On the Driving Forces of Diffusion of Podcasting in Organizational Settings: A Case Study and Propositions

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ON THE DRIVING FORCES OF DIFFUSION OF PODCASTING IN ORGANIZATIONAL SETTINGS: A CASE STUDY AND PROPOSITIONS

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Abstract

More and more organizations are integrating Web 2.0 technologies to enhance their organizational learning abilities. However, relatively little attention has been paid to the use of Web 2.0 technologies in organizational settings. This research attempts to understand what drives a person’s use of Web 2.0 technology in organizational settings. To achieve this objective, we conducted a case study on a specific Web 2.0 technology, podcasting, in a global company to understand what factors influence employees’ perceived usefulness of podcasting. Four factors were identified as having important influence in shaping their usefulness perceptions: information overload, tenure, information privacy, and information relevance. A set of propositions regarding the relationships was also developed.

Keywords: Web 2.0, Podcasting, User acceptance, Perceived usefulness, Organizational use.
1. **INTRODUCTION**

With the rapid development of information technologies, more and more organizations are now implementing Web 2.0 applications and tools (the phenomenon is termed as enterprise 2.0 by McAfee (2006)) to support organizational learning (Levy 2009). Web 2.0, including blogs, wikis, podcasts, RSS (Really Simple Syndication) and so on, has been viewed as a fundamental social way of using Internet technologies (McHaney 2012). As a result, this trend provides IS researchers with an opportunity to expand the research on influence of IS beyond the traditional focus of large-scale, corporate systems (Yoo 2010). While researchers have begun to study organizational use of Web 2.0 technologies (e.g., Wattal et al. 2010, Weber et al. 2012), empirical research on this topic is still scarce (von Krogh 2012).

When organizations use Web 2.0 technologies to facilitate organizational learning, the success of such strategies is critically dependent on the adoption of these technologies by desired individuals (Paroutis and Saleh 2009). Therefore, the role of user acceptance of a technology is central to the effectiveness of organizational learning. However, most prior research has focused on organizational benefits and implementation of these technologies (Paroutis and Saleh 2009, Richter et al. 2011). To ensure high adoption, it is important to investigate the user adoption of these new technologies, which is the focus of this paper.

Comparing with the successful adoption of Web 2.0 in the private realm, organizations are experiencing low rate of adoption and use from employees (Kügler et al. 2012). Therefore, researchers have called for further investigations on barriers and enablers to the adoption and diffusion of Web 2.0 technologies in organizations (von Krogh 2012). So in this research, we propose to study what drives employees’ intentions to use Web 2.0 technologies in organizational settings. More specifically, we focus on perceived usefulness of technologies, which is an extensively studied construct in IS adoption research (Davis 1989, Davis et al. 1989, Venkatesh et al. 2003), and explore the following two research questions:

**RQ1:** What factors impact employees’ perceived usefulness of Web 2.0 technologies in organizational learning?

**RQ2:** How these factors impact employees’ perceived usefulness of Web 2.0 technologies in organizational learning?

Web 2.0 includes a variety of technologies. The perceived characteristics of a technology play an important role in shaping individual’s use (Moore and Benbasat 1991). So researchers have argued that it is important to focus on a specific type of technology when studying IS adoption in order to account for the technology characteristics (Venkatesh and Bala 2008). Therefore, as our first attempt, this paper focuses on a specific Web 2.0 technology, podcasting, which was chosen for two reasons. First, podcasting is an important Web 2.0 learning tool or marketing tool and has been widely used by organizations to broadcast organizational knowledge such as training materials and policies (Evans 2008, Moss et al. 2010). Second, podcasting in many ways represents Web 2.0 technology. Analogical to radio broadcasting, podcasting is exempt (in the United States) from Federal Communications Commission (FCC) oversight and thus provides regular users the ability to reach to millions of listeners instantly. This makes podcasting a form of social media. For example, podcasting is a tool of networking, which is a definitive feature of Web 2.0 technology.

Organizational learning refers to a change in the organization’s knowledge that occurs as a function of experiences (Argote and Miron-Spektor 2011). Huber (1991) suggested four constructs that are integrally related to organizational learning: knowledge acquisition, information distribution, information interpretation, and organization memory. One important area of research in organizational learning is to examine how information technologies (IT) assist these activities by facilitating rapid collection and dissemination of information and knowledge, and by providing employees with flexible and easy access to these resources (Roberts 2000, Sambamurthy and
Based on the nature of podcasting, in this research we focus on information/knowledge sharing or distribution of organizational learning.

Given the exploratory nature of this research, we adopt a case study approach to first discover factors that impact employees’ perceived usefulness of podcasting and explore the relationships between them qualitatively. Then we discuss each factor in turn, refer to related literature to support our arguments and propose a set of propositions regarding the relationships between these factors and perceived usefulness of podcasting, thus proposing a research model. In the next section, we first briefly introduce podcasting, followed by a review of literature on perceived usefulness that provides theoretical background for this research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Podcasting

Podcasting is a method of publishing audio or audio/video files to the Internet that allows users to subscribe and receive new files automatically through an RSS feed (Biech 2008, Walls et al. 2010a, von Krogh 2012). Because little technical skill is required to use podcasts and files can be easily transferred to portable devices (such as iPod, MP3 players and mobile phones), users can choose to listen to the content whenever and wherever they want (Yoo 2010).

Because of these features, podcasting has gained increasing popularity in assisting learning activities (McLaughlin 2006). Researchers have found that users perceive podcasting as a useful tool to improve their learning outcomes by means of increasing access to learning materials, improving understanding of the materials, strengthening learning motivations and so on (Evans 2008, Moss et al. 2010). However, most of these studies have been conducted in educational contexts where the users of podcasting are students. While acknowledging the fact that organizations are also increasingly applying podcasting to broadcast organizational knowledge such as training materials and policies (Biech 2008, McHaney 2012), little research has focused on podcasting use in organizational settings.

Our brief literature review found that most research on podcasting use has been conducted in educational contexts and has been focused on students’ use of podcasts in learning (e.g., Walls et al. 2010b, Facer and Yen 2012). We argue that podcasting use in organizations is different from that in educational contexts because of different characteristics of the users. In organizations, the users of podcasting are employees. Compared with student users, employees have much stronger commitment to work as well as family. With the increasing demands and pressure from modern-day work and life, allocating time for learning becomes more difficult either because of lack of time or lack of motivation (Rosenberg 2008). Therefore, the existing findings about podcasting use based mainly on student users in educational context render little insight into employees’ use of podcasting in organizational context.

2.2. Perceived Usefulness

Perceived usefulness is a primary construct in technology acceptance model (TAM) (Davis 1989, Davis et al. 1989), which has been extensively used in IS research to study user acceptance of a particular information system (e.g., Gefen et al. 2003, Lewis et al. 2003, Venkatesh and Bala 2008) According to Davis (Davis 1989), perceived usefulness refers to “a degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance his or her job performance” (p.320). Adapted from this definition, perceived usefulness of podcasting in this research is defined as the extent to which an employee believes that using podcasting would enhance his or her performance in organizational learning.

Perceived usefulness has been confirmed as a reliable indicator to users’ behavioral intention to use a technology at different settings by numerous studies (e.g., Yi and Hwang 2003, King and He 2006). Meanwhile, a number of determinants of perceived usefulness, such as subjective norms (Venkatesh and Davis 2000, Venkatesh and Bala 2008), job relevance (e.g., Venkatesh and Davis 2000, Park et al.
trust (e.g., Gefen et al. 2003, Horst et al. 2007) have been identified to help explain what makes users think a technology is useful. This body of literature will be reviewed in more detail in section 5 to provide support for our proposition development regarding the relationship between the determinants identified from our case study and the perceived usefulness.

We acknowledge that another important construct from TAM, perceived ease of use (PEOU), is also widely used in previous studies to investigate users’ behavioural intention to use a technology. PEOU is defined as “the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would be free of effort” (Davis 1989, p.320). However, it was not included in this research due to the following two reasons. First, podcasting is a simple technology. The subscription process to a podcast is simple and little technical skill is required from the user side to obtain and use podcasting (Moss et al. 2010). In this sense, podcasting is not a complex technology at all. Second, some researchers have reported that there is no significant direct relationship between PEOU and intention to use a technology (e.g., Chau 1996), which indicates that although PEOU is important, it might not be the fundamental objective one considers when using a technology (Sun 2010). Thus, PEOU is not considered in this research.

Based on the TAM model, the base model for studying intention to use podcasting in organizational learning is displayed in Figure 1. Since the right side of the base model has been well studied in prior literature and the finding is very consistent (i.e., a positive relationship) (see Legris et al. 2003, King and He 2006 for a review on TAM), we focus on the left side of the model in this research.

![Figure 1. Base Model for Studying Intention to Use Podcasting in Organizational Learning](image)

Although in general user adoption research is mature, there is little research on user adoption of podcasting. This requires a systematic investigation into the factors specific to podcasting and the relationships between these factors and existing factors concerning user adoption. Literature provides a set of possible determinants to begin with when investigating perceived usefulness of podcasting in this research, we argue that what is more important is to investigate this question from the users perspective. That is, in practice, users might have different opinions from researchers about why they perceive a technology is useful or not, especially when the technology under investigation is new and its usage in organizational settings has not received much attention from researchers. Therefore, in this study we adopt an exploratory case study approach to identify prominent factors that impact users’ perceived usefulness of podcasting in organizational learning. The identified factors and relationships then guide us to develop a theoretical model regarding perceived usefulness of using podcasting. The following section describes our research method in detail.

3. METHOD

Given the limited availability of literature on the use of podcasting (or more broadly Web 2.0 technologies) in organizational settings, we employed a case study approach to answer the research questions. Case studies are appropriate for the exploration, classification and hypothesis development stages of the scientific knowledge-building process and is useful for asking “how” or “why” questions about a contemporary phenomenon that is not easily separated from its context (Yin 2003). There were two purposes of this case study. The first was to identify specific factors that impact employees’ perceived usefulness of podcasting in organizational learning. The second was to qualitatively explore the relationships between these factors and perceived usefulness of podcasting. Then using the “theory-building from case study” approach proposed by Eisenhardt (1989), we further discuss the identified relationships with reference to literature and develop a set of propositions.
3.1. Case Description

The case study was conducted at a technical support engineering team at a Chinese site of a knowledge-intensive global company in late 2006. The company is a global manufacturer of high-tech products, with 80,000 employees worldwide and headquartered in the U.S.. It has sites all over the world, including the U.S., Russia, Israel, China, India, Malaysia, etc. The working language is English. Beyond being geographically distributed, the corporation is also functionally distributed. Co-workers are spread across the globe, especially in the service areas of finance, information technology and human resource.

The technical support engineering team was from an information technology department in the company. The mission of the department is to deliver innovative IT solutions for the product groups in the organization. To provide these services, the team needed to 1) collaborate closely with other colleagues worldwide, which might need them to schedule a lot of meetings across time zones; and 2) upgrade their knowledge frequently through various ways such as training and self-learning. The team had 26 employees and most of them (24) were Chinese.

As a result, the team decided to introduce podcasting to supplement these activities. More specifically, podcasting were proposed to mainly serve the following two purposes. First, to record important meetings or company/team events so that employees, especially those that had missed them could review these activities later on. Second, to broadcast training sessions and expert talks. 26 employees, who were also the potential users of the podcasting, received a two-hour training on what podcasting was, characteristics of future podcasts (e.g., formats and length), and how to subscribe to it once it was implemented. These employees were the subjects of this study.

3.2. Data Collection and Analysis Methods

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. After the training session, we contacted each employee and 12 accepted our invitation for an interview. The interview was organized mainly around two questions: 1) do you think the implementation of podcasting will be useful to improve your organizational learning activities? and 2) what makes you think it is useful or not? The interviews were conducted in Chinese and lasted for an average of 30 minutes. Each interview was recorded and translated into English text files later. A back-translation process (Mullen 1995) was used to establish translation equivalence.

The interview data were coded and analyzed using the qualitative data presentation and analysis method described by Miles and Huberman (1994) which defined qualitative data analysis as consisting of three concurrent activities: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The analysis started with coding the interviews in categories that indicated whether employees perceived podcasting as useful or not. Content analysis (Krippendorff 2004) was used to further discover the influential factors and the patterns that showed how these factors impacted employees’ perceived usefulness of podcasting (i.e., positive or negative influence). The following section presents the results.

4. RESULTS

Table 1 lists the demographic information of the interviewees. Based on the answers of the first interview question we mentioned above, we found that among the 12 interviewees, only 3 of them indicated that podcasting would be really useful to them, thus expressing great enthusiasm of podcasting use. For the other 9 employees, they appeared to have low degrees of perceived usefulness of podcasting by expressing different concerns. This section presents the major determinants derived from the case study regarding employees’ perceived usefulness of podcasting. In general, four factors were revealed as the most frequently mentioned determinants by the interviewees: information overload, tenure, information privacy and relevance of the podcasting content.
4.1. Information Overload

Information overload was the primary factor interviewees mentioned when they were asked why they thought podcasting was not useful, with 8 out of 12 (66.7%) people expressing concerns about it. For example, one employee mentioned:

[Quotation 1.1]: I don’t think I’ll have time to listen to it. I’m already very occupied by my work and different information from different sources. If it just captures a previous meeting, I would rather ask a colleague or check meeting minutes than spend another an hour to listen to it. It’s not worth the time.

Another employee commented:

[Quotation 1.2]: Nowadays, information poverty is not a problem. Information overload is the one. The company has already provided different information through emails, internal systems and so on. You have to have time to filter so much information. I think reviewing podcasts requires a lot of time, so I would not think it a useful tool to me.

However, not all the interviewees thought podcasting would bring the problem of information overload. Some thought it brought them the right information they needed and believed it to be a very useful tool to them. One stated that,

[Quotation 1.3]: I think it’s a brilliant idea! In that way, I don’t need to worry about missing important meetings any more and I can review them whenever I want.

4.2. Tenure

By comparing answers from each interviewee, we found that in general, people that joined the company for a shorter period of time expressed higher enthusiasm to use podcasting than those that had a longer tenure in the company. For example, one employee, who had been in the company for only 5 months, stated that,

[Quotation 2.1]: I think it [podcasting] would be really useful to me. As you know, I’m new here and am eager to get any information that can help me get familiar and involved in the work environment. I do believe podcasting could help me achieve this by allowing me stay informed about the activities of my fellow colleagues and the latest news of the company.

However, another employee, who had been working in the company for more than six years, made the following statement,

[Quotation 2.2]: I think it’s a good idea for newbies. They can listen as many times as they want, which will help them better understand things like polices and work procedures here. When I first came to this company, I was eager to look for this type of information. But now, I don’t think it would be that useful.
I already know how to do things here and know the types of information I’m looking for and know how to get them in an effective way.

4.3. Information Privacy

Five interviewees (41.6%) didn’t think podcasting as a useful tool due to their concerns regarding information privacy. Two aspects of information privacy were mentioned including: 1) fear of revealing his/her identification to others in a podcast; and 2) fear of broadcasting his/her speech in an event (such as meetings or team activities) to a broader audience. For example, one interviewee mentioned,

[Quotation 3.1]: You have to be careful about what you say when you know it is recorded. It might keep some people more silent during a meeting. In this way, there would not have a lot of value in the podcast and I don’t think I would waste my time to listen.

Another employee made a similar comment,

[Quotation 3.2]: Sometimes you don’t tell your true thoughts in front of a camera or recorder. If so, why should I listen to those podcasts?

4.4. Relevance of the Podcasting Contents

Four interviewees (33.3%) stated that their perceived usefulness of podcasting is contingent on the content of the podcasts. That is, they would think podcasting was useful when its contents were relevant and interesting to them. Otherwise, podcasting had little use to them. As one interviewee mentioned,

[Quotation 4.1]: In general I do not think podcasting would be really useful to me. However, I would still think it is useful if it broadcasts related training materials.

Another interviewee made the following statement,

[Quotation 4.2]: As a manager, I’m more interested in getting different reports and speeches made by top management and invited experts. So in this sense, podcasting would be really useful if it broadcasts this type of activities.

5. PROPOSITION DEVELOPMENT

Two sets of insights were developed from the analysis of the case study. First, we found employees had different opinions about the usefulness of podcasting. Four factors were identified as having important influence in shaping their perceptions: information overload, tenure, information privacy and information relevance. Among them, three belong to the characteristics of information broadcasted in the podcasts. Therefore, our results emphasize the important role of information characteristics in shaping individuals’ perceptions of the usefulness of podcasting. Second, it seems employees’ perception of the usefulness of podcasting is not constant over all the podcasts. Rather, when the contents of the podcasts meet their interests, employees would change their perceptions and thought podcasting as a useful tool. In the following section, we discuss each empirically identified factor and its relationship to perceived usefulness of podcasting, refer to related literature to validate our argument, then offer specific propositions concerning perceived usefulness of podcasting in organizational learning. The proposed relationships are represented in Figure 2.
5.1. Information Overload

In this case study, information distributed by podcasting was reviewed differently among the interviewees. Some treated it as overload and time-consuming to review, thus perceiving podcasting as less useful to them (as illustrated in quotation 1.1 and 1.2); whereas others thought it was the right information they were looking for and perceived it quite useful (quotation 1.3). Hence, the results suggest that podcasting was likely to be considered as a less useful tool if the employee felt overloaded by the information distributed by podcasting.

Information overload refers to the phenomenon that users are given more information than they can process within a given period of time (Ting-Peng et al. 2006). As a result, users often fail to locate what they need most, which creates feelings of stress and leads to decreased performance and negative feelings about the technology used (Eppler and Mengis 2004). In a study of the use of instant messaging in organizations, Weber, et al. (2012) argued that the problem of information overload brought by the implementation of Enterprise 2.0 reduced the perceived usefulness of instant messaging. Therefore, in the case of podcasting, we propose that,

Proposition 1: Information overload negatively affects employees' perceived usefulness of podcasting.

5.2. Tenure

The results of the case study also revealed the important role of tenure in shaping individuals' perception of the usefulness of podcasting, as illustrated in quotation 2.1 and 2.2. We can expect that employees with a longer tenure in the company are more likely to have already established his or her own knowledge map to find needed information in an efficient way, while new employees are still in the phase of getting familiar with the new work environment. Therefore, new employees would be more likely to think any technology bringing them organizational knowledge as useful.
Similarly, McAfee (2009) observes that when Web 2.0 technologies are made widely available in a company, “newbies” are one of the only two groups that quickly start using them. Prior research also suggests that workers with longer tenure in a company are more likely to express resistant attitude towards new technologies (Majchrzak and Cotton 1988, Wattal et al. 2010). For example, in a study of information technology innovation, Agarwal and Prasad (1999) proposes that the length of tenure in the workforce is negatively associated with the perceived usefulness of the technology. Hence, we propose,

*Proposition 2: The length of tenure negatively affects employees’ perceived usefulness of podcasting.*

5.3. **Information Privacy**

Employees’ concern about revealing personal information was also suggested as a barrier to the perceived usefulness of podcasting. A possible explanation is that such a concern might prevent employees from active participation if they knew the event (e.g., meetings, interviews and so on) would be recorded and podcasted, which reduced the quality of the podcasts and made others feel it less useful. Another insight generated from the interviews regarding information privacy is that interviewees also mentioned their intention to not use podcasting, as evidenced in quotation 3.1 and 3.2 when they stated they don’t want to use the technology.

Information privacy has been recognized as an important ethical issue in organizational practice (Smith et al. 1996, Stewart and Segars 2002). Researchers have emphasized the role of information privacy on the behavioral intention to use a technology, especially in online environments (Suh and Han 2003, Pavlou et al. 2007). Generally, this body of research found that concern about information privacy appears to be a significant barrier to the behavioral intention to use a technology. For example, Ong et al. (2004) found that the degree to which a person believed that using a technology is free of privacy and security concerns is positively related to behavioral intention to using an asynchronous e-learning system. Some researchers treated privacy concerns as a major component of trust and found that trust is positively related to beliefs and attitudes towards the use of different technologies (e.g., Gefen et al. 2003, Chen et al. 2004). Hence, we propose that,

*Proposition 3a: Concern about information privacy is negatively related to perceived usefulness of podcasting.*

*Proposition 3b: Concern about information privacy is negatively related to intention to use podcasting.*

5.4. **Information Relevance**

The results of the case study implied that employees perceived podcasting useful when they thought the information distributed by podcasts matched the information they were seeking for. That is, the information was relevant to their job needs.

Based on a comprehensive literature review, Schamber and her colleagues (1990) argued that information relevance depends on users’ judgment of the match between the perception of information obtained and information required at a specific time. They further concluded from prior research that information relevance is related to usefulness and users’ attitude towards information systems, which was empirically supported by some studies (e.g., Zimmer et al. 2010). For example, in a study of Internet utilization behavior, Shih (2004) found that information relevance is positively related to user perceived usefulness of Internet. In organizational settings, information relevance is usually studied in a similar variable, job relevance, which is defined as “an individual’s perception regarding the degree to which the target system is applicable to his or her job” (Venkatesh and Davis 2000, p.191). Research has also demonstrated a positive relationship between job relevance and perceived usefulness of different information technologies (e.g., Venkatesh and Davis 2000, Al-Gahtani et al. 2010). Therefore, in this research we propose:
Proposition 4: Information relevance is positively related to perceived usefulness of podcasting.

5.5. Perceived Usefulness and Intention to Use

Finally, the relationship between perceived usefulness of an information technology and the intention to use it has been well studied in IS literature (Legris et al. 2003). Numerous studies have found that perceived usefulness is positively related to individual’s intention to use a technology (King and He 2006). So following this trend, we propose that:

Proposition 5: Perceived usefulness of podcasting is positively related to employees’ intention to use the technology.

5.6. Control Variables

As we argued in Section 2.2, in this research, the important factors influencing employees’ perception of usefulness were identified from user perspective rather than from existing literature. Prior research on user technology adoption has suggested several factors that may also influence perceived usefulness and intention to use in organizational settings such as subjective norm (Davis et al. 1989, Venkatesh and Davis 2000), image (Venkatesh and Davis 2000), internal self-efficacy (Compeau and Higgins 1995, Thatcher et al. 2008), and personal innovativeness in IT (Agarwal and Prasad 1998, Agarwal and Karahanna 2000). For example, subjective norm and image are both found to have significantly positive impacts on perceived usefulness (Venkatesh and Davis 2000). This research thus controls for the influence of these factors on perceived usefulness and intention to use podcasting while focusing on the information characteristics and tenure factors that are identified from the case study.

6. DISCUSSION

Little attention is paid to the use of Web 2.0 technologies in organizational settings, despite the fact that more and more organizations are now using Web 2.0 technologies to enhance their organizational learning abilities (McHaney 2012). In this research, we present a case study of a specific Web 2.0 technology, podcasting, in a global company to understand what kinds of factors influence and how they impact employees’ perceived usefulness of podcasting. A set of propositions was further developed based on the discussion in order to generalize the observations from the case study.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study before we discuss the theoretical and practical implications. First, the sample size is small and the subjects are context-specific, which might prevent some otherwise important factors from being identified in this research. For example, trust has been seen as an important antecedent of perceived usefulness in prior literature, especially in e-commerce and knowledge management research (e.g., Gefen 2004, Sun 2010). However, this factor was not identified from our research. We argue that our purpose is not to provide a complete list of influencing factors to the perceived usefulness of podcasting. Rather, we see factors as emergent and context-related. More research should be done in different organizational and demographic settings in order to generate a better understanding of the influential factors of Web 2.0 technology use. Second, the proposed causal model did not consider possible moderating effects of the identified factors. For example, people who perceived information provided by podcasting is more relevant may consider the relationship between information overload and perceived usefulness is less important than those who do not think so. These moderating effects deserve future research.

This research has two theoretical contributions. First, this research highlights the importance of information characteristics to perceived usefulness of technologies (in our case podcasting). Among the four factors identified from empirical investigation, three describe information from different ways: information overload, information privacy and information relevance. Second, based on the TAM model, this research provides a causal model that connects the identified factors with perceived usefulness and intention to use. This model can be tested in future research and be used as a starting point to study related topics.
Practically, findings from this research can help practitioners better decide what information to distribute in podcasting. Practitioners might want to keep each podcast short and concise so that employees would not feel overloaded by its content. It is also important for practitioners to pay attention to the privacy issues in the podcasts. Information relevance seems to increase employees' interest in using podcasts, so it is necessary for practitioners to keep the information updated and relevant. Tenure also appeared to be an influential factor in usefulness of podcasting. So practitioners might want to design the content of podcasts differently based on different tenure groups of employees to receive better usage.

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