The BOBCATSSS Wiki
Providing a central information resource for conference organisers

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Abstract*:*
An information resource is being constructed to serve as a BOBCATSSS manual. It is a special conference management guideline, which covers not only general project management but also BOBCATSSS-related issues. Moreover general information on the history of the conference series will be made accessible. Additionally it is meant to be a resource, which helps to avoid mistakes and to further develop already existing and proven ideas. This manual is implemented as a wiki. The wiki is equipped with a logical structure and already filled with initial information content. This approach allows knowledge to be shared between and to be enriched by former and future BOBCATSSS organisers all over the world.

Keywords*: BOBCATSSS, guidelines, wiki, shared knowledge, project management*

Introduction

"Organising a conference... an international one. With mainly students on board... sounds great! But how to start? And what exactly do we have to do?" Of course we don't know how the different organisers over twenty-one years experienced the immense responsibility of arranging such a huge event as BOBCATSSS. But at least for us, the German section of the organising team 2012, it felt very confusing in the beginning - and not only then.

By participating in the process of organising and managing the BOBCATSSS 2012 symposium (Riekert & Simon, 2012), we, the authors of this contribution, learned a lot about project management in general and also about the history and characteristics of BOBCATSSS conferences. In the very beginning of that whole process we had a meeting with the organisers of the 2011 symposium, from whom we got a lot of advice. Yet after having organised the symposium in January 2012, we felt it would have been helpful to have a resource with useful information for organising such an event. In consequence, we decided to create exactly such a resource. This is especially important because, due to the specific nature of BOBCATSSS (decentralised, international, organised by students), common publications on the topic of conference organisation are not necessarily sufficient. Nevertheless, this resource does not contain strict rules on how to organise such a conference, but offers different ideas on how organisers of BOBCATSSS conferences could proceed and what might be important to consider. The wiki is meant to be a collaborative resource, which means that every BOBCATSSS organiser, whether former or future, is invited to edit or augment its content and structure.

In addition to a physical meeting with the former organisers, the publication of guidelines for organising a BOBCATSSS conference forms an effective resource which is accessible at any time. It will be helpful through the various stages of the organising process - at first for getting an idea of the different tasks in the very beginning, then for building a structure of the team and finally as a guiding resource throughout the whole organising process.

After all it would be a pity not to use the knowledge built up during the organisation of the conference - not only of 2012 but also of other years. Through this wiki, future organisers are able to learn not only from their direct predecessors, but also from other former teams. In this way it is easier to avoid making the same mistakes again.

Why the implementation as a wiki?

There are different possibilities in which way to publish those guidelines. Our first ideas included a manual, an e-tutorial, film clips and the wiki, but the e-tutorial or the film clips would have either been too confusing or taken up too much time. A more practical possibility would have been to publish the manual in form of a freely accessible document with a table of contents and a compilation of sections in a linear order. This might have been more clear because it allows to mentally follow the procedure from the start until the end.

Contrary to that, a wiki is a website which consists of more and smaller articles. Therefore, the wiki can be constructed by multiple authors at the same time and the articles can be easily revised. New articles can be added at any time and much easier than in a manual. This is very important because we also wanted to give other organisers the possibility to share their knowledge through this resource. Due to linkages between the articles it is easy to navigate between the different topics. The problem that there are articles which are related to more than one main topic can also be solved with those hyperlinks.

The manual might be more clearly arranged, but nevertheless the wiki also has a table of contents to get an overview of the topics and different articles. Another important aspect was the international accessibility which is guaranteed through all the different options. After all we came to the conclusion that an implementation as wiki is the best way for our purpose.

Why choosing "Google Sites" and not something else?

After having decided on not only the necessity of a central BOBCATSSS resource but also on its general implementation as a wiki, the question for a concrete platform had to be answered.

The most obvious solution would have been to use the most popular wiki software of all: MediaWiki, which is created, published and used under a GPL-licence by the Wikimedia Foundation (2012). It is free to use, based on a relational database and guarantees a design which is both elegant and well-known all over the world. Nonetheless, we almost instantly opted against this software because of two distinct reasons: firstly, MediaWiki requires a Linux-based web server. As none of us had special experiences with neither Linux nor the configuration of a server we suspected that the technical problems would be both too difficult to solve and too time-consuming. Time we desperately needed for the actual content. Secondly, the MediaWiki software is updated on a regular basis. Those updates have to be implemented manually and demand a constant maintenance through one person or a group of persons. This, however, did not at all correspond with our plans of a free BOBCATSSS resource, owned and maintained by all the past and future organisers at the same time.

Therefore, we began to field-test other, very diverse, possibilities without the mentioned disadvantages, among them the Wordpress blog (Wordpress.com, 2012) and Google Sites (Google Inc., 2012). To examine the general usability as a wiki, the flexibility and the ability to create hyperlinks to both internal and external contents (as, for example, pictures or videos) of every

platform, we decided to set up test versions filled with simple content. Under the process of creating those pre-wikis, we experienced Google Sites as the most uncomplicated and instinctively usable possibility, which at the same time offered the most facilities for our purpose. In combination with the automatically updated software and the - from our point of view – easy changeable settings without any server configuration, this made Google Sites the favoured platform of our BOBCATSSS wiki. Though not actually being a wiki in the proper definition, it offers the possibility to share the rights to edit the whole content as well as a typical wiki.

The BOBCATSSS-wiki can now be found via the following link: *https://sites.google.com/site/bobcatsswiki/* (see figure 1).
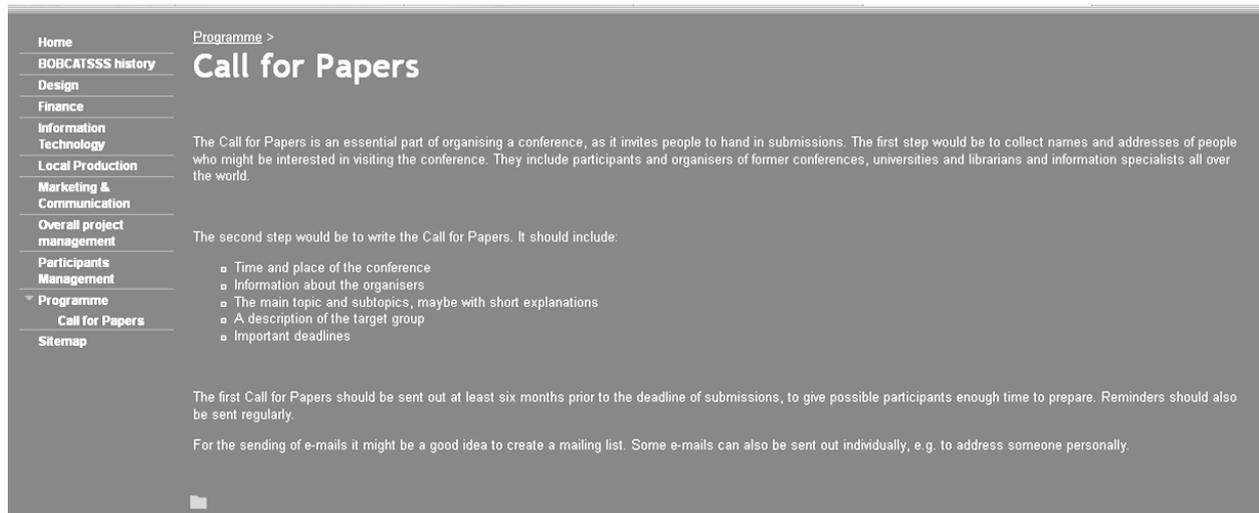

Figure 1: First impressions of the newly created BOBCATSSS wiki

Process of building this resource

First of all we created a rough structure of the different topics that should be covered with the wiki. Those topics were distributed to the persons who dealt with them during the organisation of the BOBCATSSS conference 2012 because they knew best what it is all about. As only the German team from 2012 is creating the wiki, not all the issues will be covered in every detail, because we did not deal with all the topics.

To guarantee a high quality of the initial BOBCATSSS wiki, each article was reviewed two times. For this purpose we set up a spreadsheet to coordinate the review and upload of articles. Furthermore, we set up a list with the descriptions of all the different linkages. The implementation of those linkages took place at a very late stage to remain flexible as long as possible. We felt that a clear structure of the initial wiki is of crucial importance for the organic growth of the site after its publication.

Moreover, we had to create a unique and independent Google Mail account: *bobcatsswiki@gmail.com*. We could not use our already existing address used for BOBCATSSS 2012 because of two reasons: on the one hand, we wanted this resource to be easily shared, which is not possible with all the remaining mail traffic (privacy issues!). On the other hand, the wiki shall become a general source for all BOBCATSSS organisers and not be limited to one specific year. The finally implemented address can be used by everybody to propose improvements and is meant to be managed by the respective organising teams in charge.

For the overall coordination of the whole project we had regular meetings and a special e-learning course as a platform for communication and central resource with all the relevant documents like the different articles.

Logical structure of the wiki

The main entrance to the wiki is provided through a general article about BOBCATSSS and a short introduction to the wiki content and function. The different main topics are accessible not only via this page but also by the use of the left-hand drop-down menu. Those top level issues are, in accordance to the task of writing, based on the work packages which were used by the organising team of the 2012 conference. They are shortly described in the following paragraph:

Design
This topic includes not only information on the design of the webpage, but also on the creation of a corporate design (logo, colours and more).

Finances

Money is one of the most important factors to organise such a huge event. Therefore you have to plan what you need for the different parts, to find sponsors and finally to keep an overview of your account transactions.

Information Technology
To support both the internal and external communication, there is the possibility to work e.g. with a conference management tool, a web content management system and a mailing list server.

Local Production
This issue contains information on every task concerning the local organisation of the conference, like finding a conference building, organising the catering, the social programme activities and the schedule for the work during the conference.

Marketing
The point of this task is to spread information about BOBCATSSS, to find potential authors / participants and to keep in touch with them (especially via social media).

Overall project management
In every project it is essential to keep the overview and to strategically plan the different deadlines. For those tasks a project leader/leading team for each city is necessary. They also manage the communication both in each city and between the international teams.

Participants Management
To guarantee the participants (incl. authors) an easy and prompt way to get informed, it is useful to permanently have a person in charge who handles incoming questions. Furthermore this task includes keeping an overview over the conference's participant capacity and tracking payment issues.

Programme
This task includes the search for authors and the continuous communication with them. Moreover, the programme team has to decide which contributions to accept, how the actual programme will look like and to publish those decisions (abstract booklet, conference proceedings).

The articles themselves are structured as similar as possible. Meanwhile, the content of one and each article is set up with the purpose of sharing not only general information but also the specialties and experiences of former BOBCATSSS conferences. It is a guide which helps to get an overview of the work that has to be done and if the used methods were successful or not.

Additionally, we decided to collect as much of the history of all former BOBCATSSS conferences as possible.

Further maintenance - share your experiences!
As the wiki is not based on literature but on actual practical experience, our own possibilities to fill the wiki with content and meaning are limited. That's the reason why we need the help of other BOBCATSSS organisers. The more people sharing their experiences, the better this resource is going to work! We hope that this wiki will be well received by both former and future organisers. If we all work together, this wiki can be a central resource that might prevent unnecessary mistakes (that may or may not have happened before) and thereby improve the quality of BOBCATSSS conferences in a whole new way.

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