

# Staff Profile Pages

By Olivier Serrat

## Rationale

A determinant of organizational performance is the ability to leverage expert knowledge. Much of that is tacit and therefore difficult to capture, codify, and make available through search engines and database technologies. And so, when looking we usually turn to people we know for quick, reliable information. (Chance conversations can help too.) However, in the globalized economy, personal networks are no longer sufficiently diverse to identify all the right persons, much as reliance on random connections is a thing of the past. Staff directories are no longer adequate to the task:<sup>1</sup> learning organizations thrive on rich and fluid linkages and need expertise location capabilities to put people in contact with one another.



Staff profile pages are dynamic, adaptive electronic directories that store information about the knowledge, skills, experience, and interests of people. They are a cornerstone of successful knowledge management and learning initiatives.

## Definition

Staff profile pages<sup>2</sup> are electronic tools that locate knowledge and expertise in an organization. Their purpose is to enable conversations that facilitate the emergence of rich communities of practice (or interest) in and across sector or thematic groups. In the process, especially if they can be linked with the knowledge resources that an individual has contributed, they create context-rich knowledge assets.

## Benefits

Staff profile pages are technologically quite simple and quite effective in helping organizations know what they know. They allow people to find the tacit knowledge they need by making it easy to find the people who hold it, and can also underpin corporate initiatives collaboration, knowledge sharing and learning, and knowledge capture and storage. Naturally, they are particularly beneficial to large organizations that have offices in different locations.

<sup>1</sup> Staff directories list names, job titles, departments, and contact details. Typically, they are NOT: linked to knowledge resources, connected to sector or thematic communities, searchable, attractive, lively, or championed by managers. What is worse, their more advanced versions are often mistakenly linked to skills assessment and evaluative systems: consequently, they encourage people to overstate their skills or conversely discourage them from populating the database.

<sup>2</sup> The term is taken here to equate with "white pages", experts' directories, expertise directories, skills directories, and capabilities catalogues.

## Building Dynamic Pages

Staff profile pages that connect people to generate conversations can only be voluntary and must therefore encourage personal ownership and maintenance. To build dynamic pages:

- i) preserve a balance between the discipline of restrictive formats and the chaos of not having a format. This calls for a delicate mix of formal and informal content,<sup>3</sup> and templates that individuals can use to customize, create, and update their entries are popular. Fixed terms or options for some fields may be appropriate. Multiple versions of uploaded biodata should be allowed.

## Staff Profile Page Template

**Photograph:****Name:****Job Title:****Department and Division:****Contact Details:****Expertise:** Fast facts (2 paragraphs) covering

- Areas of knowledge or expertise (selected from a pre-defined list of themes; staff should record extensive knowledge only)
- Sectors and countries of experience (selected from a pre-defined list of sectors; staff should record extensive experience only)

**Education and Professional Qualifications:****Affiliations:****Biography:** Fast facts (2–3 paragraphs) covering

- Work experience (employment history)
- Current job description
- Main areas of interest (memberships in communities of practice, working groups, knowledge networks, etc.)
- Languages spoken (staff should rank their ability, e.g., “Good”, “fair”, “slight”)
- Recent work:
- Current studies
- Previous involvements

**Publications:**

- Books
- Monographs, journal articles
- Magazine, newspaper, and selected less formal publications
- Selected unpublished items
- Selected speeches
- Contributions to compilations / edited volumes / other published work
- Multimedia
- Blogs/blog posts

**Biodata:** (multiple version)

<sup>3</sup> Staff profile pages will help people find others but the chances that they will actually act on the information and contact a person will be greater if they feel they “know” them. Familiarity can be promoted by including some personal information, e.g., hobbies, interests, holidays, etc., and avoiding sterile passport-style photographs in people’s entries.

- ii) Ensure that the design is inclusive, embedded in people processes, and connects to sector and thematic networks in the organization. By helping forge communities of practice or interest it is possible to identify champions and promote use.
- iii) Maximize the attractiveness of the platform with multimedia that relates to the expertise advertised.
- iv) Turn the pages into an evolving or smart system. However powerful staff profile pages are in themselves, they still force staff to seek answers. Also, staff have no means to know if someone else is investigating the same subject, thereby missing the opportunity to pool resources and avoid duplication of effort: adaptive staff profile pages that learn as they are used enhance an organization's ability to identify, create, store, share, and use knowledge.
- v) Add further value to the staff profile pages by linking them to the other knowledge management tools that might be available on an intranet or internet, such as good practice notes, and vice versa.

### Others

Of course, any electronic directory must be marketed internally to encourage participation, and senior staff should sponsor the rollout. Guidelines and training to encourage staff to use the pages and add entries are necessary too. Lastly, it is also necessary to track use and measure that effectively to continuously promote staff profile pages across the organization.

### For further information

Contact Olivier Serrat, Head of the Knowledge Management Center, Regional and Sustainable Development Department, Asian Development Bank ([oserrat@adb.org](mailto:oserrat@adb.org)).

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Asian Development Bank  
6 ADB Avenue, Mandaluyong City  
1550 Metro Manila, Philippines  
Tel +63 2 632 4444  
Fax +63 2 636 2444  
knowledge@adb.org  
www.adb.org/knowledgesolutions