

Chapter 8

Mapping the Enterprise Social Network (ESN) Spectrum in Knowledge Management and Product Innovations

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ABSTRACT

This book chapter unravels the difference brought into traditional knowledge management due to the use of enterprise social networks (ESNs). The advantages and barriers to the use of ESNs in organizations are also explained. The ESN spectrum and the corresponding knowledge management practices and innovation types are clearly delineated in this chapter. There are myriads of human as well as social factors affecting the usage and implementation of ESNs in organizations. This book chapter explores these factors too. Organizations may require special mechanisms to utilize the knowledge shared via ESNs and transform them into innovations. The book chapter suggests a few of these mechanisms. In this book chapter we use the theory of technology acceptance and works testing the theory of media richness to understand the varied uses of ESNs in knowledge management and innovation in organizations.

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge management primarily requires that tacit and explicit knowledge be identified and acquired from within or outside the firm and be transformed to innovations. Generally in business enterprises, knowledge is acquired from employees within the firm and from customers, partner institutions, partner universities, research centers and suppliers outside the firms. In our book chapter, we explore the new age ways of knowledge sharing in firms, and its linkages with knowledge management and innovation. We will also explore the barriers, advantages and facilitators to these new ways of knowledge management in firms.

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In the last two decades organizational researchers (Nicolas & Cerdan, 2011; Carneiro, 2000; Darroch & McNaughton, 2002; & Du Plessis, 2007) have successfully and exhaustively established the linkage between knowledge management and firm level innovation. At the same time, Information Systems researchers have been showing a burgeoning interest in the topic of social media. Enterprises have already built bridges across these disparate realms and started using social media for knowledge management and innovation. To mention a few, Macy's uses Tibbr, T mobile uses Jive, Boral uses Yammer, Nokia uses Social cast, Best Buy uses Kaltura, GE uses Chatter, IBM uses Beehive and Atos uses BlueKiwi (Fee, 2013). These social media platforms used to share content within and sometimes across business and commercial enterprises are called Enterprise Social Networks (ESNs). ESNs are defined as

“Web-based platforms that allow workers to (1) communicate messages with specific coworkers or broadcast messages to everyone in the organization; (2) explicitly indicate or implicitly reveal particular coworkers as communication partners; (3) post, edit, and sort text and files linked to themselves or others; and (4) view the messages, connections, text, and files communicated, posted, edited and sorted by anyone else in the organization at any time of their choosing” (Leonardi et al, 2013; p. 2). Social media platforms in itself are defined as the platforms used to create, modify, share and discuss internet content in the form of content sharing sites, blogs, social networking sites and wikis (Kietzmann et al, 2011).

The social media phenomenon had started around 1994 with the arrival of Geocities: An internet site that allowed individuals to create their own web pages in cyberspace ‘cities’ named after commonly used names for industries. Following this, multitudes of social media sites mushroomed across the world. Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Pinterest, Youtube, LinkedIn, Wikipedia, MySpace and Flickr are just the tip of the iceberg. And today even business enterprises use social media in the form of ESNs to share classified contents with sensitive and proprietary knowledge.

Knowledge sharing is essential to knowledge management and innovation and knowledge management in turn enhances firm financial performance (Goel et al, 2010). In this new era, the ESN platforms to share information are also pivotal to knowledge management and innovation. Ideally, management research should reflect the real life business situations and amalgamate enterprise issues across disciplines. Yet, in spite of the growing importance of Enterprise Social Networks (ESNs) in enterprises, researchers have not pursued the issues in ESN adoption in firms, or the role of ESNs in knowledge management or innovation extensively. In fact, very few researchers as Swan et al (1999), and Karkkainen et al (2010) have focused on the particular issues of knowledge sharing in ESNs and how it impacts firm level innovation. In this book chapter we intend to unravel

- The changes brought in traditional knowledge management with the adoption of ESNs into it
- The barriers to the use of ESNs for knowledge management and innovation in firms
- The advantages in using ESNs for knowledge management and innovation in firms
- The wide spectrum of social media available in the market today and the corresponding varieties of knowledge management practices and innovation they can encourage.
- The human and social factors affecting the quality and ease of use of the various ESNs for sharing knowledge in firms
- The mechanisms used by organizations to ensure that the knowledge shared via the collaborative tools of ESNs end in fruitful innovations for the firm.

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