

A Culture of Experimentation for Wikimedia



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Change is healthy

- In the early years, we made up the rules as we went
- Later, many rules have become less changeable
- But wikis thrive on change and adaptation
- When the stakes are high, determining *which* change is desirable becomes harder. And we argue in circles.
- E.g. should we change how we discuss notability? (if so, how?) Should we change how we welcome newbies? (how?) Should we accept oral citations? (how?)



Experiment!

- Disciplined **experimentation** is a method of exploring possible change towards desired results
- Discipline is key:
 - Goals
 - Hypotheses
 - Timelines
 - Evaluation
 - Post-experiment action (or reversion)

Example #1

- **Goals:** increase retention of new contributors
- **Hypotheses:** 1. failure saps motivation; 2. conflict saps motivation; 3. recognition boosts motivation; 4. recognizing good contributions is easier than preventing failure/conflict.
- **Experimental action:** systematically identify "promising" newbies (e.g. using **Quarry**, find new contributors who have made substantial edits in the last three months and are still editing) and leave a note of appreciation on their talk page.

Example #1

- **Timeline:** six months
- **Evaluation:** compare retention of appreciated users to baseline rate of retention (measured in advance)
- **Post-experiment action (or reversion):** if the evaluation shows a significant increase in retention, make it a permanent practice. If not, stop, and look for some other action to achieve the goal.

Example #2

- **Goals:** increase coverage of undercovered topics; increase diversity of viewpoints covered
- **Hypotheses:** 1. Information on Wikipedia should be verifiable. 2. It is difficult to cite oral knowledge without a permanent representation. 3. Reputation matters
- **Experimental action:** identify a **partner** *already capturing* oral knowledge, review their curation practices, and, if suitable, declare their material citeable on wiki.
- **Timeline:** 12 to 24 months

Example #2

- **Evaluation:** 1. compare coverage of topics the partner covers to baseline coverage. (Has there been significant increase beyond the expected organic one?); 2. Count instances of patently false information discovered to have come from the partner's materials, and compare to traditional sources (e.g. newspapers)
- **Post-experiment action** (or reversion): keep the partner citeable, or revert all the citations; possibly seek another partner

What would you like to experiment with?



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In conclusion...



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We are here to help!

- The Wikimedia Foundation, and the Community Development team, are interested in working with all of you on ways to build skills and capacity. Talk to us!
- Discuss the **idea of experimentation** in your communities. If there's appetite to try, we can support you with tools, analysis, and advice!



THANK YOU

Keep in touch!

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