IMHO) is a complete and absolute waste of time.

The only reason I mentioned Open Calais is because we're evaluating how effective it is at auto-generation of metadata for creating linked data. I don't know if it will feature in the Khub design or not, but I think we need to look at all options, and particularly those technologies that can auto-create data schemas where there may not be any reference data.

Overfill and duplication

Dimpl Rathod, IDeA

How will the knowledge hub know/decide which websites and resources it should be picking up from? I ask this because of the increasing number of knowledge and info resources available and duplicated, and if this is funded by CLG will there be some sort of mechanism in place to stop further duplication of Gov/LG resources being developed? Or will the knowledge hub include as many resources being built?

Answer

One thing I learnt a long time ago - don't worry about the things you have no control over! They're going to happen anyway. The whole raison d'être for the Khub came about precisely because of this proliferation of websites, communities and information repositories. I think this is going to continue (despite the Gov initiative to rationalise). Conversations are going to become increasingly granular,

so we'll need to have products/systems like the Khub to re-aggregate the disaggregated information and identify what the key themes are.

The Khub itself will be sized to take in any number of feeds/data sources. Of course, the more there are the more complex the aggregation will be, and hence why the Khub will be worth its weight in gold within 5 years!

bfw

Paul Geraghty, Councilsites.co.uk

I am sure khub will contain lots more interactivity than the Cops.

I know you are very proud of your CoPs usage figures, and rightly so, but from a usability standpoint I find the lack of any cross-connection between Blog/Fora/Wikis (B/F/W) very confusing, and frequently get lost and give up on some communications, lose track of conversations, lose content.

Is khub going to be reliant, at least in part, on the same 3 well known formats? (B/F/W)

Answer

I know exactly what you mean, and I have the same (cross-linking) problems. I think we'll keep with the general strategy in providing as many collaboration tools as possible (e.g. bfw...and more, libraries, events, calendar etc.) and letting the users decide what they want to use. However, we will definitely be addressing the problems of cross-linking. I should add though, some of this will depend on users tagging their content. The system can only go so far in making sure it is connecting the right stuff.

We're not throwing out the baby with the bathwater! No way! We will still support communities of practice - but communities are not this platform nor vice versa. But blogs, forums and to some extent wikis (we may be looking for other ways to do navigation)

Some of the things we will be pushing for

1. A presumption of openness - if your community can be more open, it should. Some communities need to stay a bit more private because of the sensitive nature of their subject matter.

2. Permeability of communities - we want much more shareability between communities.

An example.

Lawrence Hall, IDeA

Steve, as we're drawing near the end of this session, and I'm aware that there might be a number of conference delegates who still might not be that sure about the knowledge hub and exactly what it can be used for. Could you give a hypothetical example of how an individual might use the khub? Let's go with Joe CoPs who works as a planning officer for, say, Leicestershire council?

Answer

I'm going to cheat a bit here and use something that was prepared (by Ingrid) for the last Khub Advisory Group. This was a workshop exercise that brought home to the delegates just how difficult it is to find the information that many local gov practitioners need to do their jobs effectively. So, it's over to Hubville City Council....

You work with Hubville City Council. You are new to the Youth Offending Team. In a meeting with the Performance Officer in charge of LAA (Local Area Agreement) monitoring and another officer from the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership you discover that councillors are concerned that your area doesn't look on track to meet a key monitoring figure for its LAA : NI 111 (national indicator) - First time entrants to the Youth Justice System aged 10-17.

It's a single measure, but part of a wider set of priorities about reducing youth crime and anti-social behaviour among youth in general – and in some 'blighted' communities in particular. You are going to conduct a snapshot review of your current programme and try to identify a network of people who can help you.

Question: What functionality, features and information/data sources would the Knowledge Hub need to support in order to help you:-

- 1. Identify your current performance and compare it with others*
- 2. Understand how you can track and monitor information which might be related to or influence NI 111 (for example – reported crimes, prosecution rates, NI 117 the number of 16-*

18 year olds who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs)

- 3. Know what 'best in class' are doing*
- 4. Identify people locally who are working on similar issues*
- 5. Identify people across the country who are at the same stage in your improvement journey*
- 6. Find resources to help you deliver improvement against NI 111*

Answers on a postcard please!

That's it and a big thank you to everyone at Facilitation Now!

Posted by Lawrence Hall, IDeA

It's just gone 4 o'clock now which means this live session is officially over. I'd like to offer a very big thank you to Steve for being here for the last few hours to answer question, really appreciated.

In fact, that's the end of the Facilitation Now! conference. So I would like to say a big thank you to everyone who has joined us over the last three days as well as to my co-hosts here and all the panelists.

All the discussion forums will remain open for a while yet so if you have anything else you want to say, ask, or discuss then please continue to add your comments. I'll also write a summary report at some point over the next few weeks for everyone to have.

So that's about it, and I really hope you've enjoyed the conference.

All the best

Lawrence Hall

Ends