

APC FORUM: MANAGING INFORMATION AT THE INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND¹

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- The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is an organization of 186 countries, working to foster global monetary cooperation, secure financial stability, facilitate international trade, promote high employment and sustainable economic growth, and reduce poverty around the world.
- Founded: 1944
- Headquarters: Washington, D.C.
- Staff: 2,490 from 143 countries

The IMF is uniquely placed to help member governments take advantage of the opportunities—and manage the challenges—posed by globalization. The IMF tracks global economic trends and performance, alerts its member countries when it sees problems on the horizon, provides a forum for policy dialogue, and passes on know-how to governments on how to tackle economic difficulties.

The IMF has unique knowledge of 186 member country economies. However, making good use of this knowledge is a challenge because information is difficult to access and given the high turnover at the Fund, much knowledge is lost.

As Fund CIO, Jonathan Palmer is committed to improving information management so that staff can retrieve the information they need, when and how they need it: “We want to make it easy for anyone to share information via the intranet, to support collaboration both inside and outside the organization, and to link people to documents and vice versa,” he said.

Desktop@IMF, a recent intranet initiative, has a number of key components including:

- **Departmental sites.** Sites that initially involved replication, publishing and central control have become more dynamic and collaborative, while retaining a central look and feel.
- **Team sites.** The basic tool set includes a document library, announcements, lists, shared calendar, a wiki, a discussion forum, blogs, tasks, a picture library and links. Each team then tailors these tools to meet its specific needs for collaboration. Each site has some basic metadata associated with it (e.g., who owns it) to ensure it can be managed and decommissioned in the longer-term. When teams were created to address the recent global financial crisis, a team

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¹ The Advanced Practices Council (APC) is an exclusive Society for Information Management forum for senior IT executives who value directing and applying pragmatic research, exploring emerging IT issues in depth, and sharing different perspectives with colleagues in other industries. Madeline Weiss is the APC Program Director. The column was prepared by Dr. Weiss and Heather Smith, a senior research associate for the APC.

site and toolkit were available for quick organization and access to critical information.

- **My sites.** These are individual websites with both public and private sections. Still being explored is how to provide access to individual-specific information, such as development plans, or travel.
- **IMF Knowledge exchange.** The challenge of managing multiple versions of a document and knowing which one is the final is addressed by tagging the final version as “KE” versions by authorized individuals. The second challenge of having documents that were previously locked up by departments made available across the organization requires “a significant cultural shift,” and the CIO is taking steps to help the organization make that shift.
- **Search engine.** A second vendor’s search engine is being utilized.
- **Web 2.0 tools.** Mash-ups are helping to identify IMF loans; a corporate Twitter and home-grown social bookmarking tools are also being used.

As with many new initiatives, integration with legacy systems was a challenge. The IMF already had millions of documents stored in its document management system (DM5) and had developed many work practices around this technology, such as versioning, security, and control. A third-party vendor is helping to integrate the new collaboration tools.

The current global financial crisis has increased demand for new sites for information creation and sharing and has also been a catalyst for breaking down departmental silos. However, there is still a great untapped potential for collaboration and information sharing, including an “enterprise YouTube” application.

CIO Palmer outlined several lessons learned to date:

1. **Avoid customization.**
2. **Have a vision:** factor in how to use new tools and be prepared to evolve.
3. **Invest in “just enough” architecture:** the planning for a robust and scalable infrastructure has paid off.