

# Skill-building and a culture of experimentation for WikiArabia



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# Who am I?



# CCD: A successful pilot

The hypothesis:

- There are certain community capacities all thriving Wikimedia communities need developed.
- Some Wikimedia communities have under-developed capacities, or plateaued and aren't developing a particular capacity.
- WMF can usefully assist a particular community to build a specific capacity, and to "level up" or overcome an obstacle.



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Cuteness approved!

# The pilot years

- Conducted qualitative research (~20 community interviews)
- Selected (emerging) communities for pilots -- **Brazil** (communications); **Tamil** (on-wiki tech skills); **Ukraine** (conflict engagement)
- Developed curriculum
- Delivered in-person in-country training with experts
- Evaluated and wrote [final report with recommended next steps](#)
- WMF did not make a decision following the pilot; defaulted to piloting some more, and acting on the recommendations within the *pilot*-level budget.
  - E.g. month-long Wikidata and technical training trip in 8 cities in India.



# So, does this work?

Short answer: yes!

Longer answer: yes, and it has additional beneficial side-effects

# Key lesson

This "high-touch" approach works: communities appreciate attention and customization to their context. Communities successfully "leveled up".



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# Key lesson

In-person, in-language, in-country training is effective  
and engaging



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# Key lesson

Materials are significantly re-usable. Needs are often shared across communities.



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# Some side effects

Trainings developed for CCD were **repeated** at international conferences (Wikimania; Wikimedia Conference), regional conferences (CEE Meeting; Wiki Indaba) and national ones (India, Ukraine, Bulgaria).

Material is being re-used by others, e.g. the Wikidata training has been recorded at high-quality for online use; the Facilitation Skills training was delivered by a colleague at a Learning Day event.



# Some quotations

- "The **quality and depth of the training** by experienced WMF staff can't be matched by outsiders."
- "Very few people can come to the international events. **We need WMF to come to communities** in their own countries, and ideally in their own language."

# Some quotations

"I was aware of Wikidata, but **found it complicated, too confusing** to understand beyond interwiki. **Now I think it is the future** of Wikipedia. My mind was blown. **I was inspired and started contributing massively.**"

"I attended lectures about [Wikidata], but not one had engaged me and made me actually want to contribute. [...] I was **finally persuaded** that I should invest time and go to actively contribute to Wikidata"



# But does it scale?

Yes, it scales. Not like Visual Editor scales across communities, but **across time**. It sows seeds that keep on giving. It builds capacities that are then maintained by the active community. Effective capacity building "stays built".

Once the **initial obstacle** or lack of awareness/knowledge is overcome, the community continues **organic growth**.



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# But does it scale?

Capacity-building is a high-investment activity (limited in time and specific in scope). But it is a good investment when effective.

**Crucially, it fulfils a need not met by any other process.**

**Technological innovation cannot be the only tool deployed by WMF in support of the communities it serves,** as it does not address the variety of needs and obstacles those communities face in their natural growth and activity.



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# So now what?

This strategic pilot was  
**successful**  
and the model proven.



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# We're now working on:

1. Community Capacity Map
2. Online learning platform
3. Empowering proven trainers
4. Learning request channel





# Community Capacity Map

Mapping needs and potentials for  
investment in capacity-building  
[[m:CCM]]

# CCM: why?

- The pilot relied on **personally observed** needs and staff assessments. This cannot be comprehensive and equitable, long-term.
- Self-assessment is **inclusive, participatory, equitable, and potentially insightful**, for both the orgs/groups and WMF.
- Having an overview of strengths and needs across the movement allows WMF to **allocate resources wisely** and effectively (e.g. regionally)

# CCM: how?

- Every org, group, or community is invited to self-assess on any number of Wikimedia capacities.
- There are [guidelines](#) to assist in self-assessment
- In addition to the current capacity level, we are interested in the **robustness** of the capacity
- Assessments can be done in meetings, online, all at once, or gradually.
- Once enough information is collected, decisions about investment can be made.
- Over time, capacity and robustness **changes** (growth and decline) can be **tracked**.
- There is [a cool tool](#) to ease input, developed by User:Edgars.



# Online learning platform

- A structured, self-service learning platform (cf. MOOCs) with video and written tutorials and modules.
- Translatable, private, using Wikimedia accounts.

# Benefits of learning plat.

- **Translations** - learn in your own language
- **Structure** - learn a course of modules to master a skill-set (e.g. "batch uploads" or "public speaking")
- **Tracking** - track your progress; optionally, be discovered by people needing your experience (e.g. "who speaks Arabic and knows how to reconcile data with Wikidata?")

# Empowering proven trainers

- Effective training depends **enormously** on the ability of the trainer and quality of training materials
- We want to **empower** (cultivate, fund, support) people who are not only experts at a topic, but have also **proven to be effective trainers**.
- This plan is not budgeted yet. More details next year.

# Learning request channel

We are designing an online channel (details still to be decided, but it will probably be on [Wikimedia Space](#)) where you would be able to request support for any kind of learning: from requesting a whole pre-conference like Learning Days for your event, to just requesting help on how to accomplish something

# Learning request channel

There will be a guaranteed service level (response within N days), at least some multilingual support, and responses will range from online resource links through video calls for mentorship, to whole funded events.



Quick discussion:  
**What skill-building is  
most needed in  
WikiArabia communities?**



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Toward a culture of experimentation



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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 interesting 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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