

CPsquare / SCOPE Quarterly Field trips: KM4Dev Field Trip Report

April – May 2011

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Executive Summary:

As part of a series of visits by CPsquare and SCOPE members to distributed communities, we visited with members of KM4Dev in April of 2011. We learned about the history of the community, about the environment in which its members work, and some of what the community means to some of the people who participated in the visit. We looked at various KM4Dev websites and held asynchronous discussions about the community. A synchronous teleconference answered many questions and raised many more. The challenges that KM4Dev is currently facing include recent growth in its main email membership, a proliferation of venues and tools (including face-to-face meetings), increasing member diversity, and an evolving environment where knowledge sharing and management ideas are entering the mainstream. These challenges raise questions about sub-communities and community support and leadership.

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Introduction: reporting on a Field Trip

The April 2011 CPsquare¹ / SCOPE² organized a virtual field trip visit to and with KM4Dev (<http://km4dev.org>). (The two communities have been co-sponsoring informal visits to

¹ CPsquare (<http://cpsquare.org>) is an international community of practice on the topic of communities of practice. It is a membership community supported by member dues and offers workshops and conferences on the topic of communities of practice.

² SCOPE (<http://scope.bccampus.ca/>) is an online community hosted by BCcampus, a consortium of public universities in British Columbia, that brings together individuals who share an interest in educational research and practice. At one point the name SCOPE stands for SFU's Community of Practitioners in Education.

different communities for several years.) These quarterly field trips typically involve a synchronous meeting (webinar) where the leader of a community describes the history and activities of their community and shows their community's online spaces. Members of CPsquare and SCoPE are interested in understanding the spectrum of activities, technologies, issues, and styles that are found in the communities we visit. The leaders of the communities we visit find that our questions and attention helps them reflect on their communities and see them in new ways.

There is an inherent bias in what we see during the CPsquare/SCoPE visits because we hear from a community's leader about the community *from their perspective*. Other perspectives, from the periphery or even from "non-members" may be useful and are clearly legitimate, but it's difficult for any community leader have reliable complete to those views and it's beyond the scope of a visit to look beyond what a community's leader sees. We know that reality is always more complex than what we can see. Another source of bias is that, in writing this report we have sought to make explicit some of what we heard between the lines so that a general reader could make sense of the report. So we have interpreted what we heard and saw, based on our own perspectives, which include peripheral involvement in KM4Dev for one of the authors (Smith). It is clear that not everyone in CPsquare would agree with our interpretations either! It is in the nature of reports such as this that they are necessarily partial and provisional. You are encouraged to draw your own conclusions.

The visit to KM4Dev sought to be more extensive than those in the past in the sense of involving more people (not just the one leader of the community we visit), of including asynchronous discussions before and after the synchronous event, and of producing this summary report afterward. One reason for organizing a more ambitious field trip was that over the years there has been a great deal of crossover between the communities. Beyond that, KM4Dev is an inherently interesting community because of its history, its deliberate informality in a sector that is global, complex and with a predominance of large formal organizations. Finally, this was a good time for the field trip because it seems like an inflection point in the life of KM4Dev: it has more platforms than just the original Dgroup email list (<http://dgroups.org/>), and the number of people registered on the list has grown from about 500 at the beginning of 2008 to over 1900 today. This change also means that the meaning of "KM4Dev membership" to people who are involved in the community is more diverse than it was before.

The asynchronous part of the field trip ran from April 20 to early May 2011 and considered several different facets of KM4Dev. The synchronous, online conversation took place on April 27, 2011 with an online web and phone conference. The conversation touched on historical events such as face-to-face meetings or notable transitions as well as tools that have been developed, and organizational issues facing KM4Dev as it continues to evolve. Some of the information in this report was gathered from the various KM4Dev web sites. The remainder emerged either in the teleconference on April 27, in the discussions in the CPsquare discussion site, on the KM4Dev email list, or in discussions of a draft version of this report. Two technology vignettes by KM4Dev members that were first posted in the CPsquare discussions are included as appendices.³

³ It is worth reflecting on the fact that the CPsquare/SCOPE organizers of this visit were initially assuming that an extended reflection on KM4Dev in the company of professional "community folks" would be of such broad interest that an open invitation to the whole KM4Dev community would bring in too many

Themes and Topics from the CPsquare / SCOPE field trip

Although the CPsquare / SCOPE field trips have some specific questions and frameworks that are used to understand the issues and dynamics of the communities we visit, the questions that we consider do emerge from the community we are visiting. Here are some of the questions that emerged during this field trip:

- What accounts for the longevity and recent growth of KM4Dev? Do people experience the exchange of emails on a list as “conversation” and the combination of email, web resources of various kinds and the face-to-face episodes as “a community”?
- One of the challenges for KM4Dev is to include people from the “south” more effectively, given the somewhat North-America- and European-centric composition in the early days and with more new members from South America , Africa, India, and South East Asia. How has that worked and what issues face the community? How are the French and Spanish speaking offshoots faring?
- Is there an administrative structure that supports KM4Dev? How well does it work to have a different person take on the job of facilitator each month?
- The recent growth in membership has been in the community’s email list (a dgroup) and on its Ning space. There has not been the same kind of growth on the face-to-face side, either frequency of events or number of participants. What issues, if any, come up as a result of the varying rates of growth in participation in these different community venues?
- Every community has informal leaders (core members) and some have designated formal leaders as well; KM4Dev’s formal leadership is known as “the Core Group”. How has the Core Group’s energy and time-commitment been sustained? Has membership in the Core Group changed or has the leadership model evolved? Is membership in the Core Group a chore or a privilege? How well does it work to have administrative functions and project-work staffed by volunteers? How do informal and formal leadership overlap in KM4Dev?
- How is KM4Dev evolving? Is it becoming more of a “KM4Dev question and answer service” than a community of practice? Would that be a sustainable model? What is the future of KM4Dev?

KM4Dev Mission

KM4Dev is a community of international development practitioners who are interested in knowledge management(KM) and knowledge sharing (KS) issues and approaches, and who seek to share ideas and experiences in this domain. A fundamental assumption of the KM4Dev community is that international development is a knowledge-intensive endeavor and that relevant knowledge is widely distributed.

people. So the invitation was initially made to the KM4Dev “Core Group”, which includes people who have taken on a leadership role in the KM4Dev community. That initial invitation did not bring in the numbers or the energy that we thought, so a wider invitation was issued and even then participation from the KM4Dev side was modest. That suggests that, despite the fact that the topic of communities of practice is usually included in the broader field of knowledge management, interest in KM4Dev *as a community* is not as strong as the interest in the KM and development issues that are the subject of the community’s focus. This issue is discussed in the section on the KM4Dev core group below.

Connecting with KM4Dev and its community

During the synchronous event on April 27, several people described what it meant to them when they first found KM4Dev. As a community of people with a passion for knowledge management and knowledge sharing in the development sector, it was a unique resource for them. It was easy to make connections, share experiences, pose questions and help others. It's served as an important "professional family". In the early days people working in knowledge management or knowledge sharing did not have a lot of support within their own agencies or organizations (they were "a lonely lot"). KM4Dev provided support and encouragement. Very few KM teams existed in their organizations. A lot of learning and practice behaviors were well-demonstrated just in the way the community operated. Over time, knowledge management has become a more accepted practice, recognized as having value, as has KM4Dev. Over time both the community and the needs of its members have continued to evolve.

As the KM4Dev community has grown, it has become more diverse and nobody can claim to know the entire community. Off-shoots, subgroups, and side conversations have proliferated along with the number of platforms and tools at the community's disposal. The question of connectedness and diversity comes up in many of our visits to community, and, as discussed below in the section on the evolution and consequences of growth and diversification, it is an issue for KM4Dev.

The several KM4Dev web site are rich with content and information. So, in addition to making connections with other people, there is a rich set of resource materials to help people and organizations with all aspects of knowledge management, with a strong emphasis on practice.

The Importance of Face-to-face Meetings and Workshops

Several of the people who participated in the synchronous event noted that face-to-face meetings had been very important to them. They made connections and developed or refreshed personal relationships that were important professionally and face-to-face interaction gave context to interactions in the KM4Dev community. This has been important for the Core Group's sense of cohesion and its capacity to be effective. Face-to-face meetings and workshops have also played an important role in demonstrating and experimenting with face-to-face techniques ranging from fish-bowl conversations to social reporting to graphic reporting that are now more widely practiced in the international development world. Of course, although face-to-face meetings have the capacity to concentrate energy and connections, as in the case of KM4Dev, they also leave out the vast majority. Here are the KM4Dev meetings that we know of (apparently there were other regional meetings that aren't included in this list). Some were organized by the Core Group and others not.

2000: Washington and Brighton
2001: Chennai
2002: The Hague and Maputo
2003: Amsterdam, Kathmandu, and Ottawa
2004: Washington
2005: Geneva

2006: Brighton
2007: Zeist (Netherlands) and Manila
2008: Lisbon
2009: Brussels
2010: Addis Ababa and Cali (Colombia)

Considering that there was no central or recurring funding for these meetings, their number and geographical distribution is impressive. Funding has been a mixture of an agency's interest in hosting, an ad hoc's group effort to organize each one, and (mostly) individual efforts to fund travel. When funding was available, a large proportion of that funding was dedicated to scholarships to members from the global South.

The KM4Dev Community's Environment and Organizational Context

Many members of KM4Dev work directly or indirectly for large development institutions, whether national governments, non-profits or UN agencies. Within their agency work-life, the members of KM4Dev operate in complex, hierarchical, formal, and often very political structures. Part of the effectiveness of the KM4Dev community is that it is so self-organizing, informal and that people participate as individual practitioners. As a community, KM4Dev has evolved following supporting principles:

1. Open and interactive in nature.
2. Supports and encourages a mix of individuals (Northern and Southern participation, large and small organizations, academics and practitioners, male and female)
3. International development is the specific, underlying context to our exploration of KM/KS issues and approaches

Despite the informality, various organizations have provided small grants and start-up funds. Those organizations have allowed the discussions and general agenda of KM4Dev to be very open, despite a funding environment that has to focus on accountability and the targeted delivery of value for money. For several years available funds allowed one person (Lucie Lamoureux) to spend one day a week supporting access (e.g., approving accounts on the Wiki), providing enough continuity for the face-to-face events to be organized, and some minimal facilitation. At this point, on-going and sustainable funding is an issue facing KM4Dev as discussed below in the context of "the Core Group."

An early idea was that when Bellanet/IDRC ended the initial funding, KM4Dev leadership thought that it would be ideal for the community "hosting" to be rotated across different organizations. The Leadership Group did not want to have a centralized "secretariat". Nor did the Leadership Group want to have paid permanent full time staff. And, related to this desire, it was decided to not form a legal entity.

So far, what funding has been provided has come from Bellanet/IDRC, the Swiss Development Agency, and ICCO. The last two were administrated by the Swiss NGO, Helvetas, as the legal entity. Other funding has been smaller and focused on specific projects. For events, members urge their organizations to send people, to sponsor scholarships, to sponsor activities, etc. This way the organizations pay directly for those costs and it does not have to be processed by KM4Dev, as it has no legal status. That's why Helvetas acts as the fiscal sponsor.

The choice to not become a legal entity is in keeping with the need to be an independent, informal community. This status or arrangement allowed members who worked in big U.N. agencies to participate.

The Core group as community leadership structure

KM4Dev currently functions as a completely volunteer effort. In the early days, as it grew, it became clear that KM4Dev needed some sort of governance group to support the community and help respond to its needs. Hence, the Core Group was created in May 2004. The Core Group interacts via its own Dgroup and also documents its meetings in the K4Dev wiki (http://wiki.km4dev.org/wiki/index.php/Main_Page)

Currently, the KM4Dev Core Group consists of 19 community members who act in a voluntary capacity, as a steering committee for the community. Core Group members contribute their time and energy towards supporting the needs of KM4Dev members and building the community. At a minimum, a Core Group member is expected to contribute through regular email contact with the group, participates in at least 2 conference calls or meetings per year and agrees to take on some tasks based on his/her own abilities and interests. In total, this adds up to an estimated minimum of 2 days per year. Each year new members are invited to join. New people rotate into the Core while older members rotate out. There are no formal procedures for rotation but rather a question of interest and availability of time. It is worth noting that scheduling the CPsquare / SCOPE field trip with KM4Dev took almost two months, partly due to the fact that the Core Group is quite dispersed and members have full-time work that has to be their first priority. As it turned out, quite a few people in the Core Group seemed not to really understand what the CPsquare / SCOPE visit was about or how it might be an opportunity for reflection about the community and its future development.

Here are some revealing comments from the online discussions by a member of the Core Group:

We have always fought against the impulse to formalize in any way. Because of the nature of our membership and of the interactions, it's easy to join, to leave and contributing can be done in a non-threatening way. People contribute as individuals, not organizations. This flexibility has been crucial in the growth of KM4dev. Ironically, this growth is now causing us to look at the fuzziness and ambiguities around leadership as we are entering a phase where something needs to happen, we can't go on this way.

We have been trying to find funding and one KM4dev member actually DID help guide us through the proposal development but it has not been easy. It's been ongoing for almost a year now, with lots of back and forth. He thought it would be easy to get funding for KM4dev but it has proven to be very difficult to explain the reasons why we should be funded to others. We are still unsure as to whether it will go through or not. We have asked the community in the past if they had any leads for funding and no one else offered to help. Also, a lot of the

people that were keen on KM4dev have gone or changed position within their organization, making it harder to leverage their conviction.

Networks seem to falling left and right with funders pulling out. Money is perhaps not essential but a little bit really does help. The Core group is showing the strains right now of a purely volunteer effort.

KM4Dev Technology and Resource Platforms

Like many mature communities, KM4Dev has spread out onto several different platforms, each supporting a slightly different facet of the community's activities. These are described below.

Skype. It is interesting to note that in reviewing the tools that are used in KM4Dev, Skype does not show up. However, a closer look shows that without Skype as a common tool for telephony and chat, neither the community's working groups nor the Core Group could meet so easily or effectively. During the synchronous event on April 27, it turned out that there were several back-channel Skype chats going on, illustrating the fact that chat is an means of communication for many people in the KM4Dev community. See an example of a one meeting's notes on the wiki:

http://wiki.km4dev.org/wiki/index.php/Skype_Voice_Meeting_Week_of_September_7

KM4Dev Dgroups, Email listserv. KM4Dev uses a Dgroup for email discussions and archiving. While it is a somewhat dated technology, because so many members live with limited bandwidth, interrupted electricity service, or long periods out of Internet reach, an email list is the backbone of the community. Generally the list very active and serves as the major mechanism for members to announce events, ask questions, and carry on discussions. The archives are completely open to anyone: <http://dgroups.org/Community.aspx?c=038278afa7cd-4c4e-bed0-ac8ea0b7b57f>

KM4Dev Wiki: A Wiki for KM4Dev was created several years ago to support planning for face-to-face events and to collect the insights that are contributed in the email discussion lists. Here is a description from the wiki itself: http://wiki.km4dev.org/wiki/index.php/Main_Page

This wiki is currently used in several ways:

- 1. As a collaborative space during workshops or to work on different projects (link to to Main page section called Other Pages)*
- 2. As a space to present shared perceptions (often arising from conversations on the KM4Dev mailing list) of the 'state-of-the-art' in conceptualising knowledge management and knowledge sharing, particularly in an international development context*
- 3. As a environment where you can learn to use a wiki (link to Main page intro and How to work with a wiki)*

Our first project on the KM4Dev wiki was the [Community Knowledge] area, (formerly called the FAQTory (FAQ Index)- a place to make and use FAQs and information pages

out of our knowledge surfaced in our online conversations and from member experiences.

The KM4Dev wiki is quite comprehensive with rich set of practice materials.

An upgrade to the KM4Dev Wiki. Through a grant in 2010 from the KM4Dev Innovation Fund, Davide Piga created a new Wiki for KM4Dev. The new wiki takes advantage of new features for wikis and presents a new structure for sharing information. For more information about the project, see Vignette # 1, a short case study / interview with Davide Piga. As of this writing, the link to the new wiki is: http://www.km4dev.pdavide.com/index.php/Main_Page

During the online conversation it was mentioned that the upgrade and customization of Mediawiki (the software used in the KM4Dev wiki) is on the sidelines waiting to replace the platform, so as to be the main information repository for KM4Dev. Others commented that they don't know what it means to be a *main platform*, reflecting the diverse nature of information sharing across different platforms, for better or worse. While the conversation did not go much further with regard to the wiki, it did raise interesting questions on how major decisions and actions are taken by such a widely dispersed and diverse community like KM4Dev.

A Social Networking Site: Some years ago, the KM4Dev community also set up a NING site, which for many people is the "Front door" of the community: <http://km4dev.org>. Ning is a commercial web hosting service for social community networking. Many organizations and people have created Ning sites for membership services, commercial purposes, and social networking. The KM4Dev Ning site has a number of features for connecting people to each other and to resources. A number of special interest groups within the KM4Dev Ning site have been created that allow for conversations through discussion and commenting.

The KM4Dev Online Journal and the KM4Dev Journal: A group of KM4Dev members published an online, peer-reviewed journal between 2005 and 2008. It can be found on the main Ning site (<http://journal.km4dev.org/index.php/km4dj>). Since 2009, the **KM4Dev Journal** has been published by Taylor and Francis as a printed journal⁴. The Journal regularly includes "community notes" and a certain number of free copies are given to the KM4Dev community. This transition from a fairly informal, self-published journal to a commercial, academic publisher is an example of how the larger development community is evolving and expanding.

Evolution and Consequences of Growth and Diversification

Like most online communities, the proportion of people who participate visibly in KM4Dev (by posting emails to the Dgroup list, for example) is small compared to the number of addresses that are subscribed to the list (which is more than 1900). The most visible participation comes practitioners in development agencies in Europe and to a lesser degree, North America. KM4Dev's recent growth has brought many more people from Africa, South America and Asia.

⁴ <http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/19474199.asp>

A question that came up during the visit was whether a community can become too big. How can all of the people who are participating get what they need when you have over a 1600 people? It may be KM4Dev has evolved and grown beyond one community and is now many things to many people, including simply a source of information. The Ning site permits smaller groups to form and thrive (but often die off or go dormant), but the conversational mainstream in the Dgroup email list may show the strain of size. It is difficult and costly to really understand how people treat the email they receive from the KM4Dev list and what it is that it means to them.

In an effort to include and support people from different regions and different languages, members of KM4Dev have launched communities on the same topic in French and Spanish. Some funding was obtained to launch the French-speaking community, but none was sought for the Spanish-speaking one. To illustrate the informality of KM4Dev, the formalization of the SIWA Dgroup as “KM4Dev in Spanish” is illustrative: at the KM4Dev conference in Cali in 2010 the decision was made that, instead of struggling to decide on a new name or bothering to set up a new list, an existing group would just be designated as “KM4Dev” and re-purposed from its Costa Rican focus to a larger Latin America and Caribbean one. It turns out that neither the French nor the Spanish community has yet reached the vigor and growth characteristics of the original English-speaking community.

With a “community” so large there are different views about viability and value. For some of the early members, the community has grown so much that it risks becoming unwieldy and fundamentally different from the time when it was smaller and more intimate. For many others, particularly from developing countries, it is a “lifeline” of information and material and people, a portal to a larger world of experts.

KM4Dev is currently relying on a strategy of rotating facilitators of the Dgroup email discussions. This model can be sustainable if the facilitators see value in contributing the time that it takes. But their time is a scarce resource. Professional satisfaction, keeping in touch with developments, possibly hearing about new projects or consulting opportunities, and other intangibles will only go so far. People will contribute what is meaningful to them and meet needs that they see. Some possibly important work may escape notice or just not get done: helping new members, summarizing discussions, curating resources, developing funding for face-to-face meetings, etc., etc. are examples that come to mind. KM4Dev is no different from many other very important communities in that the useful work that could be done far exceeds the resources to do it. This forces an ongoing and possibly productive assessment of what’s important to get done but it can also leave crucial tasks un-done.

It was our observation during our visit with KM4Dev that the growth in the community has been on the online side. We wonder whether the deeper social relations and connections have kept up. This might be a cause for concern. What assumptions about the value of the community, about what it means to “be a member”, or about which topics are relevant, need to be reconsidered? What new assumptions will serve the community in the next decade?

The Current Business Model for the KM4Dev Community

The following Business Model Canvas (after Osterwalder and Pigneur) reflects discussions during the field trip and on the KM4Dev email list itself:



It tries to suggest how the ongoing contribution of the community depends on a fine balance between many different actors and that the strength of informality can also be a weakness in some regards. Obviously it is incomplete. One example pops up looking at it during the preparation of this report. KM4Dev Journal is a distinct enterprise within the KM4Dev community business ecology that is funded by subscribers. It has its own revenue stream, cost structure, etc., but it fits as one of the channels of knowledge distribution and participation.

All of this raised an interesting question – is KM4Dev more of a service than a community? And how important is that distinction? Service means access to information and experts to answer questions, get new ideas, and hear about new practices. Community means something deeper, where KM4Dev is a professional home and it gives people support that can only come from interaction with other professionals. In some ways the two can co-exist, but they have different implications in terms of value to members and resources required. No definite conclusions were drawn and realistically it's probably both and it may be impossible to be conclusive about exactly what resources are essential for the community to survive.

Vignette # 1: Upgrading Mediwiki for the new KM4Dev Wiki with Davide Piga

The following is presented as a series of questions with responses by Davide Piga. Actually, it collapses several rounds of emails between Davide and John Smith. It was offered as a starting point for asynchronous discussion during the visit, but did not generate further discussion.

1. What is the context or ground for the upgrade?

David: The occasion for the upgrade was the 2010 Innovation Fund:

http://wiki.km4dev.org/wiki/index.php/KM4Dev_Innovation_Fund_2010

I participated and my project was approved. The good thing is that winning projects were selected in a democratic way:

"We will invite all members of the KM4Dev community to rank the various descriptions. The KM4Dev Core Group will then determine winning applications based on community assessments".

This means that approved projects reflected the real needs and demand from the network. This is so much important in KM, and still I rarely experienced such simple and effective method for deciding next steps in innovating an organization.

For details about the idea behind my project, read here:

http://wiki.km4dev.org/wiki/index.php/Innovation_Proposal_6_-_Adding_Structure_to_KM4DEVs_Spontaneity

- **Where are you now?**

I'm working for UNDESA (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs) now. In Nairobi they are trying to set up a collaboration platform for African parliaments, so that one parliament can build on another's (draft laws, other documents, etc.). I arrived in January. They are very much focused on the technology. I am trying to offer a KM perspective. I will be the contact with the parliaments. They never did a needs assessment. The platform is built, but they don't talk to people. It was very clear to me why it isn't used.

I was a social reporter at Adis share fair and on the UNDP KM team before that.

- **How long had you been involved in KM4Dev before this project?**

I came across KM4Dev at the end of 2007. I didn't take part actively at the beginning. I was an intern in NYC, UNDP KM team. Began by following the discussions. Found them interesting, but was not confident so much as to participate. Began interacting more actively a year ago.

This project was useful because it enabled getting involved. Getting to know people. I went to the Share Fair in Addis Abbaba last year. that was a great occasion. a nice event. you get to know people that you interact with online without knowing their faces. Now I know who I am talking to.

- **Could you describe your background (professional and/or otherwise)?**

Bachelor & Masters degree in international cooperation for development. I emphasized cooperation and am a bit sensitive about the "development" aspect. I got involved through the internship in NYC.

I thought was going to work on the environment side, but turned out that KM was my real interest. I was interested in connecting poeple working in the environment. it was a big coincidence.

I had been trying to set up communities of practice all along. Then learned that it had a name and that it was KM.

Eric Tsui announced in KM4Dev that he is running a PhD program in Hong Kong. I might try to get into that next year. It looks interesting.

2. How did things unfold and what were the significant events in the story? What did people do? What roles did "invisible tools" (like telephones and email) play, along with other tools?

To be coherent with the democratic spirit of the innovation process, I decided to involve the community in my work. First, I sent out an email reaching for volunteers willing to keep an eye on the progress of the upgrade and provide feedback, in terms of feature requests, general suggestions and criticisms.

Once the testing group was defined, together with the KM4Dev Core Group we set up a dedicated mailing list, and I used Google Docs to annotate each new feature I was introducing. After completing the phase of the work involving functional upgrades, I invited the group to review my report and comment. This is the doc:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1vhK_hxBHQo1VEIb5x4-5s0caeolice_5Ds7r3NzdKUs/edit?hl=en#

The response was amazing. I had done similar jobs before, and noticed that people tend to be enthusiast when you describe how the web can help them, how specific tools can make their lives easier, but then they would just lose interest. It's like they ask for an elaborated dish, you spend your time cooking it, then it turns out they are just not hungry.

This group, they read my document and commented it in detail. And they had some good ideas! So the next step was to systematize the feedback, apply suggested changes and get back to the group with a report, something that would make them understand that their voices had been heard and had impacted the project, or at least were kept into consideration:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1qc25R5wuoOUEfm4T7MFQ1F-ZnytDVQzg2pihxDbBEfo/edit?hl=en#>

- **How long did the whole project take?**

The actual work was about 3 months, but then we got stuck, and the project got stalled. The platform is there, it's ready. Been its' been ready for almost a whole year. It will go through eventually.

- **Who actually paid you and how did that work?**

They were very honest & precise. Funding came through the innovation fund administered by Helvetas. Officially hired by them, working for KM4Dev.

3. How would you describe the final outcome?

This is the sad part of the story. The final product is good, but it never went live. Bureaucracy is everywhere. I have been waiting for months for the technical people that are responsible for the hosting of the old wiki to collaborate with me in moving the new wiki to production. It's just a technical thing. But I must say it is the most difficult step.

By the way, you can take a look at the new and old wikis and make your own considerations:

OLD: <http://wiki.km4dev.org>

NEW: <http://km4dev.pdavide.com>

I must say that most of the content is still in my laptop. It's ready, but I wanted to wait until the new wiki was in place before flooding it with content.

4. Finally, imagine one or two ways in which others might be involved or things might have been improved, obstacles removed, or a greater success achieved.

About involving people: the new system would require some commitment in summarizing KM4Dev discussions, to be then archived and categorized in the wiki. One idea is to give to the member who started the discussion (usually by asking a question to the network) the responsibility of summarizing it. It's a way to give back to the community. We'll see.

A greater success, difficult to say now. I am still waiting to see how people will react to, and interact with, the new website. My idea was to continue providing support to the community by opening a channel for new feature requests. Future innovation funds would then constitute good occasions to realize the community's wishes in this sense.

5. Who might be interested in this story? How could sharing it increase awareness of how things actually work in KM4Dev?

This is tricky. I don't know. What I know is that the most positive aspect of this story corresponds to the most negative aspect that I encountered in a recent study I did on 26 KM projects within the UN system:

<http://www.scribd.com/doc/53526423/UN-The-KM-Experience>

The most recurrent problem in these projects was that they were not based on the needs of their beneficiaries. It sounds so savvy and simple, but yet few people really apply this mentality. People do things for other people but they always omit to ask what these other people really want/need. KM4Dev, it works better.

Anybody interested in setting up a new tool for supporting a Community of Practice should take this as an example.

Vignette # 2: Gathering bloggers initiative as a case study by Ewen Le Borgne

This Vignette is also a compilation of an exchange between Ewen Le Borgne and John Smith that did not receive much comment during the visit but is offered for consideration here.

The story of http://wiki.km4dev.org/wiki/index.php/KM4Dev_Bloggers

1. What is the context or ground for this story?

Ewen: The main background for this story is the fact that I read blog posts from a handful of KM4Dev bloggers (a.o.) such as Ian Thorpe, Roxanna Samii, Joitske Hulsebosch, Nancy White etc. and I blog on a regular basis myself. And what happens with blogs is a lot of good thoughts are posted and published and stay on the public attention (if any) for just until the next post pushes the top item down. Progressively your good content gets buried and you lose the opportunity to share it with others who may find your stuff useful! I just thought there must be so many bloggers in the KM4Dev community, having written such interesting things, that it would be a shame not to tap into that potential and get a selection of the 'KM4Dev cream of the crop' blog posts.

2. How did things unfold and what were the significant events in the story? What did people do? What roles did "invisible tools" (like telephones and email) play, along with other tools?

In a typical KM4Dev fashion, it just takes one person to write sthg to the community and see what happens. I emailed KM4Dev to seek bloggers' recommendations for their best posts and put it on the Ning too - to get everyone's attention. I did not approach anyone bilaterally, though in hindsight I should have. I did send a reminder on the mailing list to have everyone keep sharing their gems.

The tools involved here were: the blogs of course, the Ning, the KM4Dev mailing list and the KM4Dev wiki on which I promised I would publish the final results.

3. *How would you describe the final outcome?*

We collected between 1 and 5 top posts from 8 different bloggers. That's really not much compared with the KM4Dev community (currently around 1900 members) and even compared with the blogging KM4Dev community (I would expect a couple of hundreds). But then again it's a start, it's there, it can be built upon, and the comments about the final result (http://wiki.km4dev.org/wiki/index.php/KM4Dev_Bloggers) have all very positive. They even led one community member to call upon technical expertise to get a regular selection from these blogs fed on one single page - so the community is already on to owning this resource and adapting it to the next step, which is ideal really!

4. *Finally, imagine one or two ways in which others might be involved or things might have been improved, obstacles removed, or a greater success achieved.*

Well of course if I had contacted quite a few people to remind them to share their posts and if they had done the same we probably would have ended up with better posts. I guess we could all have provided a tiny bit of background to the posts to make them easier to use in case their title is not clear enough. Finally I think the time I gave perhaps was too short, as one participant mentioned that we are just dealing with really busy professionals here. But again all in all, this is a good start, and it certainly could do with some follow up.

5. *Who might be interested in this story? How could sharing it increase awareness of how things actually work in KM4Dev?*

Perhaps other communities that revolve around stories and IM/KM technology; arguably any community really but the former would be likely to have bloggers among them. For donors of our community it can also be another means to show how great information can be mobilised through vibrant communities of practice like KM4Dev. If this seems useful for anyone else, I guess the important point in sharing this would be to refer to a few facts: First off, anyone can come up with any such initiative and the group energy makes it or breaks it - it's open space as a community of practice and that usually works wonders. Also: a) we encourage summarisation of discussions and active content publishing on the wiki b) we have a great and diverse group of members that have lots to share and their personal hobbies (e.g. their blogs) can be mobilised to inspire others too c) involving all of them early on to get the best results is useful and d) because we are busy people, it's probably good to activate bilateral channels at the same time, to just grab the phone and get your mates to help there too. Ah, one final thing: KM4Dev is all about work in progress, life in perpetual beta and so on, so this is just one exercise of stock-taking, but we will most likely revisit this in the future, and I think that's an interesting aspect of KM4Dev as a community too.