

# Next Generation Development

How web-enabled Professional Communities  
will transform development assistance

White Paper

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THE KAIZEN COMPANY  
*Development Transformations*

## **Purpose**

This paper explains how web-enabled *Professional Communities* will transform the nature and impact of development assistance, particularly for public and private sector institutional reform.

## **Evolution of the Web**

*The internet changed the world.....and then the internet changed.*

A new generation of World Wide Web technology, often called Web 2.0, has transformed the internet. The web is no longer a one-way portal from information provider to information receiver. Now, it is also a facilitator of user-to-user sharing and collaboration, a consolidator of collective intelligence, and an environment where human interactions generate content, learning, and knowledge. Sites such as Wikipedia and Facebook exemplify the web-enabled social networks that are transforming the internet and surpassing television as the medium of choice.<sup>1</sup>

The private sector is harnessing Web 2.0 technologies to create competitive advantage. Top businesses such as Ace Hardware, Cisco, IBM, Procter & Gamble, Intel, and Ernst & Young all employ online workplace communities to enhance the exchange of information with customers and across corporate silos, to improve product development, and to create competitive advantage.

The practice is spreading. In a recent survey of executives by McKinsey & Company,<sup>2</sup> a leading consultancy, more than three quarters of respondents said they planned to maintain or increase investments in technologies that encourage user collaboration such as peer-to-peer networking, social networks, and web services. Emerging markets executives participating in the survey, on average, expressed an even greater willingness to invest in such Web 2.0 technologies.

David Wilkins of Mzinga, a social media firm, aptly notes that, “When companies from such diverse industries all recognize major impacts from the same core technologies and solutions, it’s not really a question of *if* these solutions will be adopted broadly, it’s a question of *when*.”

## **Why Does This Matter to Development?**

While the challenges of development are quite different from those facing global businesses, lessons from the private sector can, should, and often are adapted to improve development effectiveness. Microfinance, for example, draws many ideas from the financial sector to provide much needed capital to micro entrepreneurs. Social marketing utilizes markets, and adapts lessons from commercial marketing, to heighten condom use in HIV inflicted areas. Government reform support is often about using lessons from the private sector to improve government performance.

The use of Web 2.0 collaboration technology, likewise, is a private sector trend that has vast potential to support development objectives. The development community is beginning to take note. USAID’s Global Development Commons, still under development, aspires to serve as an online meeting place where development stakeholders convene to discuss diverse development topics. DevelopmentEx, the industry’s leading recruitment and information source, has integrated interactive tools into its newly revamped website, and now calls itself a social enterprise and a

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<sup>1</sup> Wilkins, David. From the Anointed Few to the Collective Many: How Workplace Communities Will Transform Your Business. [www.mzinga.com/a/pdf/mzingawp-workplacecommunitiestransformbusiness.pdf](http://www.mzinga.com/a/pdf/mzingawp-workplacecommunitiestransformbusiness.pdf) P 2. 2008

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Bughin, and James Manyika. ‘How Businesses are using Web 2.0: A McKinsey Global Survey’, March 2007. [www.mckinseyquarterly.com](http://www.mckinseyquarterly.com).

place for professional connections. Both of these initiatives are promising, primarily as means to support international consultants and advisors.

The following section describes *Professional Communities*, an innovative development approach that utilizes traditional development methods in conjunction with Web 2.0 collaboration technologies. Professional Communities are distinct from the aforementioned initiatives in that they directly help and enable individuals in any given country to support each other – and in doing so to greatly amplify the breadth and depth of development assistance.

### Professional Communities

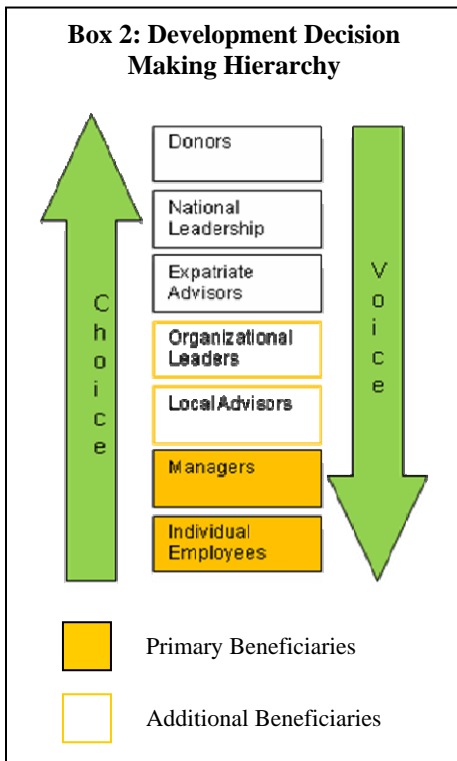
The purpose of Professional Communities is to empower professional peers in a given country to support each other through the transfer of ideas, experiences, and expertise, and, in doing so, to create progressive, reform-minded local constituencies. Diverse resources, packaged in a way that they can be easily accessed, understood, and applied, support community members in understanding the challenges they face and in making their own case for the reforms they espouse.

#### Box 1: Community Themes

Communities may cover any topic in which sufficient community members exist. Examples include:

Organizational	Technical
Human Resources	Court Administration
Communications	Export Marketing
Operations	Regulatory Reform
Finance & Accounting	Agriculture
Strategic Management	Trade

#### Box 2: Development Decision Making Hierarchy



As the name implies, Professional Communities consist of individuals who come together in mutual self-interest to advance their professional awareness, understanding, and skills. Like all social networks, Professional Communities are primarily about *bringing people together*. Technology is merely an enabler.

Each community is focused on a single theme. (Box 1) Community members work in a relevant profession (e.g. human resource professionals for the human resources community). These are primarily individuals and managers at the bottom of the development assistance decision-making hierarchy,<sup>3</sup> (Box 2), who typically receive less direct assistance and rarely have any choice, or voice, in the support they do receive.

#### Community Components

Community support is grounded in more traditional donor-sponsored activities such as forums, workshops, and trainings. These in-person events cover topics requested by community members, and have a strong networking component to help build personal relationships and trust among individual

<sup>3</sup> This group also includes leaders of local organizations, who, while not the direct focus of professional communities, can provide invaluable buy-in and support, and can benefit substantially through the more empowered and informed employees that the communities create. Local advisors receive the dual benefit of a forum for higher level learning, and an opportunity to impress potential clients.

community members. Such assistance is complemented by an interactive community web-site, developed with Web 2.0 technologies, that serves as an additional meeting place for collaboration, a consolidator of each group’s collective intelligence, a provider of local and international resources and expertise, and a means for continued support to community members *after donor involvement ends*.

Professional Communities consist of *live* and *virtual* activities, events, and assistance.

### ‘Live’ Community Events

Live community events bring community members physically together to receive technical assistance as well as to get to know one another and form personal relationships. Live events resemble assistance initiatives common to many donor projects. They are unique only in that they contain highly demand-driven content, incorporate networking activities to reinforce relationships, and are often led by community members themselves rather than outside experts. The following chart describes different types of live community events.

Component	Description
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quarterly community meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Forum where all community members convene to fortify personal relationships, discuss emerging best practices, hear from top local and international experts, and highlight newly available resources and tools.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Executive roundtables</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Small community sub-groups discuss niche topics of top priority to each specific group. Often but not always facilitated by an expert, roundtables may be in person or through call-in conferencing (to facilitate expert participation).</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reform seminar series</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A regular series of events in which community members learn the skills required to assess their organizations and enact effective change.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Member led events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Forums of various size where one or more community members lead the discussion of success stories, case studies, and issues of high local relevance.</li> </ul>

### ‘Virtual’ Community Events

In-person community events are augmented by a community website. Through a link on their desktops, community members can access virtually unlimited resources to support their reform efforts. The site also encourages community members to comment on which resources they value, view the comments and contributions of their peers, set priorities for additional assistance and community focus, and work together to localize select resources. For example, community members might work together to adapt a presentation on export marketing to include knowledge on local regulations, contact information at local export promotion agencies, etc. A community modified template for performance-based position descriptions would ensure compliance with local labor laws. The following chart describes types of virtual support.

Component	Description
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relevant resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide numerous diagnostics, templates, presentations, newsletters, case studies, podcasts, and other resources for community members to download and use to improve the organizations in which they work.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Streaming articles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bring articles and newsletters from diverse content providers to the immediate attention of community members through RSS<sup>4</sup> feeds.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community calendar</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Highlight upcoming community events as well as local, international, and regional events of potential importance to community members.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Surveys and polls</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify community priorities, hot topics, and needs; determine community direction and enable improved tailoring and targeting of technical assistance.</li> </ul>

<sup>4</sup> Really Simple Syndication.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quarterly newsletter</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distribute new, most popular, and highest-rated resources, promote upcoming live and virtual events and opportunities for assistance, recognize outstanding community members, and reach out to less active community members.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interactive media workshops</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilize video conferencing, conference calling, and instant messaging to eliminate time and space in connecting providers and recipients of assistance; use <i>wikis</i><sup>5</sup> as a means for groups of community members to collaborative and create highly localized content.</li> </ul>

## Roles and Responsibilities

Professional Communities require a transformation of the traditional roles played by assistance providers and recipients. Development ‘recipients’ also become providers. ‘Providers’ also become recipients of locally driven requests for support. Professional Communities, in effect, blur the line separating the two.

### *Role of Donor Assistance*

Donor assistance has a fundamental role to play in facilitating the success of Professional Communities, albeit one that is somewhat distinct from its role to date. Assistance for Professional Communities serves to *empower* rather than *to advise*. It creates incentives that ensure the continuous capture, distribution, and localization of approaches, resources, and expertise – ultimately across projects, countries, implementers, and time. Driven by the demands of the communities themselves, it enables local reformers with the *understanding* of best practices, the *motivation* to effect change, and the *means* to do so. It harnesses the potential of technology to make support available to a vastly greater number of progressive local reformers, while recognizing that technology enables Communities but does not drive them.

### *Role of Recipients*

Traditionally, the role of recipients is passive. Donors, implementers, and local leaders determine priorities. Consultants provide these leaders with assessments, studies, and strategic reports. Their people receive training. Sometimes, new systems are installed.

Professional Communities take a different tack.

Self-selecting community members, driven by mutual self-interest, commit to contribute as well as to take. Empowered by communities, individuals become proactive agents of their own personal development, and that of the organizations they represent. Each community supports its own, inspiring reformers and underwriting their reforms through the sharing of ideas, experiences, and expertise. Members determine the focus and direction of their respective communities – or the creation of new communities – through surveys, polls, and regular dialogue. They also respond to incentives encouraging them to support the reform initiatives of their peers, and, as needed, tap into international tools, resources, and expertise.

I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestioned ability of a man to elevate his life by conscious endeavor.

-Henry David Thoreau

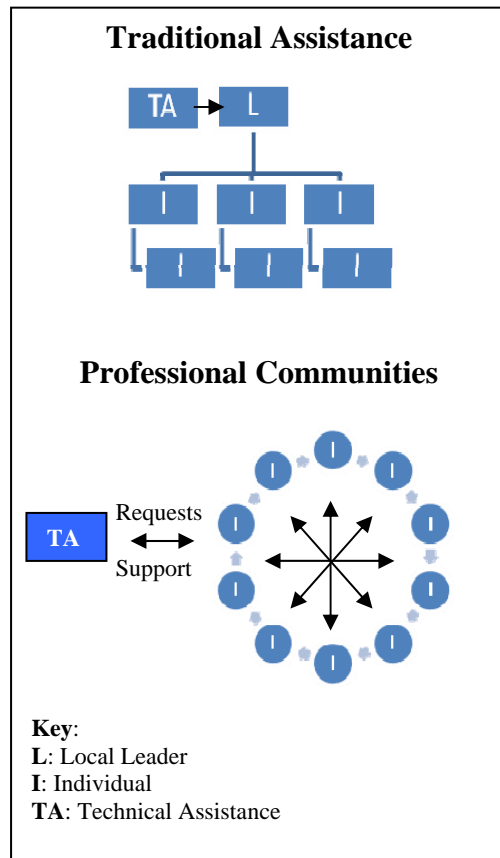
## Benefits and Envisioned Impact

<sup>5</sup> A wiki is a collection of web pages designed to enable anyone who accesses it to contribute or modify content. Sites such as Wikipedia use this technology.

Professional Communities exponentially increase the breadth, depth, and quality of the donor Dollar's (or Euro or Yen) support for institutional reforms. They create a value proposition so superior to current approaches that it makes comparison almost irrelevant. Professional Communities:

*Increase the capture and further distribution of content.* Much donor assistance with the potential to add value elsewhere goes unused after initial delivery. Professional Communities will capture such content and encourage further distribution and use. This reduces the need to recreate assistance modules from scratch each time, as is all too often done.

*Leverage local understanding, knowledge, and expertise.* Professionals in like functions often have information of more practical value to their peers than do international experts. Although it has vast potential to increase the sheer amount of available assistance, such knowledge is rarely tapped. Professional Communities unleash this local expertise as an avenue of support. For example, a Financial Manager skilled at leading his firm through audits might lend 'sanitized' accounting templates, and advice, to a peer whose firm is about to undergo its first. Box 3 illustrates how the flow of traditional donor-to-recipient assistance initiatives differs from that of Professional Communities, where community members support one another, draw from available resources, and both request and receive outside expert assistance.



*Reach a much broader demographic* than is possible through traditional development, including prospective local reformers who are otherwise given little opportunity in the development process. Live community events are of minimal expense and, where there's sufficient interest, easily scalable. The internet makes possible the virtually cost-free capture and transfer of resources.

*Create ownership of reforms.* Communities empower members to solve the problems they face firsthand, not those perceived from outside or above. Members choose how and when to apply the skills they acquire. Such choice creates ownership. Ownership improves the success rate of reforms. Success breeds further success. Many improvements will have immediate impact, and be as diverse as a streamlined government process, increased sales through improved customer targeting, or better enforcement of court decisions and improvement in the rule of law.

*Enable the localization of resources on an unprecedented scale.* While a presentation given by a

marketing expert on identifying exporting opportunities is valuable, adding country specific customs duties, inspection regulations, and a contact list of export agents makes it more valuable still. So to does a case profile describing the ups and downs and lessons learned of compatriot companies seeking to penetrate a nearby market, and hearing firsthand from the companies profiled. Such information and access are readily available through Professional Communities, which have incentives for community members to add knowledge to the collective.

*Enhance the value of short-term technical assistance.* Through Professional Communities, short-term experts who contribute to a given development initiative can follow up more readily and more frequently. For example, a specialist who helps groups of human resource managers to understand the benefits of performance-based management systems could follow up in subsequent months through community sponsored video conferences or conference calls that involve only community members who began implementing such systems in their organizations. This reduces the costs of travel and required level of effort, and creates more flexibility in the timing of follow-up events. Conference calls, complete with web presentations and online white boards, could coincide with the onset of employee evaluations at participating institutions.

*Create incentives and positive peer pressure to reform.* Many community events explicitly or implicitly highlight local successes, and the people responsible for these successes. Positive recognition of these individuals, many of whom are community members themselves, will spur others to take note and to take action.

*Increase sustainability.* Successful communities will continue independent of donor assistance. A variety of means exist to make this possible. Successful communities are market-makers for local consulting firms, as community members seek out advice in using more sophisticated resources and tools. Consulting firms may sponsor continuing community events or even post advertisements on the community website. Community members and/or their firms may also be willing to pay a modest monthly membership fee to participate in Professional Communities they value. Economies of scale make this highly affordable; and such member fee models have proven successful in a variety of settings internationally.

*Bring new entrants into development.* Professional Communities make possible the contribution of highly specialized experts who don't typically work in development assistance and might not be able or willing to travel for any length of time. For example, video conferences or conference calls could connect leaders of regulatory agencies, allowing them to speak with each other across international borders. Communities also make valuable resources from the public domain available to community members. Automated RSS feeds bring endless flows of new information from designated sources at no cost. For example, communities supporting small or growing businesses would receive a regular feed of relevant articles from *Entrepreneur* magazine.

## **Enabling Environment**

A confluence of interrelated global trends is making Professional Communities increasingly possible and compelling as a development approach. 'Live' community activities, unto themselves, are a proven, highly demand-driven means of empowering individuals and organizations to support institutional reform. Conditions necessary for the successful use of the internet and Web 2.0 collaboration technologies to supplement such activities are improving worldwide. The following describe key trends that will make the success of Professional Communities and other collaboration technologies not a question of 'if' but rather of 'when.'

The world is shrinking. Economic integration through trade, foreign direct investment, migration, and the international expansion of businesses, otherwise known as globalization, is creating an increasing number of global professionals who understand what it takes to compete globally, and to succeed in the cultures from which they come. These professionals – the products *and* promoters of globalization – are assuming leadership roles in government, business (including development consulting), and civil society. They understand that effective management requires flattened hierarchies in which employees are held accountable for results, and provided with

adequate skills to achieve these results. Armed with this understanding, they are increasingly empowering and investing in their line managers and staff.

Access to the World Wide Web is spreading. Global growth in internet usage is staggering. Currently, 21% of the world's population use the internet. Over the past eight years, the number of internet users increased by over 1000% in the Middle East and Africa, 650% in Latin America, and 350% in Asia<sup>6</sup>. Most major cities in the developing world are well connected, an astonishing fact given that the internet first came to popular use only in the 1990s. The infinite capture and transfer of resources at virtually no cost is an ever increasing reality, as are the learning opportunities that this creates.

The ability to communicate is increasing. One in five of the world's people currently speak English with some level of competency, and over one billion people study English each year. It is the primary language of international commerce, diplomacy, and science. The advent of computer assisted translation technologies is reducing barriers for those who cannot. These ever improving technologies are making the linguistic 'localization' of large quantities of information cost effective, providing individuals with valuable content in their own language. The advent of voice over internet protocol (VoIP) telephony, such as Skype, is all but eliminating the costs of international conference calls and supporting other forms of e-collaboration such as web meetings and video conferencing.

### *Criticisms*

Some pundits will argue that the above trends are not yet sufficiently widespread. They will say that many development clients have not yet learned the lessons of globalization and are not forced by competitive necessity to improve their organizations. Access to the internet is not yet universal and the ability to use more bandwidth-hungry Web 2.0 technologies varies from place to place. VOIP phone calls do not always have perfect quality and translation technologies still require a human translator to review and edit what computers produce. These pundits would be right.

They would be hard pressed to argue, however, the immutability of the trends themselves. Globalization will continue. Its lessons will spread. Competition will increase. Companies will increasingly invest in their global workforces to compete effectively. Access to the internet and high-volume bandwidth will expand. Communication technologies will improve.

So to these pundits we say, 'So what?' The conditions for 'live' Professional Community events as a means to empower broad swathes of individuals to achieve development goals already exist.<sup>7</sup> The enabling environment for virtual community support to supplement these communities is also clear and present in most major cities, albeit to varying degrees. This environment will continue to improve and expand worldwide. Each improvement makes more and more possible.

### **Conclusions**

Professional Communities, peer-to-peer networks that act as conduits of learning and knowledge, eliminate the line separating assistance providers from recipients and provide a powerful forum for individuals to become agents of change and advance developmental goals they themselves aspire to reach. The internet, and Web 2.0 technologies, can provide these communities with practically unlimited access to tools, resources, and expertise, and will extend assistance well

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<sup>6</sup> Source: <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>. 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Excepting, to some degree, extreme conflict zones.

beyond current levels at significantly lower cost. Such support transforms the very nature of assistance and fundamentally improves development's value proposition. Ultimately, Professional Communities will support institutional reforms almost entirely through market forces, augmenting and eventually supplanting the need for development assistance (the subject of another discussion). Empowered by Professional Communities, constituencies of local reformers will drive the inside-out transformation of the organizations in which they work, the institutional norms through which they interact, and the societies in which they live.