Practice papers

Socialising DAM

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Abstract   The success of a digital asset management (DAM) or other enterprise technology project depends upon system adoption within the organisation. This paper addresses the social aspect of system user adoption and maintains that 'socialising DAM' is a key component to the long-term success of the project. Because the success of collaborative technology platforms like DAM depend heavily on the system's adoption by motivated stakeholders and key social influencers within the organisation, valuable lessons for project management can be learned from introducing innovation in social systems. These concepts should be considered and incorporated into the project design phase of a new DAM implementation. Using the implementation of a DAM system at the United Nations Children's Fund as an example, this paper explores the concepts and some techniques for designing a DAM technology project in ways to ensure good internal support across the organisation and good system user adoption.

KEYWORDS: DAM, project management, user acceptance, technology adoption, innovation diffusion, social networks

'It must be considered that there is nothing more difficult to carry out, more perilous to manage, nor more uncertain of success than to introduce a new order of things; for the innovator has enemies in all those who currently profit by the old order, and only lukewarm defenders in all those who would profit by the new order; this lukewarmness arising partly from … the incredulity of men who do not truly believe in anything new until they actually have experience of it. Whenever his enemies have the ability to attack the innovator they do so with the passion of partisans, while the others defend him sluggishly, so that the innovator and his party alike are vulnerable.'[1]
    The Prince, by Niccolò Machiavelli (1515)

Everett M. Rogers chose this time–tested quote to begin the fourth edition of his influential work on the *Diffusion of Innovations*. Rogers starts off saying that getting a new idea adopted:

'even when it has obvious advantages, is often very difficult. Many innovations require a lengthy period, often of many years, from the time they become available to the time

they are widely adopted. Therefore, a common problem for many individuals and organizations is how to speed up the rate of diffusion of an innovation.'[2]

Project managers charged with implementing innovative enterprise technologies and changing organisational work practices are all too familiar with this kind of challenge. The present paper addresses the importance of socialising a new technology platform, in particular digital asset management (DAM), and techniques for successfully driving the adoption and eventual success of implementing a DAM system. However, the same approach can be taken to socialising any similar technology platform introduced into an organisation. Because the success of collaborative technology platforms like DAM depend heavily on the system's adoption by motivated stakeholders and key social influencers within the organisation, valuable lessons for project management can be learned from innovation in social systems.

In his book, Rogers goes on to illustrate the challenges of introducing innovation within a social system with a case study about public health officials in Peru who were trying to introduce the practice of boiling drinking water to prevent the spread and recurrence of infectious diseases in the small coastal village of Los Molinas. A two-year water-boiling campaign involving 200 families succeeded in persuading only 11 housewives to adopt the practice of boiling water into their daily routine. The project failed because the implementation focused on the wrong target market of end users. The Peruvian programme persuaded only a few marginal members of the local society to adopt the innovation, while ignoring current social customs (current practices) and the indigenous knowledge system. The project failed to persuade key influencers in the village and 'ignored the importance of interpersonal networks in the adoption and rejection of an innovation'. As Rogers points out: 'we see that the diffusion of innovation is a social process, as well as a technical matter'.[2]

The idea of socialising technology innovations within the organisation is not a new one. Although most project managers these days are trained in the modern version of the 'clipboard and stopwatch' kind of methods — often these days supported by Microsoft Project or Visio — experienced project managers have learned that managing the stakeholder politics and identifying the key factors affecting user adoption have tremendous influence on the timeline, resources and eventual success of (what appears to be) a technology project. So, as Rogers points out, the introduction of innovative technology is a social process, as well as a technical matter. By analogy, 'socialising DAM' will be used herein for the techniques that can support successful diffusion (adoption) of a new technology innovation like DAM within the organisation. This paper will describe how socialising is an important part of project management and project success, as well as the design process for successful DAM implementation using the recent DAM project at the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) as a case study for illustrative purposes.

There are two kinds of socialising that have to happen for a new technology implementation project to be successful: (1) socialisation on the front end (end-user adoption); (2) socialisation on the back end (workflow/work process integration and compliance). Both sides of the system and their constituent users must be taken into consideration during the planning and design phase of the project.

The front end: User adoption

Collaborative systems are social systems

and therefore subject to the same issues and rules that affect social technology systems. DAM is a collaborative system, so is subject to these same issues, rules and organising principles. Social network economics drive the perceived value of these systems. This is the value of the system. For example, if few of one's peers or colleagues adopt the system, it will have relatively little value to return for the time invested in learning the system or curating the content (digital assets in the case of DAM) in the system. This kind of personal valuation can be seen in social networking systems from e-mail to enterprise content management systems like SharePoint, in social media platforms like LinkedIn and Facebook, as well as in DAM adoption.

Often, 'user acceptance' plays an afterthought role in the integration of a new technology platform in the organisation. Information architecture, usability, training and compliance mechanisms are important parts of the design process and roll-out — and not to be left out. However, the organisation's adoption of the system really boils down to the perceived personal value for the individual users. If adoption is merely an afterthought or assumed to be sufficiently addressed in the system design and roll-out phases, the battle to win may have already been lost over the stakeholders and end users who are needed to invest and drive adoption of the new system. In order to properly 'socialise' a new technology platform and ensure both user adoption and investment, it is necessary to begin the socialisation process early. Management may have already decided to fund the procurement and implementation of a DAM platform; however, management needs to be thinking about the adoption goals as a key metric in the success of the project. As early as the procurement phase, stakeholders and motivated end users should be brought on board to feed into the system requirements and vendor

selection process. This kind of process will ensure the investment and feeling of ownership needed to create a core adoption base that will support socialisation of the new DAM system within the organisation and, most importantly, will help drive further adoption of this system by embedding it in the social fabric of the organisation. These are the key socialisation influencers in the project.

The back end: Integration with work processes and compliance issues

Integrating the new system into current work processes, or changing work processes to support the new system, has a high impact on the individuals in the organisation who are most vital to supporting and sustaining this system into the future. Any gains achieved on the front end by successfully starting user adoption will eventually fall away if these back-end users do not take pride of ownership and steward the system forward.

In order to accomplish this, a sufficient discovery process must be included during the planning phase to uncover the potential areas where the system will impact on daily workflow. The importance of good information architecture (IA) and workflow design cannot be overemphasised here. This can be best achieved by discovering and mapping the upstream/downstream relationships between people affecting the uploading, approval and metadata input processes and their co-workers and eventually ensuring that the system is providing value for the ultimate customer: the end users who are searching and ordering assets. Figure 1 shows an example of mapping video production workflow supporting the back-end of loading and organising video assets in the DAM.

Following the upstream/downstream metaphor, asset owners are viewed as both system customers (cataloguing,

DAM video project workflow
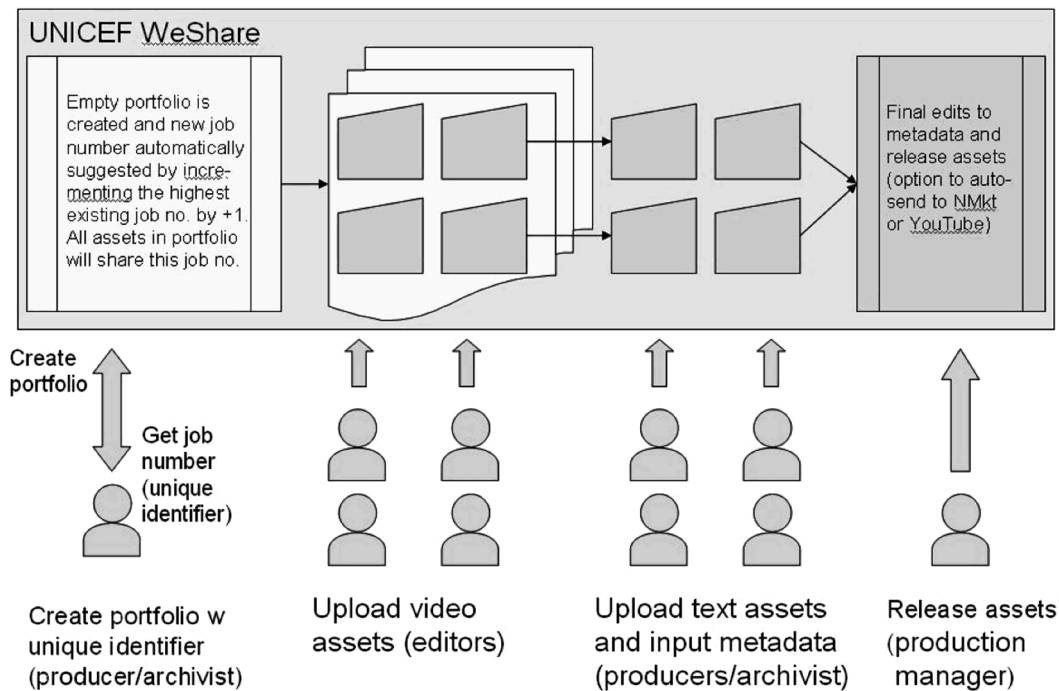
Figure 1: An example of mapping workflow on the back end
Source: UNICEF/Internet, Broadcast and Image Section

archiving assets) and vendors/distributors (providing findable assets to downstream end–users). Understanding this relationship and explaining the upstream/downstream connection to asset producers, uploaders and archivists helps to motivate better compliance by exposing the effects of poor compliance on downstream customers. Figure 2 shows an example of mapping out upstream and downstream relationships between stakeholders and end–user groups. It can be seen from the diagram that, although on the one hand there are clear management benefits in separating the admin roles for managing assets from the admin roles for managing users, especially in large organisations with many kinds of digital assets and diverse user groups, on the other hand the upstream producers of product are widely separated from their downstream

consumers. In order to bridge that gap, management needs to support internal team leadership roles to educate asset owners continually and evangelise the upstream/downstream relationships.

Value to the back–end stakeholders can also be shown by leveraging the system to distribute work to the appropriate subject matter experts and asset producers. Value on the back end should be shown by using the system to reduce redundant tasks, as well as by using it to improve the archiving and knowledge management benefits. Additionally, the asset producers, uploaders and administrators should be continually involved in process improvement (thereby supporting their stake in the outcomes). Remember to explain the value they are providing to end users and regularly report back increases in user adoption and assets distributed. Always report positive feedback about either the assets or the system.
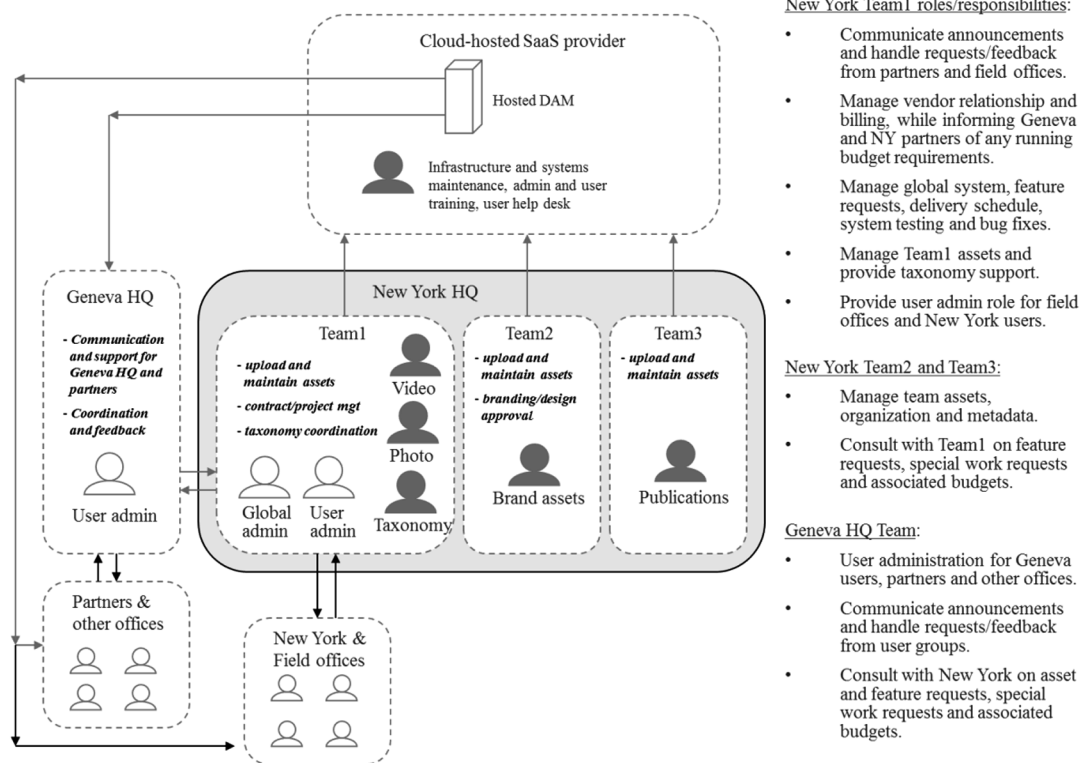
Figure 2: Diagramming the upstream/downstream relationships in the organisation
Source: UNICEF/Internet, Broadcast and Image Section

Starting on the right foot: Project design

Project design will of course include system design and IA for the DAM, especially including the upstream and downstream relationships described above, the asset archiving rules, metadata schemas for each type of asset, notification and distribution mechanisms to end 'customers', the end–user graphical user interface and the user experience factors affecting asset search/retrieval. These later components affect sustainable system organisation and asset findability; this is especially true when it comes to good metadata design. Discovering and mapping out these components is an important part of any good project plan. However, as described previously, what often gets left out is the stakeholder mapping and identification of the key influencers who

will eventually drive the system adoption and success of the project. The discovery and planning process provides the tools to identify motivated user groups and key stakeholders. (The discovery process, including stakeholder mapping and interviews, should provide sufficient opportunity to identify the motivated user groups and key influencers within the organisation ecosystem. For larger, more complex organisations, additional techniques might be used, such as organisational network analysis.)

It is important to keep this on the 'radar screen', as one navigates the planning process. The analogous situation from the Peruvian water–boiling project should be remembered: if the right stakeholders and social influencers were targeted and won over early in that project, it is quite likely that the project would have been

successful. However, the early adopters in that project were not influential in that community. So the benefits of water boiling were not reported and supported well socially.

Key influencers should be identified in all of the areas that the new DAM system touches. If working across organisational silos, in separate divisions or offices in the organisation, or in different countries in a global organisation, it is important to identify and include some key influencers from each of these target 'markets' in the early stakeholder group. Key influencers, as the name suggests, are either highly connected 'hubs' within their social network or 'bridges' between organisational silos, informally connecting important groups together. They are often perceived as the 'go to' experts or at least highly motivated DAM consumers.

Not all stakeholders should be management. Bringing the key managers of the different target markets on board is of course important to ensure both authority and good partners across organisational divisions. However, the managers will not usually be the end users who are needed to adopt and invest in the system. Motivated end users are usually the best key influencers for getting peers and colleagues to adopt the system. They are driving systems where 'the rubber meets the road'. If their scepticism can be overcome and they are encouraged to take some pride of ownership in the new system, then there will be some powerful momentum to drive end-user adoption. So, the stakeholder group that needs to be identified, and brought on board the project early, is a combination of management stakeholders to support the partnership across organisational silos and motivated users who will be the key influencers of adoption — they are the socialisers of DAM.

This is where choices in early project design and stakeholder inclusion become a bit tricky. Management may already have key stakeholder partners and target markets within the organisation identified according to organisational priorities. For DAM, these may include the owners of important or high-value digital assets. The challenge here is that these may not be the best partners, or include the best partners, for successful long-term system adoption. Remember that adoption equals success, so one needs to socialise DAM to embed it in the organisation to ensure self-sustaining user-driven adoption. So a poor choice in identifying the early stakeholder group — even if informed by organisational priorities and high-value digital assets — may not ensure adoption by key influencers, thus undermining or potentially killing the project's success.

The following is an example by analogy: the example of the social dance party.

There are basically three kinds of people at a dance party. Anyone who has recently been to a wedding, college or high school reunion, bar mitzvah, or any similar event, may have already noticed this. When the dance party starts and the band or DJ strikes up the music, the first group of people are the ones who jump onto the dance floor. They start dancing. Now, there is a second group of people standing around the dance floor looking at the first group. If the first group looks like they are having fun, the second group begins to join in the dancing. The dance floor becomes more crowded and the party really gets going. There is still a third group of people out there, however. They do not dance. They never dance. They are not bad people and they probably have other skills. But they do not dance — they did not dance last time and they will not dance next time. In the DAM dance party, if one starts with group no. 3, no matter how much of a priority their digital assets may be for the organisation, it is doomed. They will not dance, they will not drive

adoption, everything will take too long and the project will founder.

This is an important challenge that needs to be addressed early in the process. At the outset of the project it is important for management to understand the value of socialising the new platform system and that a key success metric — perhaps the most key success metric — is the rate of system adoption. This is best done by taking a phased approach. It may be challenging to get management to accept small steps and a phased approach, but the return on investment will be good if this is done properly. The downside of poor adoption is the waste of anywhere from thousands to millions of dollars, as well as lost opportunities for operational savings and/or new revenues. UNICEF was lucky to have a manager who took this idea on board and who was willing to challenge upper management on both priorities and time frame in order to get the early stages set properly.

One should start this process with the procurement/vendor selection process, the 'request for proposal' (RFP) design, product demonstrations for the identified core stakeholder group and live test drives. Then move from the procurement process to implementation in small steps. Bring the same set of stakeholders from the procurement process to a beta test scenario or pilot project to ensure that the same sense of ownership is maintained as the system is tested and developed. A beta test or pilot project group should have the opportunity for feedback and influence on the system and work process design, features implementation and fine-tuning until the system is stable and deemed ready for the larger organisational roll-out. This group of beta testers should be a complete microcosm of the system as it is envisioned to grow — including asset owners/administrators, user administrators and end-users. This group will feel

invested in the project. If one has succeeded in including some key influencers and motivated stakeholders (the dancers), this group can be counted on to help evangelise the new system among their peers, so effecting greater system adoption. They will also help to ensure that the system is user-friendly and meets the needs of all stakeholder groups.

At UNICEF, video archiving and distribution was one of the priorities for management. During the project design process, a motivated group of management stakeholders and end users was identified across different organisational divisions and across 11 countries. All of the people in this group were solicited to participate by giving feedback on the RFP document. When a qualified short list of products was identified, they were all invited to participate by viewing the vendor presentations and product demonstrations. Feedback on the demonstrations was solicited and a live test drive was provided for the more hands-on members of the group. These demonstrations and test drives used actual UNICEF assets provided by the asset owners, including video and assets from several other interested managers. So when the products were demonstrated, stakeholders saw examples that they cared about.

Once the group agreed on a DAM product for UNICEF, a pilot project was designed with the original stakeholder group, involving both the asset owners and the back-end support staff, who would be charged with incorporating the new system into their work processes. As before, the group was solicited for feedback and able to see the effect of their participation on the system design. They requested changes to the system's look and feel, the workflow process, search and navigation features, display features, metadata fields and delivery formats for the different types of asset (Figure 3).
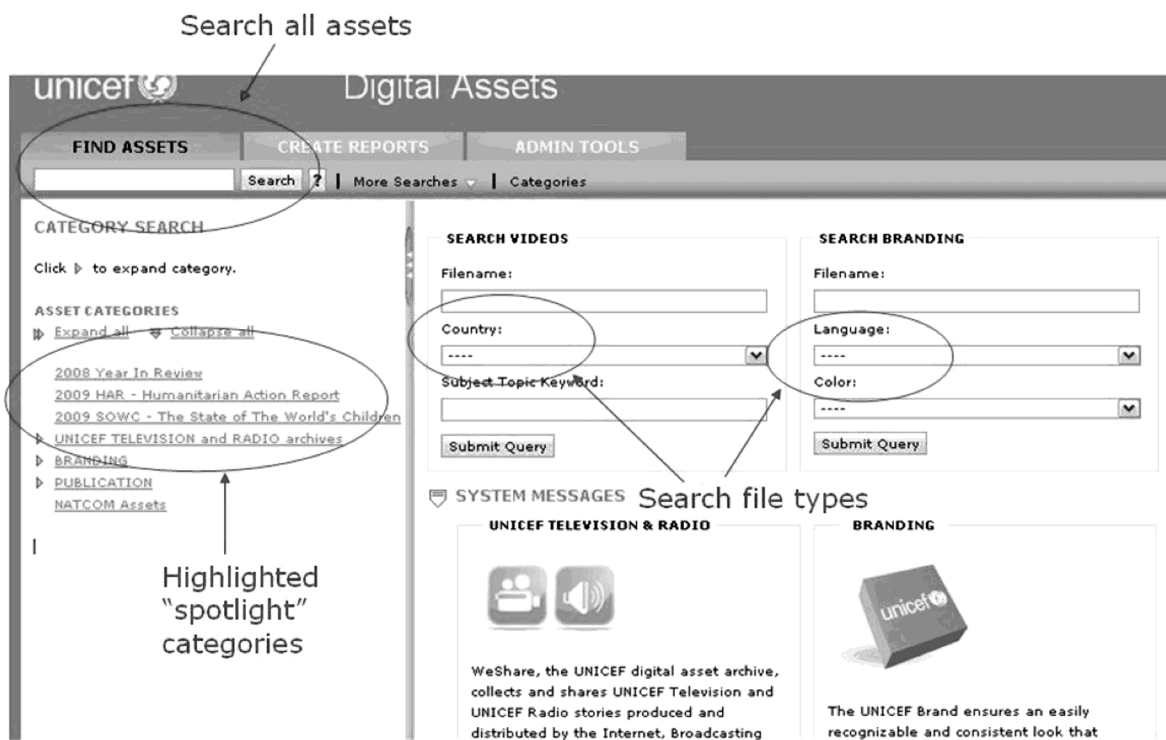
Figure 3: The DAM interface reflects stakeholder requests to differentiate assets visually
Source: UNICEF/Internet, Broadcast and Image Section

Because this was a pilot project in a 'beta test' format, it was possible to react quickly to feedback requests and reach consensus with this group. They began to see their effect on the evolving system and feel a sense of ownership.

Once the pilot project was finished and seemed to be working smoothly enough, the DAM began a phased roll-out over six months to the rest of the global organisation.

The system roll-out

Again, the system roll-out should also be done in stages, using a phased approach. For each target group for user adoption, identify motivated early-adopters where possible and ensure that they get good training and support. Use the system to support and enforce compliance on the most important pieces, like asset metadata and release processes, queuing end users to the appropriate user administrators, assigning appropriate roles and permissions. Offer training and offer value by having important and timely assets available for events and organisational priorities to drive interest in the new system. Promote internally by communicating the value and pushing timely assets out to interested end users. To a great extent, this is an internal communications and marketing effort. Use the internal key influencers from the earlier phases to evangelise the system internally and promote adoption. Bottom-up demand will drive wider and stickier user adoption and more effectively embed the new system in the organisation than top-down management directives. Get management support to help enforce and approve the aspects they can best affect, for example, compliance on work process integration, support for important

tasks and assignment of resources.

At UNICEF the pilot project 'beta testers' included a highly-motivated group of consumers of video assets. The high daily demand for these 'rich media' assets for fundraising, communications and advocacy campaigns for broadcast opportunities, journalists, websites and increasingly important social media platforms mean that assets need to be produced and distributed in a timely fashion every day. On the back end, uploading, organising, inputting proper metadata and approval/release can only be done in a timely fashion if the staffing resources, systems and work processes are well integrated to avoid conflicting priorities and minimise redundant tasks. The pilot project had proven to the initial group that this could be done. The process had also created some new collaborative relationships between these stakeholders. This was a positive experience that gave the project credibility. So the next phase of the roll-out extended system access and training to a wider audience of the same type of user. To continue the model, the system was introduced and demonstrated at a large internal UNICEF meeting by the pilot participants to their peers — not by headquarters management (innovations introduced by management are often greeted with scepticism). After the rate of system adoption within this wider group had begun to rise steadily, then roll-out continued to the next target group on the list. Each target group received consistent communications about benefits, training and support. In each group, motivated users were identified and cultivated.

When an earthquake hit Haiti in January 2010, UNICEF was able to get video, photographs and information rapidly into the DAM and distribute them quickly to communications professionals and fundraising partners. At that time, DAM had been rolled out for three months and the rate of adoption

continued to be good. The end users who adopted the system were able to report good success in responding to communications and fundraising needs during the Haiti emergency. This good experience shared with others drove a second wave of adoption within the organisation. The good word about DAM was out.

CONCLUSION

Rogers[2] explains three types of decision associated with adopting an innovation: (a) the system is 'optional' and the individual may adopt or reject the technology being considered; (b) the collective group makes a decision to adopt or reject the technology; or (c) one individual in authority makes the decision with the idea that the group will follow that decision. These types of decision have a large impact on the individual adopter and the outcome for the social system as a whole. In the case of enterprise systems like DAM, one can usually count on management (representing group C) to support. But a top-down approach alone is usually insufficient without a tremendous amount of compliance enforcement and reinforcement. If the A and B types of decision can be influenced, there is a chance of sustainable long-term adoption.

Identifying key stakeholders and winning over key influencers early in the project should be a DAM project design priority. Early inclusion of motivated stakeholders helps build consensus and cultivates a feeling of ownership. Any networked technology that provides a platform for communication and collaboration may benefit from the network effect. Socialising means that the value of social network economics may come into play, where early adopters are motivated to help drive adoption in order to reap the value benefits that arise when a system they are using is adopted by their

colleagues. Key influencers can be supportive, even evangelistic, and will influence colleagues in a positive way. Any chance to harness that networking effect to help socialise DAM will help to ensure the project's success.

Several other benefits stemming from the adoption techniques are seen, as described above, such as better process and system design. On the other hand, a system that does not get good adoption may eventually fail, thus putting resources and opportunity at risk.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. This is the author's choice of translation, based on W. K. Marriott's 1908 translation of *The Prince* (1515), which is fuller than Rogers' original translation choice.
2. Rogers, E. M. (2010) 'Diffusion of Innovation', 4th edition, The Free Press, New York, NY.