



## A self-sustaining knowledge sharing environment

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Nagarro is a company which is highly dependent on knowledge: knowledge of providing the best solution, knowledge of knowing the right technology to implement a given solution, the knowledge on how to best take care of our customers, the knowledge to succeed where others have failed. At Nagarro, this knowledge is created every day and every hour – as we talk to our customers and discover new things; as our project teams learn new techniques to solve difficult problems; as our architecture teams learn newer technologies (or perfect old ones) – we are always creating knowledge. However, as a fast growing company, we were finding it a little difficult to efficiently share this knowledge so that everyone would learn from the learning of everyone else.

The area of knowledge management is something that is very old and very well studied; large enterprises spend a lot of their mindshare towards it. Even at Nagarro we have worked on many mediums through which knowledge is shared (intranet, team wikis, organizational learning databases, internal blogs, forums, etc.). However, what we have discovered is that the amount of knowledge shared through these mediums is not the same as the amount that is created. Another thing that we noticed is that enough people weren't volunteering to write an article, or create a new knowledge topic, or share new interesting stuff that they have read. We tried to incentivize people through recognitions. We tried technologies such as SharePoint to create platforms that would make it easy for people to create knowledge. Somehow, it wasn't working out.

One of the things that we found out is that it is very hard to mandate people into creating knowledge. Additional recognition doesn't help; monetary incentives don't help either. So, we can't tell someone in the architecture group to write at least one new article a week – they would always be too busy with work to do this. Or, we couldn't get the travel desk to release new travel tips every month based on the number of people who were traveling. It turns out that creating knowledge is a creative

process; and numerous studies show that incentivizing or mandating creative processes is actually counter-productive. So, we decided to turn the problem around.

We introduced something called k-mined (short for knowledge mined) – we developed a knowledge sharing platform by borrowing ideas from two of the Internet's most famous properties: reddit and stackoverflow. K-mined is a platform that allows users to share thoughts, ideas, links, documents, etc. in a very simple to use manner; and it allows users to rate, comment upon, and consume the shared content. It may not sound like much, however, within 2 months of rollout to a pilot user base of 50 users, we had 350 articles submitted, 700 comments, 50 new topics created, and 275 tags were added to tag the content. Above all, we had over 17,000 views – on average each user had visited k-mined over 300 times. We were on to something here – what was happening?

We allowed absolute freedom for people to do whatever they wanted. There is no approval process, no mandatory submission requirements, no moderation, and no pre-meditated bucketing of content. The users choose to create what they want. The users choose to consume what they want; to comment on what they find interesting; to add to an article by sharing their own expertise or experience. The quality of the content shared is controlled by the users themselves – good interesting content is rated more, has more comments, and ranks better on k-mined.

We made k-mined very responsive. It is blazing fast; it doesn't take more than half a second to serve any page on the platform. This is very important since people are doing things voluntarily and we don't want them to feel that this is a chore. We take any feedback very seriously; most feedback is incorporated within a week and rolled out. We made it fun to use – users sometimes suggest changes to the logo of k-mined, and we incorporate those; users sometimes upload their own logo, and we use them. Everyone gets a feeling of participation – and none of this is solicited, it's all voluntary.

Once the sharing started, the consumption followed. We see comic strips being shared by users being used in presentations that people make. We see our sales team using content that is shared by the delivery teams in their sales pitches. We see ideas being shared and users from totally different teams collaborating to make these ideas a reality. We have a platform which our users voluntarily flock to in order to share what they have on their mind.

There are reasons for why we chose to custom implement this platform, instead of buying a market leading tool – first one is cost. K-mined has been developed by a group of developers in house on their own time – yes, even the development of the platform is on a voluntary basis. Ask a developer to work extra hours for a project that is to be delivered to a client, and it is mostly met with a frown; ask developers to make something cool where they have complete freedom on the choice of technology and features, and they will work nights and weekends to create it. Our developers make use of various technologies and tools for the application (asp.net for the base platform, Amazon SES

for emails, quartz.net for scheduling, lucene.net for search, JQuery templates, HTML5, etc.) and have a lot of fun learning some of these technologies. The choice of the technology is totally up to the developer. We didn't need to have any upfront investments for something that initially was experimental at best. In essence, the entire platform has been created at no cost to Nagarro. And everyone who participates in the development picks up additional skills while having a lot of fun.

Another reason to make a custom platform is flexibility. The biggest thing our users appreciate is that any user feedback is analyzed and incorporated very quickly. A custom platform gives us this freedom and ability; the developers know the platform well and can tweak it very quickly to implement most of the feedback items.

We are getting a lot of benefit out of k-mined now that it is in full swing. We have employees who are happy and excited about a knowledge sharing tool. We frequently see users posting content which is amplified by other users by adding to the same content from their own experience and research. We hear people referring to posts on k-mined and sending links that they found interesting to their team members. We are still innovating on how to increase the stickiness of the platform, and how to improve the discoverability of content already shared on k-mined – it is a continuously evolving process.

As a services company we find that any innovation is a competitive advantage. When we see that our employees are using a common collaboration platform to exchange ideas, we are very happy because this helps drive innovation. For example, through an idea shared on k-mined, two people met each other and formed a repository for prototypes that are created by various projects as part of their R&D effort. Now, we have a repository which can be searched by everyone in Nagarro, whereas earlier these prototypes would lie in isolation in various project repositories. Nagarro takes pride in being a trusted advisor to its clients, and such initiatives help us be better advisors across the board.

In retrospect, something that started as an experiment has worked out very well for us. As a services company which provides technology solutions to its clients, our strength lies in our knowledge of software development technologies. What we do wrong sometimes is to make a mistake of thinking that technology is the answer to every problem. Through k-mined, we realized that it is much more important to figure out how to use technology in a way that it makes sense to people – to use it in a way which makes it feel natural. We have great expectations from k-mined and we have an equally great number of things planned. It will be an exciting journey.