Openness and subsidiarity

how Wikimedia technical efforts should change

bit.ly/wmcee19-ptstrat

Movement strategy

- 2016-17: strategic direction (large-scale community discussions)
  - Service and Equity: By 2030, Wikimedia will become the essential infrastructure of the ecosystem of free knowledge, and anyone who shares our vision will be able to join us.
- 2018-19: recommendations (working groups, strategy salons)
  - Draft recommendations, still to be harmonized
- 2020: implementation

Structural vs programmatic

- Parallel process: WMF & affiliates plan programmatic activities, working groups plan structural change
- Programmatic: what we are going to do (develop software / feature X).
- Structural: how we are going to do it (especially, how to change roles and processes within the movement)
- Not in scope:
  - individual bugs / features ("Commons should allow MP4 uploads!")
  - product vision ("Wikipedia should be video-based!")
  - technology vision ("Wikipedia should be on the blockchain!")
- In scope: structural change needed to handle recurring problems / challenges. E.g. how do we involve the community better in decision-making? what kind of systems or processes or groups need to be in place for it?

Focus areas

- Governance - how technical decisions are made
- Distribution of work - who is expected to perform technical tasks, what resources they get and what responsibilities they have
- Technical community - are new and old technical volunteers supported in their work and their growth?
- (other things not discussed here: supporting the technical community, funding of technology, social and ethical impact of our technology choices)

Current problems

- Governance:
  - Users are consulted before software changes but for the most part do not get to participate in planning, prioritizing and decision-making. As a result, some technical decisions are made with limited understanding of the impact on wiki communities and with little or no buy-in from those communities.
  - There is limited capacity in the communities to understand and engage with product strategy.
  - The movement lacks large-scale discussion and decisionmaking structures.
- Distribution of work:
  - Almost all technical work is done by the WMF and (to a lesser extent) WMDE. Creates economy of scale but also cultural bias and lack of empowerment, and misses out on capacity building opportunities.
  - There is no structure for coordinating technical efforts between organizations or ensuring organizations have the required capacity to take on technical tasks successfully, which is a barrier for a more distributed system of working.

Recommendations

- Open Product Proposal Process: set up an open and transparent project proposal process where WMF, affiliates, community members, and readers can all participate and decision-making power is shared to some extent with the communities, who in turn commit to honoring the decisions they are involved in.
  - Makes planning and prioritization more transparent, more equitable, more robust (based on more diverse input) and more predictable (since commitments are collected upfront).
  - Problem: setting goals with a $100M budget requires significant background knowledge (of feasibility, audience, movement goals, technology trends etc).
    -> Disseminate Product Knowledge: Create a team that is tasked with ensuring that the factual basis of ongoing projects and strategic decisions available, easily accessible to the average reader, and provided to the communities.

Recommendations

- [Open Product Proposal Process](#)...
  - Problem: quality of discussions in the movement varies and tends to get worse with scale
    -> [Support Community Decision-making](#): provide community members with discussion / governance platforms that support constructive and inclusive discussion and consensus-building at scale (are accessible, multilingual, handle disruption and toxic behavior, allow self-moderation, support task management, refactoring and summarization workflows, voting and similar formal decision making processes, and nudge participants towards constructive, thoughtful and scalable interaction norms).

Recommendations

- [Evaluate and Decentralize Technology Components](#): identify what components of product and technology development can be decentralized,, and distribute work between interested affiliates.
    - Problem: technology vision needs to remain cohesive
    -> set up an iterative strategic consultation to determine long-term goals in a participatory way, and have that roadmap guide technical work.
    - Problems: organizations might overestimate their ability and fail and/or damage the brand or community trust.
    -> define responsibilities and expected capabilities.

Feedback!

(If you are reading these slides online, you can provide feedback on the talk pages of the [working group](#).)