

Chapter 2

Cultural Barriers to Organizational Social Media Adoption

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ABSTRACT

Before they became a part of our social lives, most communication technologies were introduced with a business function in mind. Private individuals quickly adopted social media technology as an extension of their personal life. Due to this reason, many organizations are struggling to understand how this technology can benefit their mission, while many more worry that it will devastate productivity and security. Individuals who wield the power of expansive social media networks can significantly alter an organization's credibility and fiscal health. Organizations who harness the massive data warehouses behind these social media networks have the ability to significantly alter individual lives and society at large; for better or worse. However, barriers to organizational social media adoption are more cultural than technical. This chapter analyzes what cultural barriers are being raised against social media adoption and how can management re-align their understanding of social media to better utilize resources and take advantage of the opportunities this technology presents.

1. INTRODUCTION

The biggest hurdle to social media adoption by businesses is culture. In a 2011 global study by IBM, four barriers were identified that prevented companies from social media adoption: Security, Adoption, Compliance, and Culture. According to Information Week, “Command-and-control culture” was the number one obstacle among the Top 10 Enterprise Social Networking Obstacles. In his 12 social business predictions for 2012, Dion Hinchcliffe from the Dachis Group predicted that social intranets will continue to struggle not from a technology perspective but from lack of collaboration between internal teams like IT, Human Resources, Marketing, etc. This is a culture challenge (Perficient.com, 2011).

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Paul Otlet an entrepreneur, visionary envisioned a mechanized system of shared knowledge based on a system of hyperlinks, which not only bound information together but also expanded on the understanding of the information by providing context (Rayward, 1975). The birth of World Wide Web in 1993 brought a milestone of the system envisioned by Paul Otlet. The final component was to add context to the hyperlinks so that the information could be turned into social knowledge.

The dawn of social media started the realization of context through a combination of metadata and machine awareness. Social media sites use metadata and network awareness to provide suggestions to users for new friends with whom they might want to connect. Search engines like Google are combining traditional indexing structures with social media networking data transfers to add further context to searches. This understanding of context also improving the learning of network of machines that makes up our inter-connected world. However, a world of freely shared, contextual information is still a dream that faces significant cultural than technological challenges to come true.

According to a study by the PulsePoint Group (PulsePoint, 2012), the average return on social engagement was calculated to be between 3-5 percent. The most engaged businesses are reporting a calculated 7.7 percent business impact specifically from social engagement, which is four times the performance of the lowest performers who only achieved a 1.9 percent estimated return.

The growing popularity of social media is making its mark on companies as well as individuals. Facebook enjoys more than 500 million members. This number alone is enough for organizations to realize that social media is the next place where they would find their customers, future employees and other stakeholders. Social media can provide multiple benefits to the organizations such as customer contact, facilitation in knowledge work, fast and easy information exchange, and increased departmental collaboration (Fuchs-Kittowski et al. 2009). Despite the possibilities, many companies still haven't leveraged social media due to various challenges and problems associated with its adoption and use (Bughin et al. 2008). These challenges may arise due to the fact that social media, being a web 2.0 tool, is a paradigm shift in how users connect and communicate with each other. Social media can enable collaboration and break down information silos to help aggregate and publish information (Mande and Wigand, 2010). Social media provides a platform for content production where consumers and other external stakeholders become active content producers and consumers at the same time. Some companies are becoming open organizations and using social media to relinquish some of the historical control they have had on the content they produced. Such organizational shift marks a big change in the organizational culture.

The barriers to enterprise social media adoption are far more cultural than technical. The objective of this chapter is to discuss the cultural barriers to social media adoption in the organizations. Within most organizations, there lies a wealth of information locked away due to both technological and cultural constraints. For the purpose of this chapter, cultural constraints are those organizational habits, leadership and management styles, policies and procedures that significantly hinder adoption of social media usage.

2. FACTORS UNDERLYING THE CULTURAL BARRIERS

According to (Miller, 2010; Michael Silverman, 2013; Beth Kanter, 2009; Jones, 2010; Coye Cheshire, 2011; Michael Brito, 2012; Hunt, 2013) the following cultural barriers hinder organization's adoption of social media.

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