Knowledge Normalization — Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

1. What is Knowledge Normalization?

Normalization is a method of reflecting the context of the user's need through structure of content — rather than through only the content itself.

2. Why would you want to structure the context?

Because it eliminates the challenge of having to word content just right to match all users' language and expertise so they:

a) Understand the content or
b) Find the content

Sometimes they don't know what they need or know how to express it — but they need to be able to find it anyway.

3. What is the context structure?

It is called a "resolution path". It is a path of content hyperlinked together in a logical order. It individually matches a user's context and forms a chain of logic from the most general way of expressing an issue to the most precise solution for the issue. An inexperienced user might start with the first hyperlinked article saying something very general like "My system is down" and a more experienced user may select a hyperlink later in the chain reflecting more specific context like "I have a corrupted boot record" and both will find a place along the same path to begin to solve their problem.

4. Does this resolution path then create more content and more work?

Because the resolution path content is articles hyperlinked together — something similar to multiple modules — most of the articles are reused in many situations (like small sub-routines) so they only have to be written once and then are mapped into many paths. And because they are reused without having to be rewritten, it results in typically 75% less content and less work to mange than document/article structures. Traditionally, knowledge bases have thousands of objects. And it gets increasingly more difficult for users to find what they need. This method avoids the unnecessary over-population of content.

5. Isn't doing normalization just "cleaning up the content?"

No. A clean up effort is purely an assessment of whether something is useful or not. Normalization does consider usefulness but in context of the relationship of any content object to others and to the existing demand. Normalization requires us to develop a topology — or holistic view of a product and its problems — to assure we know where that content fits. A natural by-product of doing normalization is some consolidation of duplicate content or similar content to make a more holistic resolution path — but it is not the primary goal.

6. How long does it take to normalize data?

It takes 2-3 weeks for 2-4 qualified resources to initialize normalization in a product area. The work from that point is ongoing. Instead of having blind knowledge creation we target high impact areas discovered during the initialization session and focus on knowledge in those areas — measuring the increased resolution rate along the way. We continue to focus our knowledge creation efforts on the highest impacting areas as we monitor demand trends.

7. How does the work get organized?

The work begins with focus on "topology areas" which reflect demand. Topologies are maps of the resolutions paths users will travel across. These are used to create meta-tags (i.e. signs so users can easily navigate through content) for navigating the content. These tags are also used for mapping content and demand to expert resources most qualified to maintain the content. These experts can then measure the maturity of the content in their area against demand.

8. How does this type of tagging relate to new models like social tagging?

Social tagging is a great way to gather individual perspectives about context. This works well in a community. If social tagging is employed in a business, it is necessary to normalize the tags as well as the content. This way the business can aggregate the context of its community and learn to serve its needs/demand better.

9. Are new tools needed to do normalization?

Normalization does not require any additional or new tools. We usually leverage any existing knowledge base tools or content management tools that are already deployed.

10. What impact does normalization have on TTR, number of knowledge articles, etc?

Normalization directly impacts Time to Resolve by making the relevant knowledge more findable and usable. The expected impact on TTR is about 30-70% of the mean TTR — depending on the complexity of the volume of cases or calls to be addressed within services, or what we call demand. Indirectly, it impacts the level of demand. Demand is reduced because it is clear to see the connection between the initial demand and the ultimate solution so the cause can be addressed or the user can find their own way without asking for directions.

11. What resources are required?

This process requires a high level of technical and cognitive abilities. We engage resources who have in-depth understanding of how customers experience problems. Most often, the engineers who are most successful with normalization are not those who are the most expert, but have the best sense of the bigger picture for how customers leverage the product they support. We usually engage several support engineers together to create the framework for the designated technology space we are normalizing and then select a couple who can do the work.

12. I still have questions, how do I get them answered?

Content normalization has been done at various companies with varying types of support environments. It consistently produces a dramatic return on the investment. It introduces a cost-effective content management workflow and a better way of structuring content for the long-term and for the greatest amount of users. It is beneficial to understand what it can mean to any organization who needs it to manage their content in order to meet user demand.

For more information contact:

Farrell Hough at fhough@outsights.com and at 913-782-7336.

Or visit outsights.com and download the white paper:

Knowledge Normalization:
Extreme Makeovers — Part 1, Part 2, Part 3

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