

## **Social Media in the Workplace**

Social media allows people to interact with each other on the Internet using web applications, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Second Life. With social media, people can create, reuse, and exchange user generated content—like photos, videos, reviews, and articles—on sites such as Instagram, YouTube, Trip Advisor, and Wikipedia.

Social media is deployed on a many types of hardware devices, which vary according to screen size, user interface, and degree of mobility (desktop, laptop, tablet, smartphone, etc.). User preference and constraints imposed by workplaces suggest which device is optimal or possible for a certain task. Web 2.0 provides the software foundation, or platform, for social media. Web 2.0 thus enables readers to be writers and consumers to be producers through an interactive (two-way) web.

In using a new generation of technology to support learning, two dilemmas must be resolved. The ultimate goal of an educational technology, and the main criteria for its measure of success, is whether it supports learning. However, this goal may not be attained (and sometimes is not even aimed for) in a workplace setting, business goals take precedence because learning at work is not mission-critical. Another dilemma is that although employees need a certain amount of socializing in order to bond and function as teams, socializing is considered a distraction during the workday, and excessive distractions shorten the time spent on work.

The key to these dilemmas is to find the right balance between working, learning, and socializing. This entails building on existing work practices and integrating computerized work with (one or more) social media. The main challenge for this

integration is not technological but to make it persist, engage the employees, and support learning. Another challenge is to decide whether to mandate the use of social media. E-learning and social media are frequently mandated in numerous workplaces and institutions of higher education. As long as there are multiple ways to access work related information, both with and without social media, and employees do not engage excessively in socializing with family and friends, discretionary use of social media will be successful. It is the pedagogical framing, integration with work activities, and organizational implementation that needs special attention for social media to succeed as an educational technology in workplace settings.

Employees use social media productively at work when it helps them locate required information and knowledgeable individuals to answer questions, to learn about the skills and functions of others in the organization, and to boost work performance. The rest of the article goes into more detail. First, it classifies types of social media as a learning environment. Then it provides an overview of findings from workplace studies, and presents technology components and emerging trends.

### **The learning environment**

Social media gives rise to two types of learning environment: 1) integrated learning environment (ILE) and 2) social learning environment (SLE). Mike Atwood used the term integrated learning environment in 1991 to describe the integration of an intelligent tutoring system in a work organization. Its use was inspired by Gerhard Fischer's notion of an integrated domain-oriented design environment, consisting of a design environment for content creation and a hypertext system for information about content creation. In the era of the World Wide Web, ILEs mean that domain-specific

work tools are integrated with a virtual place for users to find the right content at the right time for accomplishing a work task within the “action present” (the time from encountering a problem to solving it should not result in a disruption of work). When empowered by Web 2.0, users also contribute their own content to supplement missing or crudely rendered information. Julita Vassileva used the term social learning environment (SLE) to describe the following additional functionality: 1) support learners to connect with the right people (right for the context, learner, purpose, educational goal, etc.), and 2) motivate and give incentives for people to learn.

Examples of ILEs include: Using *YouTube* to search for instructional videos to provide help and guidance, and *Wiki systems*, for reading, writing, discussing, and tagging web articles, modeled after Wikipedia. Examples of SLEs include: *Customer engagement platforms*, like Get Satisfaction, allow a company to crowd source ideation, such as to reach out to its customers in a joint effort to improve the company’s products or services, *LinkedIn*, a large business oriented social media network, which allows people to maintain a list of contacts with whom they have some level of relationship, and arranging *online courses* in the virtual world Second Life, in which role playing is used to simulate human resources and relationships.

### **Workplace studies**

In a large bibliometric analysis of 324 published articles on workplace e-learning published in leading journals between 2000 and 2012, Bo Cheng and Minhong Wang conducted a meta study and identified six recurring research themes based on the meaning of article keywords; one theme was “social media in informal learning,”

which was identified with knowledge sharing among peers in companies. The study suggests that social media is an important topic in e-learning research but among the six themes it had the lowest group cohesion (most fragile topic), indicating a theme under development. In scope, it aligns with the notion of social learning environment (SLE) described above.

Grete Netteland conducted a three-year e-learning implementation and adoption study in a telecom company in Scandinavia to determine why the process failed. The study adopted a sociocultural perspective on the analysis and used aspects of Yrjö Engeström's cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) to identify contradictions. Netteland identified six main problems: 1) hardware and software resources, 2) execution of implementation tasks, 3) management control, 4) information sharing, 5) allocation of time to accomplish e-learning, and 6) relevance to work and previous knowledge. SLEs address problems with information sharing and ILEs address relevance to work and previous knowledge.

Social media is gradually replacing or supplementing e-learning in many organizations. Andrew McAfee coined the term "Enterprise 2.0" to mean Web 2.0 applied within an organization. The inadequacy of knowledge management systems to capture tacit knowledge, such as traces of everyday work activities, triggered his inquiry into finding new solutions. McAfee made a distinction between two types of information and communication technology: channels (email and instant messaging) and platforms (corporate intranets and web sites, and information portals); studies indicate that although channels are used more (particularly email), platforms retain traces of work better.

When Enterprise 2.0 extends outside the boundaries of an enterprise, it has the potential to involve a larger community of collaborators to join forces with company employees to develop novel ideas of mutual interest. Don Tapscott and Anthony Williams refer to this as *mass collaboration* and provide two paradigmatic examples: the Linux operating system (open source model of collaboration), and Wikipedia (involving expert users to create specialized content).

### **Technology components and trends**

Today's web applications sometimes contain features and mechanisms that go beyond an interactive and collaborative Web 2.0. With a semantic web framework (Web 3.0), social media becomes adaptive and may complete actions for the user. Mechanisms for user driven organizing, accessing, and presenting information started with *tagging* web pages with keywords (metadata) to describe content so it can be organized according to searching and browsing. Based on the actions taken by past users on related items, a *recommender system* can make suggestions to a user regarding an item on a web page (book, movie, etc.). A *reputation system* is a related mechanism that computes a reputation score for an item based on direct feedback from user interactions (likes, dislikes, reviews, etc.); these interactions help users make decisions toward the item. Reputation systems are also used to promote specialized privileges. For example, a user with a high reputation score in one of Get Satisfaction's online communities may be promoted to champion and be paid part-time to help other customers. *Information delivery* means to decide between different strategies for presenting information to users: a) proactively (automatically computed ahead of time based the user's interaction history), b) reactively (computed

immediately after an action that triggered a perceived need for information), and c) on-request (user searches manually for information). An example of a combination of proactive and reactive information delivery is the Rich Site Summary (*RSS feed*). An RSS feed automatically sends a summary of a web site to an RSS reader (a web application for viewing) after an update has occurred on the site. Finally, *learning analytics* is a set of mechanisms for unleashing the educational potential of a social media, frequently implying a normative perspective by combining statistical analysis and predictive modeling. One goal with learning analytics is to go beyond simply using the web for problem solving and stimulate learners to reflect on their achievements and patterns of behavior in relation to others, and to learn from it. To accomplish this, Gerhard Fischer distinguished three *learning strategies* for social media learning environments: 1) Fix-it level (learning does not delay work, but little understanding is required), 2) reflect level (temporary interruption, fragmented understanding), and 3) tutorial level (systematic presentation of a coherent body of knowledge, substantial time requirements). Researchers are attempting to find the right balance of these three learning strategies for social media in the workplace.

*Anders I. Mørch*

**See also:** Education in Workplace Settings, Integrating Social Media into Learning and Instruction, Social Media in Higher Education, Social Media and Networking, Web 2.0/3.0 in the Workplace

### **Further Readings**

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