

Global JAM on Collaborative Technology Requirements for Social Change

kpublic • Lars Soeftestad • Forum posts •

You are logged in as Lars Soeftestad (Logout)

Posts

Lars Soeftestad

Profile	Edit profile	Forum posts	Blog
Posts	Discussions		

Page: (Previous) 1 2 3 4 (Next)



GLOBAL JAM FORUM -> LEARNING -> Re: LEARNING - learning from a case in Botswana

by Lars Soeftestad - Thursday, 19 July 2007, 04:34 PM

I would like to share with you a story, a project, a narrative, and a glimpse into unimaginable suffering and social upheaval. It is one that addresses all the key foci in this forum, that is, creating, seeing, sharing, using and connecting knowledge, albeit in a way – and with outcomes – that are perhaps somewhat unexpected. As a massive case of social engineering, employing heavy amounts of ICTs, this case is still unfolding. The use of social networking tools is so far not pronounced, but I am nonetheless confident you will find it interesting.

When HIV/AIDS struck, Botswana was one of the countries hardest hit. It still is. Although a very large part of the population is afflicted, you do not see it much when traveling around. But it's there. The Government understood early on that drastic measures were necessary. Funds were lacking, infrastructure not available, and trained personnel was missing. In this situation an American University, together with an American drug company and backed by massive American funds, were invited to collaborate closely with the Govt. to create, virtually from scratch, a whole new sector to address this disease. Part of this was a communication system that was built around heavy use of computers, Internet, email. This involved not just the creation of a new sector, partly built around the relevant line ministry, but also outside of it, it also implied the wholesale import of a Western-based medical system. The net result of this top-down management and social engineering has been that existing and general staff in Botswana's health services has been left partly outside of this new sector. This applies, in particular, to rural-based practitioners, namely healers (dingaka). It also applies to people representing traditional religion, the prophets (baprofiti). Both

categories are located within the indigenous medical system, which naturally is alien to the Western medical system. Apart from the obvious fact that the curative approach and ability of these traditional practitioners is vastly inferior to that of the Western medical system, it remains a fact that the use of these modern means of communication led to instant and very effective barring of these categories of people. Thus, while these technologies at one level function as inclusive, at another level they function in the exact opposite way. This is truly a question of leapfrogging, on the one hand, and marginalization, on the other hand. It is an instructive case of how ICTs both facilitate and constrain and channel communication.

I have analyzed this sector by means of a simple social network analysis, as well as by doing a stakeholder analysis, complemented by organizational/institutional analyses. Along the way I had occasion to consider both what communication is, what knowledge is, the fact that different cultures have different knowledge systems, and as well as knowledge management.

I concluded with the following two theses: (1) Networks have built-in imbalances that prevent free flow of information, (2) ICTs tend to overlay such imbalances, and to reinforce them.

This case study is an instructive documentation of the digital divide, the existence of which is a key conditioning and limiting factor for much of the work that many among us are involved in. In addition, it makes clear that there actually are two digital divides to consider: and international one, between the North and the south, and a domestic one, as found within many developing and transition countries, running partly along the traditional rural-urban divide. While both are important to focus on, the latter one more so, perhaps, because it has so far not been given a lot of attention.

I have attached a conference presentation that includes the highlights. I refer, in particular, to several tables, including the use of ICTs by sector and level, as well as some figures / flow charts.

To conclude: Cases like this are important to consider when we discuss the application of social networking tools with and within these countries. The mentioned potentials for inclusion and exclusion that the more traditional ICTs show will most certainly also apply social networking tools. Which begs the question: how to use and translate these facts in ways that change the design and usability of such tools?

[Show parent](#)

[See this post in context](#)



GLOBAL JAM FORUM -> WORKING -> Re: Virtual Worlds

by Lars Soeftestad - Thursday, 19 July 2007, 12:50 PM

Dear Tim,

Briefly, this time 😊, I fail to understand what Second Life, etc. add to the picture at all. Certainly when it comes to my concern with online communication with rural people in developing countries. The content, focus and rationale is one thing (it will appeal to the urban elites I wrote about in an earlier post today, and that's it). A very different issue is the bandwidth required, which is way beyond what is currently available commercially, not to mention the costs involved.

[Show parent](#)

[See this post in context](#)



GLOBAL JAM FORUM -> WORKING -> Re: Modernity raises its head ...

by Lars Soeftestad - Thursday, 19 July 2007, 12:40 PM

Dear Roy,

I guess your second paradox, connected with payment for global infrastructure, is not really a paradox for me. I would like to distinguish between the state and the citizens. Briefly, states are responsible for infrastructural investment, not the citizens. How states, in turn, finance such investment is what we are getting it. You seem to imply that the citizen must accept to forgo their traditional property rights in order that the state can capitalize on these resources to finance such investments. I guess you are using an analogy from a Western setting here, and refer to "eminent domain" (to use the US term) that are found in common law systems. In most developing countries the situation is a different one. While states can expropriate it would not do them much good. How should a developing country capitalize on expropriating the wetlands in Mauritania where I worked? There are no resources, no incentives, no capital.

The result is, of course, that countries like Mauritania place investment in data infrastructure rather low on the priority list. For this reason, as well as for others (hint: capital translates into power, which translates into capital) is finances and owned by private companies in the West. And with that I have touched upon a whole set of macro-level issues that we haven't even touched upon yet, content as we are to argue within the existing framework.

As an aside: Mauritania actually did expropriate the wetlands in question some years back. And not just these wetlands. Actually, the tribal law that have ruled Mauritania for hundreds of years (neatly divided between a small number of tribes) was abolished over night. Today any Mauritanian can harvest and exploit any natural resource anywhere, any time, and without asking anybody for

permission. Formally, this could perhaps be called "state property." In reality, this is a recipe for what elsewhere is called "open access."

[Show parent](#)

[See this post in context](#)



GLOBAL JAM FORUM -> WORKING -> Re: WORKING

by Lars Soeftestad - Thursday, 19 July 2007, 12:06 PM

Dear Nancy,

Thanks. One comment only, at this point, relating to the post just sent to Lynette:

I maintain that there is a qualitative difference between face-to-face communication and online communication. And this qualitative difference is that one in face-to-face interaction can play on the whole cultural context that data and information are imbedded in. In other words, knowledge for me is the contextual framework within which data and information can be best interpreted, analysed and assessed. This does of course not mean that I argue that it is not possible to have "truly meaningful interaction online". We most certainly can. It is just that the scope of what can be communicated face-to-face is broader, it is "richer", to invoke a term that I used in a post earlier today.

It occurs to me that I could perhaps make this clearer by means of some data I have collected on the upside and downside of the very fast and massive introduction of ICTs in Botswana, in connection with the emergence of HIV/AIDS in that country....

As a total aside, your term "take homes" made me realize that I'm hungry, after having looked at this screen for hours.... Which make me also realize that an intriguing part of this particular case of online communication – data, information and knowledge aside – that we all come from different backgrounds and thus use different terms and even think along different trajectories. It makes it a bit of a challenge to get at key points at times, but all the more rewarding! There is important learning to be had also at this level!

Now it's feeding time, before I sit down again for the rest of the evening, until midnight local time, when my responsibility as volunteer/facilitator is over.

[Show parent](#)

[See this post in context](#)



GLOBAL JAM FORUM -> WORKING -> Re: WORKING

by Lars Soeftestad - Thursday, 19 July 2007, 11:42 AM

Dear Lynette,

Ok. Then I guess I have misunderstood the meaning of the term "face-to-face" (F2F) as used in this context. Either that, or you use it with a different meaning than the rest of us.

As far as I have understood, the whole preceding discussion has been about online communication and F2F communication, pro et contra. Thus, I fail to understand how your "virtual F2F" differs from the "online communication" - which is also virtual? What exactly is "virtual 2F?"

The exact meaning of the term "virtual F2F" communication aside, I would like to state that while this may be more *effective* than physical meetings, I fail to understand how it can be *richer* than physical meetings. This invokes the whole discussion of the differences between information and data, on the one hand, and knowledge, on the other hand. Briefly, virtual communication (whether it is called "online communication" or "virtual F2F") concerns primarily exchange of information and data, while face-to-face communication involves exchange of information, data *and* knowledge.

PS. Maybe the terms "data," "information" and "knowledge" should be added to the glossary.

[Show parent](#)

[See this post in context](#)

Page: (Previous) 1 2 3 4 (Next)

You are logged in as Lars Soeftestad (Logout)

kpublic



Except where otherwise **noted**, content on this site is licensed under a **Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 License**