Chapter 43

Towards Understanding the Successful Adoption of Blog–Based Knowledge Management Systems
A Socio–Psychological Approach

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ABSTRACT

Knowledge has been recognized as a valuable resource for organizational activities. As businesses are entering the world of Web 2.0, knowledge sharing is widely regarded as a critical issue in the area of organizational knowledge management (KM). Recently, organizations have started adopting blog-based knowledge management systems (KMS) with encouraging results. Used as a tool for sharing organizational knowledge, blogging can aggregate the intellectual power of individual members, serve as innovative KMS, and lead to the creation of a trust-based corporate culture. However, despite the increasing adoption of blogs by organizations, a theoretical framework for understanding a blog-based KMS has not been developed. This chapter attempts to present a framework for understanding a blog-based KMS in an organizational setting, grounded in a socio-psychological approach and the application of social identity and symbolic interaction theories.

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge has been recognized as a valuable resource for organizational activities (Miller & Shamsie, 1996). Prior studies have argued that knowledge is the most valuable organizational resource because it represents intangible assets, operational routines, and creative processes that are hard to imitate (Grant, 1996; Liebeskindk, 1996).

There are many research questions associated with corporate knowledge management (KM) such as the effects of knowledge boundaries on KM, the significance of social relations in KM, and the role of experience and environment in KM. Another issue associated with KM involves the methods and incentives necessary to promote knowledge sharing within and between organizations. In this regard, organizational knowledge sharing has been debated intensely by business practitioners as one of the most critical parts of knowledge management. Even though the pieces of knowledge required to complete an organizational task may be dispersed among different members (Agrote, McEvily, & Reagans, 2003), those users may not be aware of others who need or possess this knowledge. Also, even when knowledge owners know of someone in need, current incentive structures may discourage knowledge sharing and make members reluctant to "give away" their knowledge to others, as this may affect their current status within an organization (Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Huber, 2001). As a result, there may be limited organizational knowledge sharing with an increasing knowledge gap resulting in undesirable work outcomes (Baird & Henderson, 2001).

Today, leading companies (including IBM, Sun Microsystems, etc.) have launched new KM systems based on blogs to foster knowledge sharing throughout their organizations. Studies and reports indicate that these companies have effectively managed blog-based KM systems and achieved notable results in the area of organizational knowledge sharing (Dearstyne,

2005). However, there has been little theoretical work aimed at understanding the current state of KM systems and knowledge sharing within organizations. This chapter attempts to present a new a framework for understanding a blog-based KMS within an organizational setting based on a socio-psychological approach and integrating the application of social identity and symbolic interaction theories.

BACKGROUND

Blogging is known to enhance information diffusion and knowledge sharing between users (Gruhl, Liben-Nowell, Guha, & Tomkins, 2004). Although the content of most blogs is personal, there are many topic-oriented blogs related to specific interests or to business promotions. In this regard, blogs are sometimes used by organizations as educational or knowledge management tools (e.g., blogs at Sun Microsystems), and this type of blog use is growing (Cayzer, 2004; Maag, 2005).

Because blogs are relatively low cost and easy to maintain, the employment of blogs in the business world is growing. Currently, organizations are using blogs for internal information sharing and knowledge management applications (Ives & Watlington, 2005; Wagner & Bolloju, 2005). Blogs can be viewed as a technology (King, 2007) and a communication channel (Holt, 2005). Information shared within corporate blogs may include: industry or company news, strategy brainstorming, activities within specific department, and the sharing of customer related information (Holtz, 2005).

However, as businesses come to view the blog as a KMS, qualms about the possible side effects of corporate blogs emerge. These concerns include: a waste of work time, loss of productivity, reluctance of employees to share knowledge, and increasing bandwidth requirements. Consequentially, the number of businesses managing corporate blogs for knowledge sharing purposes is currently

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