

Chapter 35

The Role of Technology and Social Media in Tacit Knowledge Sharing

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ABSTRACT

Technology-mediated knowledge sharing has become almost unavoidable given the globalization of work. Co-workers are not necessarily in close enough proximity to have face-to-face interactions despite the fact that these are the most effective means of sharing knowledge. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) differ in a number of key attributes. While traditional technologies are well suited for sharing explicit knowledge, that has been articulated and documented as text or other media, tacit knowledge is more challenging. Tacit knowledge is typically experiential knowledge that is very difficult to put into words or document in any way. This paper proposes an ICT selection method based primarily on media richness (extent to which multimedia content can be shared) and social presence (extent to which people feel they are connecting with other people and not technology). These characteristics can serve as a preliminary basis to select the most appropriate channel for sharing tacit knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

Herring (1996, p. 1) defined computer-mediated communication as “communication that takes place between human beings via the instrumentality of computers” (Herring, 1996, p. 1). Today, it is more common to refer to information and communication technologies (ICTs) that can be used to mediate communication, conversation and knowledge sharing as there are more diverse devices available in addition to computers.

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Tiwana and Ramesh (2001) list content aggregator systems such as project management systems, data warehouses, digital libraries and organizational memory systems as ICTs for knowledge sharing. These ICTs contain explicit knowledge (documented and tangible content) but also link this to tacit knowledge (“point” to tacit knowledge e.g. the name of an expert). Young (2010) provides a comprehensive list of tools and techniques for knowledge sharing which includes the following ICT-mediated tools:

- Blogs
- Discussion forums, chat rooms, corporate intranets, emails and texting
- Communities of Practice (virtual)
- Document libraries
- Wikis
- Social networking
- Voice and VOIP
- Expert locators
- Collaborative virtual workspaces
- Knowledge portals
- Video sharing

Blogs can be used to capture spontaneous learning, good ideas, and insights. Blogging is defined as the writing of weblogs (Blood, 2002). Blogs are simple journal type websites with sequential entries in reverse chronological order. They can be short stories or articles, often discussing current events. They can include multimedia in addition to text: photos, videos, etc. Blogs can be single or collection of authors. There is a specific focus and readers can comment on the items. Blogs offer an easy way for individuals, groups and the entire organization to be notified of new items of interest that have been shared with the community. Videos can be used to add more context (images, voice, scans) to blogs.

Discussion forums, chat rooms, corporate intranets, emails and texting can be used to capture and share collective knowledge. Weisz et al (2006) describe FreeJam, a knowledge sharing tool used at IBM to broadcast instant messages within IBM. A common application is to call a “jam” which can be almost instantaneous. For example, a question can be sent out to the IBM community and quickly answered.

Communities of Practice (CoPs) were defined by Wenger (1998) as groups of people who share a strong professional interest, want to learn to perform better and interact regularly to share skills, knowledge and expertise. Virtual communities of practice make use of ICTs to connect members and allow them to interact.

A document library like GoogleDocs is a repository of useful documents that are organized and searchable – typically stored in relational database. This is almost exclusively for explicit or tangible knowledge.

Wikis typically contain one web page per topic (a discussion page and an editing page for each topic as well as a history of changes and revisions) e.g. Wikipedia. It tends to be open to all to collaborate, contribute content and access what it is there.

Social networks consist of a group of people who share a common interest. Unlike CoPs, this interest need not be a professional one. Social nets help you find others with the same interest, aggregate them so they can communicate with the group and allow them to share content (text, streaming video, relevant

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