Finding A Common Denominator

It’s not a secret that the world of eHealth is pretty chaotic. It’s saturated with information, yet it’s not easy to find useful pieces of knowledge. Field experts are consistently talking about the need for knowledge dissemination, active collaboration, engagement of stakeholders, empowering local communities and supporting capacity development. Despite a call for reusability of existing resources, donor organizations continue to invest huge sums of money, often in parallel, into information sharing portals that operate in silos. These systems take time and money to develop, and often cease to exist after funding runs out. Additionally, if we consider all of the best intentions to build knowledge sharing portals we have learned at the very least that the “if we build it they will come” approach simply doesn’t work. Today’s reality of eHealth is such that there are no incentives to share information.

At the same time, when it comes to team collaboration, we see it as a separate domain, and in the donor-driven world we are used to the status quo. We all are accustomed to using multiple tools to work with our teams. To create and publish a simple report, distributed teams typically use about five different tools – email, Wiki, Google Drive, calendar, and ListServ. In summary, there is no public awareness that knowledge management and collaboration should be part of one cohesive process that includes finding and adopting reusable information, creating new content, gathering input, coordinating activities and publishing results. So, what can be done?

Simple Math

When I was studying applied mathematics, I was taught that if a formula results in an answer that is not simple – it’s probably wrong. Applied mathematics is a very beautiful science, and I admire this from the perspective of a woman - it describes various complex processes with straightforward and elegant formulae. Some of my friends who were working as math tutors had a simple test for pupils on adding fractions. Finding a common denominator was a basic skill required to move forward with lessons.

I believe that one of the challenges we face in the world of eHealth is that organizations and initiatives continue operating in their segregated section – they continue dividing the global world of knowledge into fractions. To move forward, we should seek simple and elegant solutions; we need to consolidate knowledge and collaboration, to bring people together and to find that common denominator.

Leave it to the professionals

It has been three years since I got the exciting opportunity to work on a global knowledge management system for health ICT, known today as HingX (pronounced Hinge – eX). Our approach to community-driven development brought amazing results: over 20,000 people from 180 countries come to HingX to find information, share knowledge and collaborate. One thing we learned in the process is that technology is just a tool. The success of any initiative is mostly dependent on people and process. The purpose of good technology is to make an existing process more effective, to enable people to do their job better. One of the conceptual differences of HingX from other initiatives that come and go in the world of eHealth is that our sole focus is on making stellar enterprise technology for all. When a project manager doesn’t have to worry about different knowledge management and collaboration tools, but rather spends his or her energy on core business activities, the results will benefit all: an increased success rate of eHealth initiatives around the world.

What’s Next?

To make things work, we need to challenge the status quo. In a world that thrives on reinventing the wheel, it will not be an easy task, yet I remain optimistic. We
will see more sustainable initiatives and improved local capacity when we treat knowledge as a product of collaboration, so sharing it will become a natural continuation of an existing process. The next evolutionary step will be a fusion between knowledge management and community collaboration into knowledge collaboration.

In addition, I also believe that we should think outside of the “eHealth box” and see how we can reuse knowledge created in other industries, such as finance and agriculture. Lines between technology verticals are getting more and more blurred, so we should embrace integration, common environment, and a model that we’ve all learned from our childhood that “sharing is caring”.

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