Enterprise Social Networks: A Successful Implementation within a Telecommunication Company

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Abstract

Although enterprise social network (ESN) has been implemented within a number of organizations to facilitate communication, collaboration and engagement among employees, many organizations are struggling to realize the benefits of this emergent workplace social platform (due to employee underutilization). This paper aims to elucidate a successful ESN use case among employees within a leading Australian telecommunication company. The findings indicate that the employees’ ESN behavior is gravitated by utilitarian and hedonic values, and driven by socio-technical factors. The factors are generically categorized as technological (i.e. platform and content quality), organizational (e.g. community management and top management involvement), social (e.g. critical mass, and constructive communication climate), individual (e.g. knowledge self-efficacy) and task factors (i.e. equivocal tasks and integration to business processes). We suggest that a successful implementation of ESN within an organization involves the nexus between these five factors and recommendations are also made about how ESN usage can be enhanced.

Keywords

Enterprise social network, usage and factors

Introduction

The wide acceptance and use of public social networking sites (SNSs) such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter among individuals in the personal realm (e.g. global public SNSs users are predicted to increase to 2.55 billion users by 2017 (eMarketer 2013)) is burgeoning the trend of social networking platforms usage in the corporate realm, referred to as Enterprise Social Networks (ESNs). While it is reported that having actively disengaged employees costs $450-$550 billion per year (O’Boyle and Harter 2013), the main motive of ESN deployment is to provide employees with new ways to communicate, collaborate, consume and create knowledge for improved employee engagement and performance and enhanced organizational knowledge creation practices (Aral et al. 2013; Berger et al. 2014a). However, it is predicted that approximately 80 percent of organizations will fail to materialize the intended benefits of ESN (Mann et al. 2012). Practitioners and scholars (e.g. Ashton et al. (2011) and Denyer et al. (2011) have revealed that the relationship between ESN investments and the materialization of its benefits seem paradoxical due to underutilization among employees. An understanding of the use of social technologies within the workplace is imperative to provide organizational actors with practical guidelines on leveraging their ESN investments (Leonardi et al. 2013).

ESN differs from conventional organizational IT (e.g. enterprise resource planning (ERP) system) in terms of the flexibility of content generation, voluntariness of use, many-to-many interactions, high intuitiveness, low degree of governance and unstructured quality assurance (Steinhuser et al. 2011). Furthermore, ESN is regarded as a malleable technology, which has flexibility of use and purpose
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(Richter and Riemer 2013b). Such dichotomies indicate that the antecedents of ESN usage may be distinctive from the antecedents of conventional IT, or suggest that existing theoretical frameworks remain parsimonious to explain employees’ use behavior of this emergent social platform and require modifications (e.g. Richter and Riemer (2013b) and Parameswaran and Whinston (2007)). Prior empirical studies on ESN have not been abundant enough to provide a holistic understanding of what drives employee use of ESN. For example, Denyer et al. (2011) found that influential factors are from organization perspective (e.g. social environment, perception of community, nature of team and work, organizational culture and leaders) while Kügler et al. (2012) identified different aspects of factors including technological (i.e. relative advantage, ease of use, result demonstrability and compatibility), social (i.e. reputation, perceived critical mass) and organizational climate factors (i.e. trust, collaboration norms and community ties). As scientific studies on organizational practice of ESN are still in its infancy (Richter and Riemer 2013a; Stenmark and Zaffar 2014), an explorative case study was adopted to understand this phenomenon. This paper aims to bridge this gap by studying a successful ESN implementation within a telecommunication company and to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the value of ESN use?; and
2. Which factors influence the use of ESN among employees?

The next section provides the related work to the study. This is followed by a discussion of the research methodology and the findings. The last section concludes the paper and describes further work.

Related Work

The use of Web 2.0 applications (e.g. social networking, blogs, wikis, or micro-blogging services) for content creation and exchange within an organization context is not new. McAfee (2006) referred to this phenomenon as “Enterprise 2.0” (or E2.0). ESN is a part of the E2.0 phenomenon, and has been referred to as web-based corporate (or internal) social networking platform that connects organizational actors (i.e. management, employees and external stakeholders) by building and maintaining social relationships and facilitating interactions and collaborations through content creation (van Osch and Coursaris 2013). Current leading ESN providers in the market include Yammer, IBM Connection, Jive, Tibbr and Chatter (Drakos et al. 2014). Generically, a ESN platform has multiple social media functionalities such as status updates, micro-blogging, groups and communities, instant messaging, content management system (e.g. upload and share files and other digital resources), enterprise search, ratings as well as social network features such as profiles and the ability to connect with, follow, like or praise someone (Leonardi et al. 2013). The uniqueness of ESN compared to other organizational communication tools such as email and blogs lies behind its higher degree of affordances of visibility and association (of people and content) and persistence and editability (of content) (Treem and Leonardi 2012). Recent scholarships (e.g. Ellison et al. (2014), Leonardi (2014) and Fulk and Yuan (2013)) have argued that these affordances of ESN strategically facilitate the knowledge sharing practice within an organization. For instance, Majchrzak et al. (2013) asserted that ESN is capable of shifting the organization-wide knowledge management process from centralized, intermittent and repository-based (e.g. conventional knowledge management (KM) systems) to decentralized, continuous and emergent. ESN claim to prevail over conventional KM systems by overcoming the challenges such as location of relevant knowledge (i.e. expertise), motivation to share knowledge and formation of social capital (e.g. create and sustain social ties with knowledge providers) (Fulk and Yuan 2013). This communal knowledge conversations (Majchrzak et al. 2013) nature of ESN promotes new ways of communicating, relating and collaborating among employees within organization. The strong relationships and interactions between employees reduces organizational knowledge stickiness (Leonardi and Meyer 2014) and leads to innovativeness and less knowledge duplication (Leonardi 2014). Despite the benefits of ESN affordances, scholars have discovered the contradictions and tensions of ESN use. For example, Majchrzak et al. (2013) proposed four other affordances of ESN: meta-voicing, triggered attending, network-informed associating, and generative role-taking, which they claim will not only promote but also inhibit the productivity of communal knowledge conversations happening in ESN. Correspondingly, Gibbs et al. (2013) revealed that the openness of ESN creates dialectical tensions and promotes covert and surreptitious behavior among employees by allowing them to be invisible, disengaged and to control the knowledge and connections. Although ESN affordances create heterogeneous implications in usage, empirical studies have shown that the use of ESN improves team performance (Liu et al. 2014), individual employee work performance and job security (Wu 2013).
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There is little understanding about how employees make use of this workplace social platform and the value of the use to individual employees (Leftheriotis and Giannakos 2014; Mäntymäki and Riemer 2014). However, prior studies by Leftheriotis and Giannakos (2014) and Brecht et al. (2012) revealed that the employees’ use of social networking platforms within an organizational setting is valuable because of their utilitarian and hedonic natures. According to van der Heijden (2004), a utilitarian system provides instrumental value (i.e. improving task performance and productivity) to the user while a hedonic system provides self-fulfilling value to the user (i.e. giving an enjoyable user experience). The degree to which ESN is used for utilitarian and hedonic purposes remain ambiguous and worth to be examined (Ellison et al. 2014) and more effort is needed to gain insights into the salient determinants of this dual-purposed system use (Wu and Lu 2013). To better understand the successful use of this prominent organizational knowledge-sharing platform in an organization, this study adopts a socio-technical approach. In a socio-technical system (STS), the successful ESN implementation is the result of mutual alignment of social and technical subsystem (Bostrom and Heinen 1977). While the technical subsystem focuses on the processes, tasks, and ESN platform itself, the social subsystem denotes the relationship among employees and their attributes (e.g. attitude, skills, values) and the organizational structures (Bostrom and Heinen 1977). Prior empirical studies have used STS to investigate what are the determinants of successful distance learning (Jianfeng et al. 2010) and knowledge sharing practices among public SNSs users (Chai and Kim 2012). By envisaging ESN as a socio-technical system, we intend to understand the multi-level issues (or factors) within technical and social systems that influence the success of workplace social platform usage.

Research Methodology

This paper adopts an explorative case study research approach to answer the research question. We refer to our case organization as ‘Gamma’, which is one of the Australia’s largest telecommunication and media organizations. Gamma was formed in 1975 and provides fixed line and mobile telephony, Internet and data services, network services and digital television to its clients. Gamma has a diverse workforce (approximately a total headcount of 32,000) of staff, retailers, contractors and part-time workers who undertake different tasks in geographically dispersed regions of Australia. We have selected this case organization because Gamma has successfully implemented Yammer as their main ESN platform approximately two to three years ago. Data were collected by means of semi-structured interviews with six of Gamma’s employees, who were selected using snowball sampling (see Table 1 for their demographics). All six interviews, conducted face-to-face at the locations chosen by interviewees, lasted on average of 40 minutes and they were audio-recorded. After the interviews, the recordings were transcribed verbatim and the transcripts were coded and analysed systematically using MAXQDA 11 software. Using a deductive approach, each transcript was read line-by-line and prominent themes that might be relevant to answer the research questions were identified. Following this, the catalogue of prominent themes were analyzed and assembled according to patterns of meaning (or coherent themes). In the process, the values that drive ESN use and the factors influencing employees’ ESN use began to emerge. Following this step, all the coherent themes in the data were re-analysed in depth (to look for similarities and differences) and refined.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Code</th>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Job Tenure</th>
<th>Personal Innovativeness</th>
<th>Public SNSs User Type</th>
<th>ESN User Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GU01</td>
<td>20-34</td>
<td>Service Portfolio Manager</td>
<td>5 to 10 years</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GU02</td>
<td>35-49</td>
<td>Intranet Analyst</td>
<td>More than 10 years</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GU03</td>
<td>35-49</td>
<td>Senior Business Analyst</td>
<td>5 to 10 years</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GU04</td>
<td>50 or over</td>
<td>Collaboration and Knowledge Manager</td>
<td>More than 10 years</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>Active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GU05</td>
<td>35-49</td>
<td>Intranet Quality Assurance Manager</td>
<td>More than 10 years</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Non-User</td>
<td>Active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GU06</td>
<td>35-49</td>
<td>Change Manager</td>
<td>5 to 10 years</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Active</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Legend: Public SNSs: Public social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter
Active: An individual who regularly uses the social platform (i.e. consistently monitors, responds and contribute posts)
Passive: An individual who occasionally uses the social platform (i.e. intermittently monitors, responds and contribute posts)

Table 1: Demographics of Interviewees

Findings

The overall usage rage of ESN is relatively high, where almost 70% of Gamma’s employees use the social platform. While Gamma has thousands of employees from distinct business functions across geographic locations, ESN is an invaluable platform to connect them together and build a networked organization.
Firstly, ESN plays a pivotal role as Gamma’s knowledge base of all the organization’s information (e.g. knowledge of who knows what (i.e. skills and expertise) and who knows whom (i.e. social ties)). The visibility of the organizational knowledge breaks the functional silos and creates and maintains social ties within and between all levels of the organization. ESN also provides Gamma’s employees with an avenue to ask for solutions for their task-related problems and crowdsource opinions and ideas. The transparent and robust repository of knowledge conversations improves business processes by removing duplication of work tasks, which saves time and money. The use of ESN within Gamma also flattens the communication hierarchy, where everybody has the same level of access to information and also interactions (i.e. everyone is equal) regardless of the position within organization. Moreover, ESN facilitates in building Communities of Practice (CoPs), where likeminded employees can gather together virtually, support one another, share resources, seek feedback and learn from each other. Therefore, the relevant topics and knowledge conversations of CoPs may provide guidance to Gamma employees in facilitating self-learning and innovation. Overall, ESN is implemented within Gamma to support work-related tasks to get their work done easier and faster (i.e. increase employees’ productivity).

**Perceived Value of Using ESN**

While all interviewees are active ESN users, we derived two types of purposes of ESN usage from the interview data: *utilitarian* and *hedonic*.

From the *utilitarian* perspective, three interviewees (GU01, GU04, GU06) mentioned that ESN is a powerful tool in terms of reaching out for help and solving work-related task problems in real time. They were instantly directed to the right expertise or expert through ESN. Moreover, ESN keeps employees abreast of current organizational activities and politics (GU03, GU04). ESN also facilitates rapid information dissemination (GU02) and gathering of opinions and ideas through crowdsourcing (GU04), which saves more time.

Meanwhile, from the *hedonic* perspective, four interviewees (GU02, GU03, GU04, GU06) mentioned they enjoyed the sense of connectedness using ESN because this platform enables them to establish interpersonal relationships with other employees with whom they do not usually work within the organization (weak ties) and also to maintain existing relationships (strong ties). They feel engaged and it is fun and entertaining to be able to have watercooler conversations and personal non-work related groups such as gaming and book club groups with these social ties. Using ESN, employees feel empowered as their voice is heard within the organization (GU01, GU03) and their visibility is increased (GU04). In addition, employees within Gamma are able to work remotely through the ESN platform (GU06).

Our findings confirm that the use of ESN within Gamma is driven by *utilitarian* and *hedonic* values.

**Enabling Socio-Technical Factors**

Mapping from Bostrom and Heinen (1977)’s STS constructs, i.e. technology and task (technical subsystem) and structure and people (social subsystem), we suggest that five dimensional socio-technical factors influence employees’ decision to use ESN, namely *technological*, *organizational*, *social*, *individual* and *task* (TOSIT) (see Figure 1). In this study, *technological factors* are associated with ESN platform characteristics and its outputs while *organizational factors* relate to the organizational processes and environment that impact the use of ESN. Meanwhile, *social factors* refer to the various social processes and mechanisms that guide an individual employee to formulate perceptions of ESN usage and *individual factors* include attributes of individual employees and their perceptions of ESN use. Lastly, *task factors* are associated with the tasks characteristics that are supported by ESN.

**Technological Factors**

The characteristics of ESN platform relating to *ease of use*, *integration* and *accessibility* were identified as technological factors motivating employees’ behavior. Five interviewees mentioned that simplicity and similarity of ESN with other public SNSs contribute to ease of use and transition. ESN is integrated and prominently features in Gamma’s main portal page (i.e. Intranet). This appears to be an important factor as stated by two interviewees. The ability to access ESN content and knowledge 24/7 across a wide range of portable devices was also identified as an enabling technological factor. Another technological factor is
the quality of content and conversations happening within the platform in terms of its usefulness and timeliness. ESN offers a venue for geographically dispersed employees to connect and have social conversations (i.e. share and exchange knowledge). These organizational conversations create nuggets of useful knowledge (GU01, GU02). For example, social tags (e.g. #bestOfESN) are used to tag positive ESN experiences at work. Meanwhile, according to GU06, using ESN enables her to easily find an answer to work-related questions as someone within the network will answer or point her in the right direction in real-time.

Organizational Factors

Identified organizational factors that drive the ESN use within Gamma are allied to its strategic ESN community management, top management involvement, campaigns and education and training. The community management involves community managers, committee members and assistants to community manager (i.e. champions). According to GU06, there are a number of ESN administrators who are full-time community managers. It is the responsibility of community managers to look after the network by ensuring that connections are made, all posted questions are answered as well as ensuring the ongoing flow of information, conversations and ideas (GU01). A committee is set up to establish a holistic strategy and plan for ESN and facilitate the realization of the value within Gamma. The committee members also consistently communicate the benefits of ESN across organization and coax employees to use ESN appropriately (GU06).

“There is a [ESN] Committee of which I’m part of that is looking at what is the program of work ahead, how could we improve it, how could we drive the value within the organization, what sort of analytics can we get, how do we know how it has been used. We are also looking at the moment to put in appropriate support mechanisms for dealing with the people who don’t know how to use it or are having technical difficulties with it.” (GU06)

Champions are also recruited among a group of employees who are very active and enthusiastic social media users to follow-up and help everybody in Gamma to solve their problems by answering the questions and have their voice heard (GU01). Gamma’s CEO is also one of the champion users in the network.

The enthusiastic top management involvement appears to be another driver of ESN use. Five interviewees revealed that the main reason that ESN has taken off within Gamma is because the CEO is an avid user of ESN and he encourages everybody to adopt. His enthusiastic and active use of ESN creates the impression that using the ESN is beneficial and his leading-by-example increases the usage (GU02, GU03).

“The thing that really made [ESN] take off in Gamma was that the CEO started posting. Suddenly people have an avenue directly to the CEO, which is quite unusual and other senior executives also are doing the same things there.” (GU02)

Three interviewees (GU03, GU04, GU06) also revealed that Gamma held company-wide ESN campaigns (i.e. YamJam) twice a year for several days where all levels of employees have brainstorming sessions focused around various topics or issues they are dealing with. The purpose is to build momentum in ESN use and generate new ideas around a topic where employees feel their voices are heard resulting in a more connected workforce.

“I think twice a year the senior management have a kind of get-together for a couple of days. Interestingly, the CEO actually put a question on [ESN] that said, “Are you on [ESN]? If not why haven’t, why don’t you join?” That being suddenly started boosting the people to join in.” (GU04)

Apart from campaigns, Gamma also provides education and training (e.g. video conferencing) for employees who have problems using ESN (GU01).

“What we have been doing is running master classes, which is basically a teleconferencing that everybody dialed in and you’ve got a video conferencing going on and show how different pieces of [ESN] may work.” (GU01)
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Social Factors

The social factors that drive ESN adoption within Gamma include critical mass, democratic social climate and social presence. The use of ESN in Gamma has achieved its critical mass and there are enough users in the network to create its own momentum and become viral (GU01, GU04).

“I think there is enough of an audience there that you can ask a question. If there isn’t actually someone who knows the answer, there will be someone who knows somebody. There is enough variety of topics and groups and things that most people would find something of interest.” (GU04)

Gamma’s constructive ESN communication climate encourages employees to participate and share information and knowledge (GU04). Employees can openly exchange information and have confirming and cooperative interaction through this social platform.

“I think it’s kind of reasonably nurturing in terms of the people who participate there where you don’t kind of get flamed. People don’t criticize your failure, like “You silly, you got that wrong!” (GU04)

Another driver for ESN use is associated with capability of this internal social platform to convey a feeling of human contact, connectedness and intimacy among Gamma’s employees who are geographically dispersed. The social presence of ESN enables employees to connect with other employees even when they work remotely (GU03).

“[..] we don’t have to be in an office anymore. I work from home two days a week. I think [ESN] brings us all together in a way. It gives you that feeling that you are still there, you are still part of that group, you are still talking and the office environment becomes less important.” (GU03)

Individual Factors

The individual drivers for ESN use in Gamma seem intrinsic, namely enjoyment of helping others and knowledge self-efficacy. Four interviewees (GU01, GU02, GU03, GU04) agreed that being able to help their colleagues to solve problems makes them feel good. They feel important and like a trusted employee within the organization, which is a big motivator.

Another reason that contributes to the success of ESN use is the high level of knowledge self-efficacy among Gamma employees (GU01). Employees who have a good knowledge of certain topics feel confident that the knowledge they contribute is valuable and can help others to solve their problems.

“I think one of the biggest motivators for champions is that because they have some knowledge of their topics they continuously want to contribute because they are not only passionate but they have a very good knowledge of the environment, the industry, and IT trends.” (GU01)

Task Factors

From the task perspective, three interviewees (GU01, GU04, GU06) mentioned that ESN is definitely helpful in terms of getting answers for uncertain and difficult tasks (i.e. equivocal tasks) when they do not know who can help. The ability of ESN in supporting equivocal tasks is one of the usage motivators.

“Many times I had a question but I didn’t know who I should ask. I went and did a shout ‘Does anyone know this?’ Within 5 seconds, there is somebody told me, ‘You have to talk to this person and this person and something could have come out of it.’” (GU01)

The integration of ESN into business processes by which tasks occur also appears to be a motivator (GU02, GU03, GU06). From the interview data, we found that every functional affiliation forms its own private virtual workgroups to share and exchange information and knowledge. The use of ESN is to advance tasks coordination, increase group productivity and improve their operations with best practices. As ESN use is integrated into work processes, employees will be motivated to participate because they do not want to miss any updates or important things happening within their workgroups.

“We have a private group, which is set up for our business unit. Our boss and many of the conversations around projects will take place within that group. We are supposed to skim through to see if there is anything that you need to know about what’s going on. There is other interest groups [...] and I just look through what’s going on. My manager will go to [ESN] and sort of say, ’X, Y, can you please do this and this?’ It’s also used to communicate about work tasks.”(GU03)
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Discussion

Congruence with our previous study (i.e. Chin et al. (2015)), this study confirms that an effective ESN strategy within an organization is the result of concurrent alignment of technological, organizational, social, individual and task (TOSIT) factors of the social platform and that employee behavior are gravitated to the utilitarian and hedonic values. More significantly, the study suggests that there is a direct relationship between the TOSIT factors and the perceived value of ESN use. As the ESN we studied in this case is a third-party system, the features of the internal social platform are stable. From the technological perspective, how the organization activates the ESN platform (i.e. platform quality) and creates a user-friendly experience (e.g. easy to use and access) for employees and generates useful content and provides timely feedback (i.e. content quality) that fulfil their work needs, is imperative. In fact, system quality and content quality have been acknowledged as critical success factors for information systems (IS) (DeLone and McLean 1992), knowledge management system (KMS)(Kulkarni et al. 2007) and corporate social software (Steinhuser et al. 2011). This study therefore proposes the following propositions:

Proposition 1: The higher the quality of the ESN platform and content activated, the greater the perceived value of ESN use will be.

From the organizational perspective, the coalition between top management involvement and ESN facilitating conditions (i.e. community management, campaigns and education and training) plays a pivotal role in maximizing the value of an internal social network for the organization and employees. The perceived top management support has been acknowledged as a strong motivator for KMS use in previous studies such as Wang and Lai (2014) and Kuo and Lee (2011). The degree to which top management is visibly involved and actively engaged in the ESN is a key driver of this open platform use. Their active participation not only indicates the legitimacy and benefits of the platform usage, but also drives the creation of quality content and conversations and escalates employees’ engagement. This increases the value of ESN. While Venkatesh et al. (2003) have validated facilitating conditions as a significant predictor of IS use, our study also corroborated that ESN community management, campaigns and education and training facilitate the organization’s transition towards a networked communication culture by motivating more employees to use the social platform. For example, the roles of community manager, champion and ESN committee include understanding what employees need (e.g. providing education and training for employees who do not have experience with a social platform), keeping the experts or senior managers actively involved and answering questions on the network, to ensure that important content goes on network and that use of the ESN is promoted (e.g. organizing campaigns).

Proposition 2: The more top management is involved and the better the perceived organizational facilitating conditions for ESN, the greater the perceived value of ESN use will be.
The theory of network externalities suggests that the value of a technology increases with the number of users (Katz and Shapiro 1986) and we also found that the perception of critical mass is crucial to increase the perceived value of the ESN. Prior studies have revealed that the critical mass of value-adding key users (e.g. someone with breadth of resources) are crucial to ensure high quality content flowing and an increase in the value of contributions to the ESN (Berger et al. 2014b; Zhao et al. 2013). If there are enough key users (i.e. experts and senior managers), more employees will be attracted to use ESN, as organizational knowledge that help them solve their problems could be reached through the platform. The ESN’s ‘atmosphere’ or ‘communication climate’ (e.g. how things are done and how employees treat each other on the platform) has also been identified to have a significant influence on value of usage. A positive ESN communication climate (e.g. innovative, collaborative and affiliation) is a strong motivator of ESN use (Boh and Wong 2013; Kügler et al. 2012). For example, a constructive communication climate of ESN, where employees are encouraged to think freely and communicate their opinions and ideas openly without being criticized and discriminated against, are more likely to sustain the information flow and conversations and increase the perceived ESN value. In addition, ESN offers an alternative virtual environment for employees to interact with each other. Previous studies have shown that the sense of human warmth and sociability (i.e. social presence) positively influence the use of social software in the personal realm (Gao et al. 2010; Grieve et al. 2013). Our findings have identified similar results where the perceived social presence of ESN enables employees to work remotely and feel a sense of connectedness even they are not in the physical office.

Proposition 3: The higher the level of critical mass, constructive communication climate and perceived social presence, the greater the perceived value of ESN use will be.

On the individual level, we found that employees’ ESN behavior seems to be evoked by intrinsic motivation. For example, employees derive enjoyment from sharing their knowledge and helping others on ESN and they believe that their knowledge can help other to solve organizational tasks or problems. It has been acknowledged in prior studies that the perceived enjoyment of helping others and knowledge self-efficacy are influential predictors towards employees’ knowledge sharing behavior (Kankanhalli et al. 2005; Lin 2007; Singh et al. 2014). It can be concluded that the overall culture of knowledge sharing within Gamma is relatively strong.

Proposition 4: The stronger the knowledge sharing culture of the organization, the greater the perceived value of ESN use will be.

While task characteristics (e.g. task analyzability, urgency and complexity) have a positive relationship to employees’ use of social communication platform (Koo et al. 2011), our research found that the influential task factor of ESN use is associated with fitness of the platform to support tasks that lack adequate information or instructions (i.e. equivocal tasks). When the ESN platform is an accumulator for all the organizational knowledge, employees are motivated to use the social platform, as they are provided with the right knowledge and people when they post their equivocal task problems. Moreover, the integration of ESN to business processes where work-related tasks are coordinated through the social platform also appears to be a motivator. We found that the integration with tasks creates a sense of commitment among employees to use ESN as it associated with their work performance.

Proposition 5: The higher the task equivocality and the higher the integration of the ESN with business processes, the greater the perceived value of ESN use will be.

Conclusions and Further Work

This paper highlights the importance of understanding the different socio-technical factors motivating employees’ behaviors towards ESN. As organizational knowledge is an important organizational asset (Beck et al. 2014), this understanding is important. This is especially true as ESN become more prominent in organizations and their use for knowledge sharing continues to evolve in new and complex ways. Elucidating the use of ESN within a successful view will also improve our understanding of the key success factors of the use of this workplace social platform. The best way to activate an ESN platform is to ensure augmentation of purpose has utilitarian and hedonic values and the joint optimization of the identified technological, organization, social, individual, and task factors. For example, organization should create an ESN user-friendly experience for employees such as by ensuring that the ESN platform is easy to use, 24/7 accessible and integrated with the organization’s portal to enable the flow of quality
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content and knowledge conversations. In addition, ESN community management is critical to trigger and manage the use of ESN (i.e. integration with business processes) and to find avenues to ensure that all organizational actors (from top to bottom) are involved and treated well within the social platform. When there are enough ESN users, the momentum will increase and its usage becomes viral as there are enough ‘brains’ (e.g. experts and expertise) to help individual employees to solve their equivocal tasks and improve their work performance. Given that the findings are based on a relatively small number of interviews and limited to a particular organization perspective, we have to be vigilant in generalizing our results to other types of organizations and ESN platforms. Future research in extending the exploration of usage in other type of organization and conducting a survey to generalize the findings from other case studies will be conducted.

REFERENCES


