

Research report  
May 2014

## Putting social media to work

Lessons from employers



WORK



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# Putting social media to work

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# Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the organisations and interviewees who took part in this research. Those cited in this report are:

Alex Abbotts, Head of Communications, Bromford

Rupert Atterbury Thomas, Communications Manager, Southeastern

Andy Bindon, HR Director, Southeastern

Roland Burton, Senior Employee Communications Manager, Marks & Spencer

Nikki Cann, Internal Communications Support Officer, Devon and Cornwall Police

Liz Cobbold, Head of Digital and Retail Marketing, Adnams plc

Caroline Davies, HR Manager, Cape

Rav Dhaliwal, Director of Customer Success EMEA UK/France/Germany, Yammer

Fergus Fitzgerald, Head Brewer, Adnams plc

Chris Haselden, Director of People and Leadership, Devon and Cornwall Police

Jo Hutchinson, Head of HR Planning and Communication, Marks & Spencer

Philippa Jones, Deputy Chief Executive, Group Company Secretary and Executive Director, Bromford

Hayley Kettlewell, Senior Recruitment Coordinator, Cape

Julie Leo, Director of HR, Bromford

Katherine Marlow, Director of People, Learning and Culture, Santa Fe Group

Nick Matthews, Director of Customer Success, Middle East, Africa, Central and Eastern Europe, Yammer

Reuben Millard, ICT and Corporate Communications Manager, Devon and Cornwall Police

Helena Moore, Director of Communications and Organisational Development, Bromford

Michelle Parry-Slater, The Academy Manager, Santa Fe Group

Martin Tweddle, UK Recruitment Manager, Cape

Niels van der Zeyst, Director of Customer Success, Western Europe, Yammer

The report was written by Jonny Gifford, research adviser at the CIPD. We would like to thank Nicola Peachey for helping organise the research and Steve Bridger, Vanessa Robinson, Perry Timms and Ksenia Zheltoukhova for their comments on the report.

# Summary

This year saw the twenty-fifth anniversary of the creation of the World Wide Web (Owen 2014). The Internet has transformed many aspects of our lives and, over the last decade, social networking sites have been at the heart of this. Since 2008, when Facebook overtook MySpace as the most popular social networking site, there has been a huge growth in social media use (Curtis 2013). But despite the rise of LinkedIn, we use social media more in our personal lives than we do in our organisations and with professional contacts.

This report explores the potential of social media for use with and by employees and aims to shed light on how this potential is being realised. Drawing on in-depth case study research with seven organisations, it focuses on two main aspects of leading practice.

Firstly, we focus on the functional business reasons for using social media with employees, in particular in-house enterprise social networks. How, in practical ways, do these create business value or contribute to the smooth running of organisations?

Secondly, we look at how enterprise social networks are developed within organisations and what factors and practices help them to be used effectively.

We identify a number of business drivers, uses and benefits of using social media with employees. These include:

- **Employee voice.** Social media in general is an open, discursive and dynamic channel that draws employees into discussions about their organisations, and gated enterprise social networks provide a safe place for such online conversations. Social media can facilitate ad hoc communications and collaboration, as well as ongoing initiatives such as employee representation structures.
- **Corporate communications.** Because social media is a more engaging platform than more traditional communications tools such as static intranets, employers can use it to put out corporate messages, quickly gauge how these resonate and land with employees, and help ensure that those messages have been properly understood.
- **Employee relations.** One particular way employers can use social media as a channel for employee voice and corporate communications is to get to the bottom of collective employment issues. By engaging with their workforces in open, two-way (or multi-directional) dialogue, they can demonstrate they are being reasonable and strengthen the relationship with their workforces.
- **Shared purpose.** Enterprise social networks can be used to build shared purpose in an organisation by celebrating good work, reinforcing the organisation's mission and values and helping people gain a better understanding of how their work fits in with those of colleagues.

*'Having a better networked organisation lies at the core of most uses of enterprise social networks, but is also of inherent value in itself.'*

## *‘Enterprise social networks require a shift in role for communications and L&D professionals from creating, packaging and disseminating content, to curating it.’*

- **Workplace community.** Having a better networked organisation lies at the core of most uses of enterprise social networks, but is also of inherent value in itself, as it can enrich employees’ working lives and strengthen their identification with the organisation. Having personal posts as well as professional is often seen to contribute to this.
- **Operational agility.** Enterprise social networks facilitate co-operation and sharing of real-time information, which can help organisations resolve operational issues and deal with customer queries swiftly and efficiently.
- **Insight and innovation.** Enterprise social networks also help organisations deliver better services over the longer term, being valuable tools for drawing on employee insight and experience to make improvements. As well as enabling ideas to be fed ‘upwards’, they provide forums for ideas to be incubated and honed.
- **Advocacy of the organisation.** By permitting and encouraging staff to engage with customers through social media, employers can harness the commitment of these natural advocates. Such interaction can also reinforce the pride employees have in their organisations and contribute to their enjoyment of their job.
- **Recruitment.** Social media can vastly increase the pool from which employers can recruit and make the process of hiring more efficient. This is likely to be of particular benefit in fast-paced job markets.
- **Learning and development.** While there will always be a place for face-to-face learning interventions, social media can

transform many aspects of learning and development, being used to curate knowledge, locate experts and facilitate peer-to-peer support, support self-directed learning and help employees prepare for and embed learning from training courses.

- **Distributed leadership.** Enterprise social networks provide a vehicle for employees throughout the organisation to informally step forward as leaders, influence directly and contribute to the wider organisation. This can help the organisation identify leadership talent but can also inculcate distributed leadership, whereby employees are valued for the expertise and skills they can contribute at any one time, rather than the positions they hold.

One main finding on the journeys of development that organisations take is that enterprise social networks need a rationale or purpose if they are to resonate with employees and become embedded in the organisation. Ultimately, in one way or another, they need to support the day-to-day activities of the organisation.

The process of identifying these uses are often best developed bottom-up, originating from employees themselves, but effective uses will often need to be identified and spread or replicated if they are to be sustainable. As such, there is an important role for someone – or a team of people – to guide and encourage employees’ use of an enterprise social network until it reaches critical mass.

We find that enterprise social networks are an excellent and very time-efficient tool for senior leaders, to help them engage

with a wide range of employees and be more visible across the organisation. However, the most useful role they play on enterprise social networks is often that of encouragement, as too much involvement in discussions can put off more junior employees from contributing. Certainly it would have a negative impact if senior managers were seen to be clamping down on employees with whom they disagreed.

Related to this, we find that as far as is possible, it is best for social networks to be self-managed and posts not to be censored or taken down. Negative criticism should be engaged with in an open and frank way and employees should be informed if their posts have caused offence. Requiring employees

to be named, not anonymous, and setting a clear expectation that posts will remain respectful is usually all that is required to ensure good online behaviour. Thus, policies for social media are appropriate but generally work best when they are light touch.

Enterprise social networks have significant implications for communications and learning and development professionals, requiring a shift in role from creating, packaging and disseminating content to curating it. Equally, employee users of active social networks will need to adapt how they manage information so that they aren't overloaded with irrelevant material.

Enterprise social networks can be used to shape organisational culture but should be used in a way that aligns with other interventions – for example, forums, workshops or Q&A phone-ins to facilitate employee voice. Social media naturally fosters openness, egalitarianism and a lack of rigidity, but it will not transform an organisation's culture by dint of the technology alone.

In the short term at least, our research suggests that an enterprise social network will reflect the culture, tone and morale of the organisation in which it exists. Although it will usually constitute a significant initiative in its own right, it is above all a tool or platform *for* change, to be used towards a purpose.

# Introduction

*‘For social media to earn its place as a core business communication tool, it needs to be more than the latest sparkly thing.’*

## **Envisaging a more social future**

Social media is here for the long term and many employers have some catching up to do. Our 2013 survey on social media use highlighted how its rise has been driven by developments in our personal instead of our work lives: while three-quarters (76%) of UK employees use social media personally, only one-quarter (26%) use it professionally. This is a marked shift from years gone by, when we would usually be introduced to new technology through the organisations in which we work.

Yet many organisations are realising that there is much to be gained from actively adopting social media; indeed, that they would benefit from being fundamentally more social as organisations.

The main problem does not seem to be a lack of understanding of the technology on offer. There is an ever growing array of social media platforms available, offering a wide range of functions, but guides to what they enable people to do are easily found online. Thus, our survey showed that few employees are unsure how to make use of social media, not surprising when we consider that most of us are already familiar with social media from our personal lives.

We also found that organisations are relatively advanced and effective in using social media externally, in particular through communications functions with customers; it is internally with employees where less is being done.

What the survey points to is that many of us don't see the relevance of social media to our work. Obviously, this could be because it really does have limited relevance, but it may also be that we struggle to see the link because our organisations and jobs are simply not geared up to make good use of social media. The risk is that employers are missing a trick and that they will be left behind not only by other organisations, but even by their own employees, who can use social media for work purposes whether or not their employers like it or even know it.

## **An important trend or just trendy?**

Social media is becoming an increasingly common feature of the world of work and this trend looks set to continue. As our recent 2013 survey found, while only a quarter of UK employees use it in their professional lives, this increases to 42% among employees aged 18–24.

It is not unlikely that most employees – especially the younger ‘digital native’ generations who cannot remember a time before the Internet – will soon expect to be able to communicate in this way. Being up to speed with social media may strengthen employer brand and be an important attribute that helps attract and retain employees.

But for social media to earn its place as a core business communication tool, it needs to be more than the latest sparkly thing. It may be ‘low friction’ or easy to introduce (see Section 3) and something many employees would



like to see more of in their work, but the crucial question must be: *how does it actually support the work we're doing?*

As well as focusing on how to go about introducing and embedding social media in an organisation, it is these business rationales that we explore in this research.

### **The current research**

This report is based on qualitative research looking at good practice on the uses of social media with and by employees: *how employers use social media to interact with existing and potential employees and how, in turn, employees use social media to perform their roles more effectively or efficiently and contribute to the organisation more widely.*

We focus on how organisations are using social media, what they see as the benefits and, from an organisational development angle, how they have gone about their social media 'journey'.

This research builds on our survey findings (CIPD 2013a) and literature review (Silverman et al 2013) showing why social media is a powerful employee communication tool. Our hope is that this report and the accompanying case study summaries will help more organisations envisage how they can make better use of social media.

### **Research approach**

The research is based on in-depth interviews in each of seven case study organisations. Initial scoping discussions were conducted by phone between November 2013 and January 2014 and interviews, conducted face to face, by

telephone or by videoconference, took place between January and February 2014. We also conducted an expert focus group at Yammer.

In total we conducted over 20 in-depth (semi-structured) interviews and comparative content analysis on the data from the different organisations. From this we identified common themes in the use of social media with employees, as well as contextual factors that shed light on differences in approach.

### **Note on foci and terms used**

It is worth noting that we refer to internal social media in broad terms, as any platform on which employees can post comments or information that can be viewed by other colleagues. This could include intranets that have limited functionality for interaction – for example, where employees can post comments on an article, video or other piece of content. Where we talk of enterprise social networks, we refer to more advanced platforms that have *'the technical functionality of social media sites like Wikipedia, Facebook and Twitter all clubbed together'* (Rupert Atterbury Thomas, Southeastern).

Specific areas we investigate include how social technology is being used as a tool for internal communications, learning and development and recruitment. We also look at how employees outside corporate communications functions use social media to engage with customers and external stakeholders, but beyond this, we don't look in depth at external communications, which is a significant area in its own right.

It is also worth noting that, although we discuss social technology more broadly – including mobile technology as well as social media – we only touch on the use of mobile technology briefly, in so far as it is used to access social media and share content. We do not aim to address issues relating to Internet-enabled mobile devices per se, although examples of this can be seen in the accompanying case study reports.<sup>1</sup>

### **This report**

Following this introduction, we present a brief overview of the seven case study organisations, followed by a description of the essential functionality and nature of social media.

We present our main findings in Sections 3 and 4. In Section 3, we investigate why our case study organisations are using social media, what the technological innovations look like and how this has been seen to impact on the business. How, in practical ways, is social media creating business value or contributing to the smooth running of organisations?

In Section 4, we consider the organisational development angle, covering key aspects of the 'journeys' our case study organisations have taken in developing their use of social media. What are the keys to using social media successfully?

We conclude with the main lessons from the research.

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<sup>1</sup> See in particular the case study reports for Devon and Cornwall Police and Marks & Spencer, where mobile devices are increasingly being used with front-line officers and customer service employees respectively.

# 1 The case study organisations

This report presents the main themes from seven in-depth case studies. These trace the journeys that the organisations have taken in developing their use of social media with employees and go into more detail on their operating contexts, their uses of social technology and the benefits they have observed.

While the organisations represent a range of sectors, they are all large organisations. Further, many of the benefits of social media are especially salient because most of these organisations have highly dispersed workforces. While our recent survey (CIPD 2013a) did not find this to be a statistically significant influence on the use or perceived benefits of social media, most of our case studies were in no doubt of its relevance. They viewed a particular value of their enterprise social networks being that colleagues could connect who would otherwise not come into contact with each other. With the rise of flexible working and teleworking, this is likely to grow in importance.

**Adnams** is an independent UK brewer, distiller and retailer that describes itself as a values-based business committed to a sustainable future. It has encouraged and supported employees to use social media to engage with customers and strengthen its brand. Through blogs and social media platforms, employees are able to develop their online persona as a part of Adnams.

[www.adnams.co.uk](http://www.adnams.co.uk)

Main focus

**Customer engagement and brand advocacy**

**Bromford** is a social enterprise that provides housing and other community services. It has about 1,250 employees based at about 150 different sites. Bromford has focused on being a 'great place to work' for over a decade. It is in this context that extensive use of Yammer and other social media has been encouraged, as a facilitator to create a more engaging and empowering workplace.

[www.bromford.co.uk](http://www.bromford.co.uk)

Main focus

**Discussion forums, employee engagement, networking and organisational culture**

**Cape UK** supplies services to the energy sector, including scaffolding, thermal insulation and rope access. Recruitment is a particularly significant factor in Cape's operations: it more than doubles the size of its workforce over the summer months and often needs to recruit at very short notice. Using Facebook has transformed Cape's hiring process and has been used to help employee relations. [www.capeplc.com](http://www.capeplc.com)

Main focus

**Recruitment and employee relations**

**Marks & Spencer** employs about 70,000 people in the UK, where it has over 700 shops. Over recent years, the organisation's culture has become more open and collaborative, and its leadership more devolved. Yammer, used alongside a more interactive intranet, is a key tool in this ongoing journey to create a more positive working environment and get the best out of employees. [www.marksandspencer.com](http://www.marksandspencer.com)

Main focus

**Employee engagement, L&D and service improvement**

**Southeastern** runs train services in London, Kent and East Sussex, employing about 3,800 staff across 179 stations. A central focus of its people strategy has been employee voice and communication. Alongside initiatives such as company councils, focus groups and Q&A phone-ins, a major strand to this has been an enterprise social network, WorkMate. [www.southeasternrailway.co.uk](http://www.southeasternrailway.co.uk)

Main focus

**Employee engagement, discussion forums, networking and service improvement**

**Devon and Cornwall Police** has approximately 6,000 staff and 500 volunteers and covers a population of about 1.5 million residents. It is using social media platforms variously to encourage more independent learning, create forums for workplace discussions, make improvements to services and the quality of working life and enable officers to engage with the public. [www.devon-cornwall.police.uk](http://www.devon-cornwall.police.uk)

Main focus

**Discussion forums, engagement with the public and L&D**

**Santa Fe Group** is a global relocation service provider which formed from a merger of Santa Fe (Asia based), Interdean (Europe) and Wridgways (Australia). It has developed an enterprise social learning network, The Academy Online, to transform learning and development in the organisation and start to build a common corporate culture across the group. [www.thesantafegroup.com](http://www.thesantafegroup.com)

Main focus

**Learning and development**

Fuller individual case studies of the organisations are available at [cipd.co.uk/socialtech](http://cipd.co.uk/socialtech)

## 2 What's unique about social media?

*'With social media, communications become not just two-way but multidirectional, colleagues conversing with each other at the same time as feeding messages "up".'*

What is it that social media has to offer? What makes it different from other forms of ICT and what is the fundamental reason it is seen to be of value?

### **The basic functionality of social media**

In our literature review on social media and employee voice (Silverman et al 2013), we argued that much of what social media has to offer is a question of information flows. These changed dramatically with the development of 'Web 2.0' or 'the social web', which saw the opening up of the Internet from 'static' published pages to a more dynamic space in which people could connect and share content.

Email, intranets and presentations are primarily channels for monologues. They have some potential to develop from monological into dialogical if they are followed by discussions and questions and answers, but social media takes this dialogue as its starting point. Indeed, it can be said to be 'multilogical', in that communications become not just two-way but multidirectional, colleagues conversing with each other at the same time as feeding messages 'up' to management.

There is wide recognition that we have become over-reliant on and consequently overloaded by email. Social media offers one solution to this:

*✓ The difference between email and something like Yammer is we have decoupled the addressing mechanism from the message ... If I send an email, I've coupled*

*the addressing mechanism to the message but what [people] can't ever predict is the value of that message to other people that they don't even know. ✓*  
(Rav Dhaliwal, Yammer)

Thus, social media has the potential to make communication both more efficient and more effective. By drawing people into conversations (a 'pull' style of communications) rather than simply broadcasting messages (a 'push' style), social media can be used to engage people who are interested and help get the 'right' information to the 'right' people.

### **Collaboration, collaboration, collaboration**

True to its name, it is also inherently social, in that it is based on what individuals post or share and the interpersonal connections and networks that they form. Our 2013 survey confirms this, showing the greatest value employees place on social media being in developing connections with new people and collaboration.

Many of the uses we describe in the following section can be seen through the lens of building more supportive and collaborative organisations. Collaboration is probably an overused word and certainly not one that is often clearly defined. We often hear talk of collaborative behaviour and many appear to use the term to refer to any joint endeavour.

But to ensure collaboration retains distinct meaning as a concept, we are probably better limiting our use of the word to the voluntary activity that falls outside

one's usual remit, such as cross-organisational initiatives that break down silos and add value where we wouldn't do normally (CIPD 2013b, Hansen 2009, Schrage 1995, Rosen 2007). Otherwise, you're probably just carrying out your job and supporting your colleagues as you should be doing anyway.

In this sense, in a social media context, collaboration is often where online becomes offline, as discussions started on social networks lead to people meeting and working together. It is also clear that collaboration is a means to an end, not an end in itself, and for this reason we do not single it out as a specific business rationale for the use of social media.

### **'Low friction' and inherently attractive**

Part of the reason social media is fast becoming established as a business communication tool is that, supported by developments in mobile technology, it is a relatively easy way to communicate. As such, social media and in particular enterprise social networks – Facebook-like platforms that sit within organisations – have been described as 'low friction' tools:

*“The idea of low friction is [that it's] something that's ubiquitous, something that's easy to engage with and something that doesn't require a lot of specialised equipment ... [Enterprise social networks] are designed ... for users to go viral.”* (Rav Dhaliwal, Yammer)

But the capacity of enterprise social networks to 'go viral' is not only because they are easy to use. It is also a result of them being inherently engaging and attractive, because of their interactive, democratic and immediate nature.

They naturally draw in employees who want to connect, share and discuss with colleagues or even just 'lurk' and see what others are discussing.

This is something seen in several of our case studies. For example, Southeastern previously used a static intranet to post company news, policies and safety plans, but levels of usage were low. By contrast, HR Director Andy Bindon describes the impact of its enterprise social network, WorkMate, as 'phenomenal'.

*“It knocks a static intranet for six. I would never have one, ever again. They're dead.”* (Rupert Atterbury Thomas, Southeastern)

During its pilot, WorkMate received 52,341 visits, nearly 100 times the 540 visits that the intranet received, and staff were clicking on company news as well as engaging with colleagues. Since then it has gone from strength to strength, to the point where 80% of staff are registered, about half of the workforce log on in a given month, and typically about 60 questions and several hundred comments are posted every week.

In the sense that this does not tell us about how or for what social media is being used, this is no more a business rationale than it being the latest sparkly thing (see Introduction). Theoretically, the high levels of use could be a sign of high levels of time wasted and profitability out the window. But seen alongside the benefits discussed in the following section, it is a significant piece of the picture and greatly strengthens the business case. Social media is an engaging ICT tool, the likes of which we have not seen before.

***'Enterprise social networks naturally draw in employees who want to connect, share and discuss with colleagues or even just "lurk" and see what others are discussing.'***

# 3 Why do we use social media and how does it benefit the organisation?

For many employers or professionals looking at actively using social media, a primary question to answer is *what will it deliver?* To this end, we now consider the business drivers or other reasons that our case studies have adopted social media, how they are using it and what benefits they have seen.

## Employee voice: a safe place for open discussions

As we discussed above, employees often find social media platforms engaging because they are interactive, democratic and immediate. It is thus an ideal channel for employee voice, often proving far more popular than traditional methods of enabling voice, such as running employee surveys.

A specific benefit of enterprise social networks is that they provide in-house forums where employees can discuss issues facing the organisation more openly. They can air problems and gripes and make suggestions to improve management processes, products and services and the quality of working life.

Figure 1: Uses of social media in our case study organisations



Indeed, some employers were prompted to set up an enterprise social network because employees were already starting to discuss the organisation independently on external social media platforms. This was the case in Southeastern, where, as the social media phenomenon grew, employees started to use Facebook to create discussion groups and connect with colleagues. There was concern about the content of work-focused discussions that took place publicly, outside the work environment:

*“[We] thought “...Is this the place for staff to be airing their dirty laundry?”... That not only puts Southeastern’s reputation at risk, but also staff’s reputation, because it [blurs the] divide between what’s personal and private, and what’s work.”* (Rupert Atterbury Thomas, Southeastern)

It’s a similar story in Marks & Spencer. Although employees are encouraged to actively engage with customers, the company Facebook page is carefully managed by a dedicated team and Marks & Spencer has a very clear social media policy to protect its brand and employees themselves. An enterprise social network, such as Yammer, was an obvious way of capitalising on employees’ desire to engage with social media in a safer environment:

*“Part of the drive for Yammer was to say, “Look, when we are discussing things about the business, let’s keep that in a private network that we can see and where the consequences are much less far reaching. Feel free to have a voice within M&S, but we don’t want anyone to air dirty laundry in public.”* (Roland Burton, Marks & Spencer)

### Corporate communications

Having employees engaged of their own accord with an in-house social network provides an excellent opportunity for internal communications functions. It gives them perhaps not a captive audience, but certainly a receptive one that they can leverage. As such, enterprise social networks make excellent platforms for communications professionals to put out their messages more effectively.

Using enterprise social networks for internal communications also leads to a shift in how messages are put out, making the process more dynamic. Compared with an intranet or email, the medium of social media is more suited to posting informally worded messages and engaging in discussion. As well as being more attention grabbing, through conversation with employees, key messages can be backed up and clarified, and further attention is drawn to the initial communication:

*“The thing with email is that ... there’s still a tendency to think, “Well, I’ve sent an email and therefore I’ve communicated,” [but] you don’t necessarily know that you have. Okay, you could [use] a “read receipt” ... but if you put a message on [an enterprise social network], it probably won’t be very long before you get a response to that message or someone adding a comment.”* (Andy Bindon, Southeastern)

Similarly, Marks & Spencer has been able to circulate far fewer large documents, which often fast become out of date, and communicate more through shorter messages. This is seen to be ‘much easier and quicker ... to get out to people, but also easier and quicker for them to digest’ (Roland Burton, Marks & Spencer).

*‘In some organisations employees were already starting to discuss the organisation independently on external social media platforms.’*



**'Social networks can act as a social glue, strengthening corporate values and employees' identification with the organisation and pride in their work.'**

It is worth noting that social media need not replace more formal communications. Official documents can be referenced in social media and made available elsewhere. But the shift from an intranet or email-based 'push' style of communications to a 'pull' style through social media can be useful in drawing in and focusing the attention of employees and making sure messages have landed properly.

#### **Employee relations**

A specific area of employee voice and communications in which social media can help is resolving employee relations issues. In fact, although Cape's main use of social media was for recruitment (see below), its first use was as an employee relations tool to prevent what was fast becoming an industrial dispute at a Lincolnshire site in summer 2011. Two years previously, the Lindsey oil refinery dispute demonstrated to the engineering construction industry how wildcat action could be quickly organised through social media. In the Lincolnshire case, Cape decided to use Facebook to clarify their position, engage with people and try to avert the strike:

*'We'd detected that an unofficial strike action was going to happen at one of our major power stations. There were rumours circulating that Cape was utilising non-qualified labour on site and lots of unemployed engineers were orchestrating picketing of the strike. There were 80-plus people planning to congregating at 8 o'clock the next morning. ... We drafted quite a formal but factual response and appended it to the post that was being used to orchestrate it. We had a little bit of kick back from it, but again we were quite tempered in our response to that ... and we didn't have any strike action. It all died down.'* (Caroline Davies, Cape)

This highlights the power of social media as a tool for open discussion. By engaging in debate on a platform that freely allowed comeback, Cape was able to convince people that its actions were correct and reasonable and put to bed a destructive rumour.

In a less heated situation, Southeastern used WorkMate to explain the automatic enrolment onto Smart Pensions. Because this was a result of collective bargaining agreements, the leadership team felt it was for the trade unions to explain this, but when it became clear there was a void in communications, it promptly posted an explanation on WorkMate. The following online discussion helped clarify and reinforce the company's position. Thus, Southeastern managed to preserve harmonious employee relations, avoiding the erosion of trust and potentially an industrial dispute.

Through an enterprise social network, employers can quickly understand how employees are reacting to corporate communications and, by engaging in dialogue, can quash ill-founded rumours and straighten out misunderstandings in a more convincing way than sending a formal all-staff memo. The financial and reputational cost of industrial action is huge and being able to avert this should in itself be enough to justify investment in an enterprise social network. It is of course just one tool and needs to be used effectively within a broader culture of openness and trust, but there is no denying its potential.

#### **Shared purpose**

Beyond resolving or avoiding disputes, enterprise social networks can act as a social glue, strengthening corporate values



and employees' identification with the organisation and pride in their work. This is most evident in Bromford, where, by fostering connections between colleagues, social media is seen to help employees see the line of sight between their role and the organisation's purpose; or, as Helena Moore puts it, 'What bit am I doing that builds the whole?'

It's very easy if you're working in finance, for instance, to lose that sense of what is it that Bromford is all about. What are we achieving here? When they're bombarded daily with stories posted by support workers and housing managers about exactly what's going on with their customers, it just makes it immediately real. ... [It's the] connection with our mission and purpose, the Bromford DNA. (Philippa Jones, Bromford)

Yammer is often used in Bromford to encourage colleagues, celebrating good work and giving moral support or advice for those facing challenges. For example, during our interview, Helena Moore showed one of the latest posts by a maintenance engineer that presented before, during and after pictures of a housing improvement project:

To get one of our engineers to do something like that, without even asking – we would never have had that [before]. ... It brings alive what we're really about. It's actually showing colleagues what we do. (Helena Moore, Bromford)

In response to such posts, many employees celebrate good work, offering praise and encouragement. These are often hash-tagged with Bromford 'be' values, such as #BeDifferent or #BeCommercial, as well as #GPTW (great place to work).

In Marks & Spencer, Yammer has also highlighted how strongly employees identify with the M&S brand. This was particularly seen following the 2013 horse meat crisis, when before making any public announcements, Marks & Spencer used Yammer to tell staff that it had been given the all-clear and would emerge completely unscathed from the episode:

The response to that was really, really powerful. ... Employees were saying, 'This is why I am so proud to work for M&S. This is the company that I am really glad to be a part of. Thanks for sharing this before you shared it with customers.' (Roland Burton, Marks & Spencer)

### Workplace community

Developing networks across the organisation is inseparable from most uses of internal social media. For example, using social media to resolve operational issues, exchange views, locate experts and support learning all rely on connections between individuals and sharing information.

But as well as having a functional purpose, these networks are valuable in their own right, contributing to a stronger sense of community, employee engagement and well-being and, linked to shared purpose, identification with the organisation. Our 2013 survey supports the case study findings that a main reason individuals use social media is a basic desire to network and build relationships.

Our case studies show that this can work variously between geographically dispersed groups of colleagues working in similar functions, across departments and across different levels of seniority. It can make the organisation feel smaller, better integrated, less hierarchical and more personal:

Anybody can post anything and you actually don't know who is going to reply. In some cases, your colleague down the road might reply, and in other cases the director of kids' wear might reply. (Jo Hutchinson, Marks & Spencer)

Given the fears of some employers about internal social media leading to time-wasting and shirking, it is worth noting that a fair amount of non-work activity takes place on enterprise social networks. In Bromford, as much as 30–40% of posts are estimated to be personal, relating to subjects such as a fortieth birthday, leaving to have a baby or passing qualifications.

In the case study organisations, this is largely an accepted and even encouraged aspect of enterprise social networks, being something that further contributes to the sense of community:

It brings personality to the organisation. ... You get a more rounded view of people. ... You're not just dealing with "John in accounts". ... It brings the organisation to life. I think if it was all business on there, I don't know whether people would engage in it as much. (Alex Abbotts, Bromford)

We discuss this further in the following section (see *What constitutes inappropriate uses of social media?*).

### Operational agility

At the more business-focused end of day-to-day operations, social media is used to improve services – for example enhancing customer experience – in real time. In Marks & Spencer, Yammer is used to swiftly flag up specific issues and communicate how the organisation is responding:

**‘Social media can give a unique insight into employee views, often flagging up issues that senior leaders were not aware of.’**

*‘[We’re] able to say, “Great, thank you for all of that. We are working on the problem.” Then coming back and saying, “Here is what the answer is. Here is how we are fixing it. Here is what to tell a customer.” Everyone knows at once, rather than having to phone around 50 different people.’* (Roland Burton, Marks & Spencer)

The speed at which online threads develop have enabled Marks & Spencer to identify and resolve faults with products and IT system problems, as well as deal with customer requests, when previously it would have been slow, time-consuming or, in some cases, simply impractical:

*‘We had a customer who came into a store who, over Christmas, had bought her son a pair of dinosaur slippers. Her son loved them, his favourite gift. He started complaining that one of them was hurting his feet. ... When she looked at them, one was a size 11 and one was a size 6. The pair had obviously got mixed up. She went into the store to [get another size 11]. ... The slippers had gone into the sale, so it was becoming more and more unlikely. The store decided to put it on Yammer. ... Within 36 hours we’d managed to find some slippers and they were on their way to the customer. It’s a really small example, and it’s commercially a very small return these slippers ... but it’s just that warmth and that’s what M&S should be good at. We made that customer’s day. ... People weren’t spending hours trawling through trying to find it ... and everybody could see [once it had been found].’* (Jo Hutchinson, Marks & Spencer)

Southeastern staff similarly use their enterprise social network to help them do their day-to-day

job. One of the original drivers for developing it was to share real-time operational updates throughout the organisation, so as to keep pace with passengers, who were sharing information on Twitter. In practice, it has also helped staff fix faults on trains, reduce delays and communicate with colleagues to quickly locate lost property.

Devon and Cornwall Police has started to take this a step further, by putting out calls for help through Twitter to assist their investigations. On occasion, the force has received useful information from the public which it probably wouldn’t have got as quickly otherwise.

#### **Insight and innovation**

As well as resolving real-time operational issues, employees’ proximity to customers and access to social media can combine powerfully to provide customer insight and help improve service quality over the longer term.

In this way, social media harnesses employees’ desire not only to deliver a better service themselves, but to help the organisation continuously improve. In Marks & Spencer, the dedication of store-based employees to their customers has shone through in their use of Yammer, and much greater potential is now seen in harnessing their tacit understanding of customers:

*‘If all of our customer assistants access Yammer, they can be our customer insight. They can say, “Do you know what, I’ve had ten customers in this week, all [saying] X.” If we end up with that, you’ve actually got some quite meaningful customer insight, which is real, live and free. Currently, we pay for lots of agencies to collate that customer insight for us.’* (Jo Hutchinson, Marks & Spencer)

It is also notable that ideas can be developed and honed through peer review on social media, meaning that much of the work in filtering and testing innovation can be done by colleagues themselves, rather than a separate unit. Nonetheless, Bromford has developed a dedicated innovation team, whose role includes picking up ideas and suggestions made by colleagues on Yammer, to support the process.

Social media can give a unique insight into employee views, often flagging up issues that senior leaders were not aware of. These can be guided towards particular areas of importance. For example, Devon and Cornwall Police uses Sharepoint to facilitate five organisation-wide forums that cover the areas of associations (for example for black and ethnic minority staff), job evaluations, organisational change, saving money and sports and social:

*It is a piece of internal intelligence for what is going on in the organisation. ... [It] puts us in a better place to pick up the issues that are affecting our staff and gives us a heads-up of the things we should be dealing with to make their life at work as good as we can make it, in order that they are as productive as possible.* (Chris Haselden, Devon and Cornwall Police)

### **Advocacy: promoting the organisation**

If employees are sanctioned to use external social media in a professional capacity, their proximity to customers and the public can also make for powerful public engagement and organisational advocacy.

In this way, Devon and Cornwall Police sees Twitter and Facebook as useful tools for officers to publicise

their activities and reassure the public. As Chris Haselden, Director of HR, describes it, this is partly a matter of front-line officers being able to 'present themselves as individuals as much as officials of the state'. He explains:

*At the most extreme end, a police officer will be seen as an unwelcome invader into a community. At best they're seen as a member of the community that's supporting the community infrastructure. ... Twitter has helped to make individual officers feel more like individuals within the community, because they talk to people in a way that people are used to receiving information.* (Chris Haselden, Devon and Cornwall Police)

*In this day and age, the traditional police officer walking the beat has obviously been long gone. They're in cars and moving around. They're in offices dealing with day-to-day stuff. To make them more visible, social media works for us, especially with more rural communities and the more digital age.* (Reuben Millard, Devon and Cornwall Police)

Devon and Cornwall Police are far from alone in using social media to present a more human side of their organisation. In Adnams, employees' interaction with customers through blogs and social media is seen to strengthen its reputation and how customers identify with the brand:

*I think generally, people are more inclined, more trusting of companies where they have some sort of relationship with them. ... Although my Twitter is generally linked to what I do at the brewery, it's not the Adnams' Twitter account, it is a personal account. ... I think*

*'Social media comes into its own as an external communications tool when customers have the sense that they are interacting with and even getting to know real individuals, rather than getting sanitised responses from an airbrushed, faceless corporation.'*

generally people have an innate mistrust at the moment of major organisations and I think that can be helped a little by having actual people communicating directly. / (Fergus Fitzgerald, Adnams)

Similarly, a number of Bromford employees discuss their work through Twitter and blogs, talking in an authentic, non-corporate voice about their experiences, what their work comprises and how they go about it. This is seen as powerful storytelling that enhances Bromford's brand as an employer and service provider:

/ Anyone can set up a blog and blog about the job they do, and it's great to get alongside those people. After all, they've just written a story that can make the hairs on the back of your neck stand on end, which is written from the heart from a person who's out there, delivering and making a difference. / (Helena Moore, Bromford)

This boils down to the adage that organisations don't Tweet, people do (Semple 2012). Social media comes into its own as an external communications tool when customers have the sense that they are interacting with and even getting to know real individuals, rather than getting sanitised responses from an airbrushed, faceless corporation. And who better to share a passion for the work that the organisation does than the employees at the coal face?

## Recruitment

Cape's business model depends on a large number of fixed-term contracts and fast recruitment. But until 2010, when it established a centralised recruitment function, Cape was typical of its industry in being somewhat 'old school' in its hiring, having processes that were inefficient, opaque and open to nepotism:

/ Things were done in a somewhat "black book" fashion; recruitment took place at site level. Sometimes you might hear the joke that guys would go around the local town, handing out a few business cards and that's how they would find the local employees. ... It really was a case of networking and doing it the old-fashioned way. / (Martin Tweddle, Cape)

Having once used Facebook to avert industrial action (see below), Cape first used it for recruitment when it needed to mobilise nearly 200 engineers to Western Australia with only six weeks' notice. This involved putting 250 applicants through competency assurance programmes, conducting interviews, making visa applications, delivering new training and checking competency cards and qualifications to work on the specific sites, all in an extremely tight timeframe:

/ We couldn't physically cope with the volume of calls into the office with such a small recruitment team, when it came to giving people constant updates on where individual applications were at, what the mobilisation plan was, what the training plan and the assessment plan was. We started putting the updates on Facebook and then when people would phone, we'd say, "Hey guys, why not check Facebook ... that's a really up-to-date feed of what's going on." / (Martin Tweddle, Cape)

The recruitment team was soon using Facebook to actively market the jobs. This aided hugely with Cape's success in this contract, which far outstripped those of its competitors:

/ We found out when we did the reporting at the end of it that we'd spent £6,000 on an

advertisement in the Daily Record in Scotland and it had generated just one applicant. In contrast, the other 166 people that we mobilised were sourced through Facebook, which cost absolutely nothing. That project contributed over £2 million of EBIT [earnings before interest and taxes] to the bottom line in no small part due to the size of the mobilisation. If we'd gone down a traditional route with the infrastructure that we had in place, we would have done maybe half of that. ... I don't think anybody expected us to source that many engineers in such a tight timeframe. / (Martin Tweddle, Cape)

Having powerfully demonstrated the potential of Facebook to aid recruitment, Cape went on to make Facebook central to its hiring process. Its recruitment Facebook page now has 7,753 followers and the move has enabled Cape to reach levels of mobilisation that previously would not have been possible, recruit the best talent available and ensure fairness:

/ Rather than only probably having two or three CVs to choose from through word of mouth, we might now have 52 high-quality candidates to submit to our hiring managers for selection within mere hours of advertising. / (Hayley Kettlewell, Cape)

More details of this fascinating success story can be seen in the accompanying case study of Cape.

## Learning and development

Much of the information shared on social media feeds into learning of one form or another – for leaders to understand their employees or colleagues to be more effective in their roles. But as a knowledge management tool and a platform for e-learning, an important use of social media is to directly support

individuals' professional learning and development. Indeed, it has the potential to completely transform how learning and development is delivered within the organisation.

Enterprise social networks can usefully support learning and development in two broad ways. Firstly, and most simply, they can generate discussion and engage employees with events before and after they take place, thus boosting interest and focusing attention in the first instance and helping embed learning in day-to-day work afterwards.

Secondly, social media itself provides a source for learning content. It helps locate expertise within the organisation and catalogue insight and information for future reference. 'Wikis' are a case in point: these are blank canvases for employees to produce or collate information over time that colleagues may find useful. Employers can also make short guides available on social media (as can be done with intranets) or host Q&A forums that, if kept as a record, work as a form of FAQs. One example of the latter is the 'YamJam' forums that have taken place in Marks & Spencer, whereby employees can discuss training materials with the experts who created them, giving them greater clarity on how to use them.

Social media blurs the traditional boundaries of learning and development. Sharing information and pointing to resources naturally leads to learner-led development, whereby people find out what they need to know when they need to know it. In this vein, Devon and Cornwall Police is actively

encouraging line managers to be more self-sufficient in finding out information and take on more HR responsibilities. For example, through Sharepoint, it is providing step-by-step guides for a range of people management processes and supporting more self-directed learning.

But by far the most advanced example in our case studies of social media being used to support learning and development comes from Santa Fe Group. In 2010–11, when a three-way merger formed Santa Fe Group as a global organisation with 1,700 office-based employees around the world, the learning and development team realised that the traditional model of residential workshops would be challenged in its consistency and ability to embed learning into practice.

The solution was to develop The Academy Online, a learning management system fully integrated with a social networking platform. Based on the social media product Fuse, it enables employees to produce, share and comment on learning content. They can quickly post links to online learning content and upload and share videos and screencasts.<sup>2</sup> The learning and development team helps organise content for ease of use and, being a social network, the platform facilitates conversations between colleagues.

The Academy Online is used to deliver blended learning and development. An intervention may start with a presentation or workshop and go on to self-directed e-learning through an online platform, which involves different learning streams and

*'Sharing information and pointing to resources naturally leads to learner-led development, whereby people find out what they need to know when they need to know it.'*

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<sup>2</sup> Screencasts involve simultaneously recording your actions on a computer with a voiceover to talk about what you are doing.



**'Enterprise social networks allow employees throughout the organisation to informally step forward as leaders and can even help build their careers.'**

formats. It is also used in what is a fast-paced working environment to provide employees with access to an array of bite-sized learning, so that they can do worthwhile personal development in even a five-minute slot, or to find real-time solutions to problems they are facing at any given moment.

At the time of our research, Santa Fe Group had been using Fuse for less than six months; it had already made great strides in changing the organisation's learning culture:

*'We had a four-point plan, [which] we thought would last about four months. We would start with: just get people to log in; all we want you to do is look. Then, the next month, we were hoping that people would start to like and comment and feel a little bit confident around that. Then the third month, we were hoping that they would feel up to, maybe, sharing content with other people. ... Then the final stage, where they would actually record their own videos. We were blown away that by the end of September [after less than a month] we'd got through those four stages with some people. Some people have never logged on yet, but it's a journey, isn't it?'*  
(Michelle Parry-Slater, Santa Fe Group)

#### **Distributed leadership: broadcast yourself!**

Finally, from an employee perspective, there is a personal benefit to using social media to support colleagues, influence directly and contribute to the wider organisation. Visibility and recognition for this gives employees a tangible sense that their experience and knowledge is valued:

*'One of the reasons why I think it has been successful is we've made it attractive for people to be there. We've made it rewarding [by] the fact that they get the kudos. ... It's not about what I know [as a learning and development professional]. It's about these guys understanding ... they do have value and they need to share that value with other people.'*  
(Michelle Parry-Slater, Santa Fe Group)

In this way, enterprise social networks allow employees throughout the organisation to informally step forward as leaders and can even help build their careers:

*'The face that I recognised at the conference, Tiago, he's now made a name for himself. He's relatively new [to the organisation] ... and I think that [activity on The Academy Online] buys him visibility and credibility, given what he's posted. If he posted a lot of rubbish, then he would get the opposite.'*  
(Katherine Marlow, Santa Fe Group)

*'People who were savvy realised this [Yammer] was a pretty good way to have a voice and influence across a dispersed organisation. It's a way of getting your talent recognised outside of just your functional silo. That can't be bad for developing your career.'*  
(Philippa Jones, Bromford)

This does not contradict the argument in our survey report that, despite an age of celebrity culture, 'selfies' and 'trolling', the use of social media is 'less narcissistic and more collaborative' than it is given credit for (CIPD 2013a). Enabling employees to lead others does

not benefit the employees alone, as they only do so by proving themselves useful to colleagues.

For the organisation as a whole, it can be seen as a way of identifying leadership talent and supporting succession planning, but can also be used to challenge traditional leadership practices. There is an inherent alignment between social media and the notion of 'distributed leadership'. This theory sees leadership not in the attributes and behaviours of designated leaders, but instead in structures and processes that facilitate change and development (see, for example, CIPD 2012, Bolden 2008, Spillane and Diamond 2007, Gronn 2002).

It is a less hierarchical, more democratic view of leadership. As Bolden (2008) puts it, *'the action and influence of people at all levels is recognised as integral to the overall direction and functioning*

*of the organisation'*. Leadership becomes a group quality and something that people can step into (and out of) as the need arises. It is, argue van Vugt and Ahuja (2010), a form of leadership *'close to that which proliferated during the long course of human evolution'*. Expertise and skills are valued for the situations in which they are most relevant, meaning that who takes a lead depends on context.

This is not a form of leadership many organisations currently embrace, but it crystallises much of what is described as organisational agility, which is increasingly needed in a VUCA world – volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (CIPD 2013b). As Gannaway (2013) argues, enterprise social networks will not be *the solution* but they are a platform particularly well suited to help facilitate such a change.

*'The use of social media is "less narcissistic and more collaborative" than it is given credit for.'*

# 4 Going about the social media journey

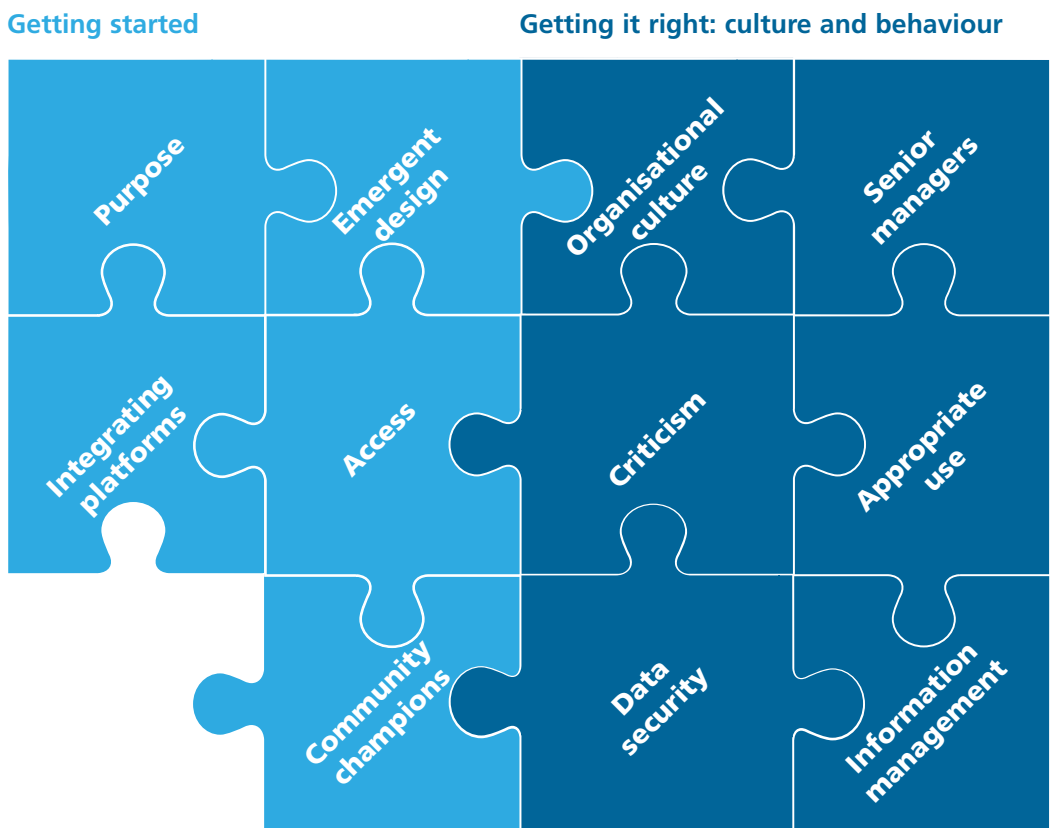
Having looked at how social media is being used with employees and to what effect, we now turn to practical issues and success factors in developing and managing enterprise social networks.

We consider two broad aspects. Firstly, we look at getting started on the social media journey. This includes the importance of supporting the organisation's purpose, designing enterprise social networks, getting the right

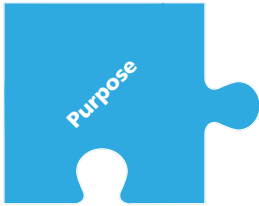
platforms and access, and reaching a critical mass of active users.

Secondly, we discuss 'getting it right', or embedding the right social media culture and behaviour for the organisation. Factors we consider include effective senior leader use of enterprise social networks, responding to negativity, data security and information management.

Figure 2: Going about the social media journey







### Enterprise social networks need purpose

Enterprise social networks survive and thrive on the voluntary engagement of employees. While a desire to be better networked may drive some initial engagement on its own, the common view across the case studies is that for usage to grow and be sustained, enterprise social networks need to be used in ways that practically feed into the organisation's purpose:

*“The best uses of Yammer come from when an organisation approaches it by saying, “What do we actually do as a core business?” and then “How can we enhance that by using social technology?” rather than someone saying, “We just want to deploy a social network because it’s cool or because it’s the latest thing.”* (Nick Matthews, Yammer)

*“Always make it as specific as possible, always answer the “What’s in it for me?” on every level of the organisation, from a CEO down to the factory floor. ... I do a lot of work for a big drinks manufacturer and the question we always asked ourselves in the project meetings with the customer was, “How is the use of this going to help me sell more beer?” Full stop. If we couldn’t get it back to that, we were off mark.* (Niels van der Zeyst, Yammer)

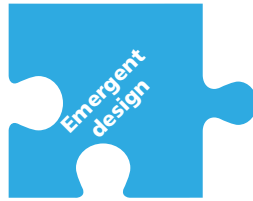
*“Social technology works very well when it is focused on particular needs. It’s not a catch-all and just putting it in place doesn’t transform an organisation. But if you use it on*

*particular targeted areas, it can be very effective. So that’s on a particular project, where people need to work closely together on something. On a particular event, where you are asking people to share their success. Or, on a particular question, that you want people to give feedback on. It can be very, very effective in those ways.* (Roland Burton, Marks & Spencer)

For example, the secret to Cape’s success with social media lies in it actively recruiting through Facebook, so followers are ‘getting something out of it, rather than just following an organisation to show that they like them’ (Hayley Kettlewell, Cape).

Similarly, having first been unsuccessful in using another enterprise social network, Santa Fe Group found The Academy Online worked because employees had a genuine reason to be using it. The previous attempt failed because only a small segment of the workforce saw that it was relevant to them; as Michelle Parry-Slater puts it, ‘There was no reason to have that discussion.’ But placing the focus on learning and development made it much more inclusive, all employees potentially having questions to ask or perspectives to share.

*‘To grow and be sustained, enterprise social networks need to be used in ways that practically feed into the organisation’s purpose.’*



*'Before they knew it, several hundred employees had joined Yammer within a few weeks, with membership continuing to grow since.'*

### **Emergent design: top-down versus bottom-up?**

However, although enterprise social networks need to link with the organisation's purpose, this link does not have to be established before the technology is first introduced.

On the contrary, thanks to the flexible nature of social technology, the conventions of use can be established in an emergent way, in tune with employee behaviour.

For example, in Southeastern, WorkMate had a very soft launch. Apart from a user group of a cross-section of staff, set up to inform the platform's ongoing design, it was not actively promoted and employees were certainly not directed in how to make use of it.

*'We just said, "Here's a tool for you. It's got everything the static site has got. We think you will find it useful. Go use," and nothing more than that, to see what the take-up was.'* (Rupert Atterbury Thomas, Southeastern)

In Bromford, the spread of Yammer was even more viral. Having heard about Yammer through LinkedIn, Helena Moore forwarded a link to a few colleagues within the communications and organisational development (OD) directorate. Before they knew it, several hundred employees had joined Yammer within a few weeks, with membership continuing to grow since:

*'I didn't actually say to them, "Oh, best not pass this on." So they completely clicked – because they're that generation that this is second nature to; sent it on to*

*their friends around the business, no particular reason, other than they knew them. ... The growth of it was just phenomenal ... "Oh, blimey, look what we've done."* (Helena Moore, Bromford)

Nevertheless, it is important to build on such organic growth so that the workforce as a whole establishes common uses of an enterprise social network. From its work supporting clients, Yammer's own experience is that successful organisations are able to *'look within the virality to see where the energy is and understand why that energy is there'* (Nick Matthews, Yammer):

*'We often say to people, "Definitely let it grow and see what happens. Then make your observations and deductions based on how people are using and whether you need to course-correct or accelerate things, whether you need to stop certain things.'* (Nick Matthews, Yammer)

*'The starting point is always quite nebulous ... [but] at a certain point, you have to start making it specific to people's roles. ... The trick is to be top-down and bottom-up. ... Some years ago the thinking was ... "You have to let it [be] open, free-flow and design itself." ... Years before that it was very much top-down, [a leader] decides what we want and this is how we go. I think now it's [the case that] you look to find the space in which you want this thing to do something and then within that space people will find their way.'* (Niels van der Zeyst, Yammer)



'Freemium' products are particularly helpful for this emergent process, as they allow organisations to try out products and functions in practice at no cost before they commit, rather than just hoping a product they have bought lands well:

*That's the beauty of having something in place before you might do a large-scale programme. That's very, very new in this kind of world where, [traditionally], you would go through a ... requirements gathering exercise, design, test, build and roll out.* (Nick Matthews, Yammer)

However, it should be noted that there may well be IT design issues that do need to be worked out and delivered in a more traditional top-down style. Much as Bromford reaped huge benefits from its introduction of Yammer, the way in which it was introduced – with no referral to the IT or leadership function – was recognised to be far from ideal. But that need not hold the organisation back or dictate how the technology is used. Developing an enterprise social network is an opportunity for communications, HR and OD professionals to work more closely with IT colleagues and other senior leaders to deliver something of sustainable value to the organisation.

### **Integrating platforms**

Enterprise social networks are open communication tools that combine various functions, including being able to: post announcements, comments, micro-blogs, questions and resources; join and set up special interest groups; follow colleagues; and take part in forum discussions. But do these things all need to take place on the same integrated platform? Does an enterprise social network remove the need for other platforms, such as intranets? And how far do employers need to go in ensuring employees have access to different social media platforms?

There is no standard model across the case studies. Southeastern is the only organisation that has entirely replaced its intranet with a single enterprise social network.

Marks & Spencer has redeveloped its intranet, adding interactive features, and has been actively using Yammer alongside this to foster greater employee engagement. Both of these complement, rather than replace, the mix of channels previously used in internal communications, such as email, an employee magazine and noticeboards.

Similarly, Bromford uses Yammer alongside the company's intranet, Our Space, which provides a more traditional corporate communications tool to disseminate official news and information and provide resources. It also uses SharePoint for colleagues to exchange and collaborate on documents, and Be Bromford is an interactive platform

used for learning and development and performance management.

In such cases, social media adds to more than replaces traditional communications tools, and employees are generally seen to handle using a range of platforms well. For example, if a Bromford employee saw something on a site that needed attention, they would likely phone or text in a message to get it sorted. In a different way, they might also post a picture on Twitter or Yammer to share examples of great work being done.

The most important thing is for the interfaces of related platforms and applications to be matched so that there is a smooth transition between them. There may be benefits either way of keeping different platforms separate or having a single, multifunction enterprise social network.



*'Most of our case study organisations saw the provision of up-to-date mobile devices as an outstanding issue.'*

#### **Access to social media**

How employees access social media varies from organisation to organisation, according to where most employees are based who use it. For example, in Bromford about a third of people access Yammer from mobile devices, including personally owned smartphones. In Marks & Spencer the figure is about 50/50 between mobile devices and desktop computers. This is seen to be a reflection of the different user groups: for a while, the clear majority of Yammer users were employees based in stores, but office-based employees are now catching up.

Most of our case study organisations saw the provision of up-to-date mobile devices as an outstanding issue. For example, in Southeastern, WorkMate was initially made accessible through company-issued devices, including older-style BlackBerry as well as desktop computers, and later was made accessible through any Internet-enabled devices, including personally owned mobile devices.

Similarly, in Santa Fe Group, The Academy Online has been promoted with all office-based employees but the warehouse employees are yet to be included. Fuse, the platform used, does have a mobile app but Santa Fe Group does not yet have a formal bring-your-own-device policy or provide crews with mobile devices. Nonetheless, the potential and relevance is seen for this group of employees – for example, to share videos on how to pack an antique

vase or a grand piano – and the plan is to enable them to join the online learning community.

One would anticipate that with time, especially as the price of smartphones and tablet computers continues to fall, employees' access to enterprise social networks will become less of an issue, whether they are using employer-provided or personal devices.



### Community champions

As a result of the need to encourage uptake and establish norms of use, several case studies highlighted the importance of having someone, or a team of people, to manage and champion social network communities. This is not only a case of promoting active use of social media, but also of identifying the 'pockets of energy' in the organisation, nurturing them and helping others replicate their success:

*“I personally think in the first year you ideally need a person whose job it is to drive and embed it and direct people and report on it. ... [We now have a group of] champions who are helping curate [and shape Yammer] into what we want it to be. Otherwise it could take quite a long time. ... We're probably like every other business, impatient and we want everything yesterday. ... Those champions help us drive it there [more quickly].”* (Jo Hutchinson, Marks & Spencer)

It is important to note, however, that this drive need not come from a centralised function. In Marks & Spencer, for example, local ownership is seen to be extremely important, and some of the best examples have come from store-based employees who have taken the initiative to use Yammer to address a specific need:

*“Having a social network is just the very, very beginning of the journey, it's not the end of the journey. Growing it and then maintaining it, and then demonstrating how*

*it is delivering value, is more of a challenge. It doesn't feel like it's a linear journey. ... We see it growing in fits and starts and all of a sudden we see how it is being used in a particular way or at a particular event and go, “Wow, we never thought it could be used in that way. What a great idea, we will build on that for the future.”* (Roland Burton, Marks & Spencer)



*‘Social media can be used to shape culture – be this a focus on cross-functional collaboration, stronger employee voice, or shared purpose.’*

#### **Culture change and organisation ‘fit’**

Social media is a tool that can be used to shape culture – be this a focus on cross-functional collaboration, stronger employee voice, or shared purpose. In particular, it is a channel that naturally fosters openness, egalitarianism and a lack of rigidity, as it is an inherently democratic, free-flowing tool. It is being used in this way in Devon and Cornwall Police as part of a general move away from a command-and-control culture, in which clear guidance is expected to come from the top, to one in which employees with relevant expertise feel more able to advise others.

However, the introduction of an enterprise social network needs to align with other aspects of organisational development. This can be seen in Southeastern, where WorkMate has clearly been part of a wider raft of change, including initiatives such as focus groups, forums, works councils and phone-in Q&A sessions with directors:

*‘You cannot just bring in something like WorkMate and think it will solve all your engagement and voice-type issues. [For ourselves], after three years of steady progress, it was a logical extension of where we’d got to.’ (Andy Bindon, Southeastern)*

It is also important to recognise that in the short term, at least, how an enterprise social network is used will be a reflection of

the organisation’s predominant culture. In the case of Adnams, for example, using social media closely aligns with a general culture of openness. A well-established norm of having authentic conversations leads to getting employees to blog about their working lives and engage with customers through Twitter, as well as feeding into other areas, such as holding each other to account as part of quality assurance and performance management. Because of this culture, the way Adnams projects its image externally and relates with customers sits very naturally with social media:

*‘One of the things that we’re really keen to do is to come across as a real organisation with real people and a bit of an anti-brand, if you like. So it’s more than just the name Adnams, it’s actually real people behind the brand that are enjoying what they do and enjoying talking to customers. It’s not just on social media; it applies to when we do events. We don’t have an external tasting or sampling company that we employ, we get our staff to pull the pints and chat to customers so we’re always really keen to come across as authentic and real in everything we do.’ (Liz Cobbold, Adnams)*

In Bromford, too, part of the reason social media is thought to have been adopted so widely and actively across the organisation is that it naturally fits with the strong culture that the organisation has (see *Shared purpose*, Section 3).





Social media will not transform an organisation's culture by dint of the technology alone. Even in Santa Fe Group, where it is hard to argue against the transformative effect of The Academy Online on the learning and development culture, the use of the technology has had to be assiduously planned, promoted and supported, requiring strong leadership to set expectations and embed new ways of thinking. Most likely, an enterprise social network will have a limited or gradual transformative impact unless the organisation is somehow primed to make use of and not reject this technological implant.

### Senior management involvement

Although social media naturally aligns with a distributed leadership (see Section 3), our case studies point to various lessons on the involvement of senior leaders in enterprise social networks.

Firstly, support from the top is seen as important for the legitimacy of enterprise social networks. This is the case not only for the allocation of resources, but also because social media constitutes a very different way of communicating and employees need to know that this is an acceptable channel and a valid use of their time:

*“The big thing for me is to make sure your most senior people are engaged with it, and are using it. I think you’re always going to struggle if your most senior people aren’t into it and don’t get it ... it’s going to be a pretty hard sell to the rest of the organisation.”* (Alex Abbotts, Bromford)

Secondly, an enterprise social network can also be an invaluable leadership tool. It provides an easy way for leaders to make sure they are accessible, visible and in touch with the organisation:

*“As a chief executive, or a senior manager, when it’s really hard to keep in touch with people constantly because you’re so busy yourself; but you want to make sure you’re talking to people, listening to people as much as talking to them, sharing what you’re doing; why wouldn’t you want a free tool ... a nice app to use ... and it’s just at your fingertips?”* (Helena Moore, Bromford)

One senior leader put it like this:

*“I can so easily just put on [a post], “That’s really great work, well done. Have you thought about this?” It takes seconds. Those little interactions, cumulatively, I think make a really big difference to the way those dispersed project workers feel about: “Are the execs in an ivory tower or do they actually interact with me?” ... I do take days out of my schedule to spend some focused time looking at some of our services. ... On that day, I’ll get to meet maybe a dozen colleagues, that’s probably all I’m going to do. Which is great but I can add to this. When I get home, while I’m catching up on junk telly, I can actually interact with a dozen or so colleagues. That thread will be read by dozens more, maybe even hundreds more on some occasions. It’s a massive impact for minimal effort.”* (Philippa Jones, Bromford)

Thirdly, however – and in line with the distributed leadership perspective – our interviewees saw it as important that senior leaders’ activity on enterprise social networks does not stifle engagement by more junior colleagues. In short, employees will be put off sharing their views if they fear they will be shouted down or undermined by their superiors.

Clearly, if there is a need for HR or senior leaders to clarify a particular point, they should not hesitate to do this through an enterprise social network. However, there is a balance to strike between this and stepping in to conversations to put people straight. In general, the experience of our case studies suggests that, where possible,



*'The best way to respond to negativity in online discussions is to engage with, rather than censor it.'*

senior leaders should let enterprise social network discussions flow without interfering.

For example, in Devon and Cornwall Police, the people and leadership director, Chris Haselden, sees this principle as one way to challenge the traditional command-and-control culture. He argues that the most powerful responses actually come from colleagues with an alternative view and area expertise. This is especially the case with the more heated, negative discussions that can take place:

*/[It's] absolutely, far more effective, because [if a senior leader wades in] all you get is propaganda accusations: "Well you would say that, wouldn't you? You live in a different world to us," and all those sorts of things that makes your response, as management, particularly as senior management, inappropriate to the individual. ... You have to choose how and to what extent [you get involved] and actually a lot of the time it's best to sit on your hands and other members of staff will often then put alternative views forward, which then tends to modify or counteract some of the negativity. / (Chris Haselden, Devon and Cornwall Police)*

Haselden believes there can be a place for senior leaders to respond to negative posts but care needs to be taken. In broad terms, it needs to be conversational, in line with the general online discussion, and not seen to be clamping down on dissent.

### **Responding to negative comments**

Related to this and the use of social media as an employee relations tool (see Section 3), the general consensus from our case studies is that the best way to respond to negativity in online discussions is to engage with, rather than censor it. While some might fear that dissent and negativity are contagious, the majority opinion from our case studies is that it is better to have them out in the open so that leaders know what the general sentiment is and employees' concerns can be given answers.

This can even be the case where, as in Devon and Cornwall Police, some employees felt that discussions relating to organisational change could be overwhelmingly negative and found this a challenge:

*/I think the idea of giving an employee voice is great, but for me the key is that voice is heard and responded to. ... Forums give staff, or customers, or whoever it is, a voice and allow feedback ... and the benefits can be enormous, but actually very little [in the available advice and guidance] talks about managing large amounts of negativity. / (Nikki Cann, Devon and Cornwall Police)*

Yet while this may be a challenge to manage, the HR director, Chris Haselden, insists that facilitating openness and transparency is worthwhile for the contribution to employee engagement:

*/People are going to say these things anyway ... and it is better that we actually have some*





medium by which people can vent their frustrations ... [so] that it will be taken notice of. And it's in-house, so it's something which is a release valve for the organisation, for individuals. ... We're trying to promote openness, transparency, we want managers to explain why they're making the decisions they're making. / (Chris Haselden, Devon and Cornwall Police)

Similarly, in Cape's experience of using Facebook for recruitment (see Section 3), some applicants have shown their discontent at being turned down for a number of positions on the run and posted comments on Facebook criticising the organisation.

Nevertheless, Cape does not remove comments from its Facebook page unless posts contain swearing. Instead, it encourages people who do post negative comments and complaints to discuss the matter with them. While this takes up staff time, it is a rare occurrence and is seen to pay dividends, as it straightens out misunderstandings and protects Cape's employer brand. One such example was an applicant who accused Cape on Facebook of blacklisting him, following a number of unsuccessful job applications:

/ We spoke to him; we explained to him that for each role that he'd applied for, there were over 50 applications that were shortlisted. ... Since then, he's taken down some of his comments that were a little bit abrupt and he's apologised for his behaviour ... and he now understands to what extent Cape is seen to be a good employer. / (Hayley Kettlewell, Cape)

### What constitutes inappropriate use of social media?

Broadly, across the case study organisations, not being too constraining is seen as an important aspect of managing enterprise social networks because of the nature of the medium:

/ I think if you try to control that too much, and try to control what you want Yammer to look like for your organisation, you're really going to struggle. It's not in your hands. ... It's about giving guidance to people, but don't put loads of rules in place, because people just will get scared by it. It will turn them off, and they won't engage in it. / (Alex Abbotts, Bromford)

/ You cannot control enterprise social networks. Don't for one second think that you can. You can steer it. You can influence it, so you can lead people down a particular discussion but it's an open platform. So there isn't a great deal [of managing it]. Other than encouraging some conversation and contributing to it, we purposefully didn't try and say, "Use it for this ... Don't use it for this." / (Rupert Atterbury Thomas, Southeastern)

However, it is important to recognise that there are limits to what is appropriate. This will vary from organisation to organisation and will depend on the nature of the platform.

### Ensuring respectfulness

Across the case study organisations, abusive comments and expletives are considered unacceptable, but this is rarely if ever seen to be an issue. Cape has at times experienced

**'Not being too constraining is an important aspect of managing enterprise social networks because of the empowering nature of the medium.'**

*'Typically, making employees use their own names is all it takes to ensure appropriate behaviour: enterprise social networks effectively police themselves.'*

this on its Facebook sites, which are public facing. It has removed the posts, explaining to the person in question why they have felt the need to do this. On rarer occasions, employees have been disciplined for social media posts. In two-and-a-half years, Cape has had to conduct just two disciplinaries for gross misuse of Facebook. For example, one of these concerned false allegations of drug use on site, which led to a dismissal and an employment tribunal that Cape won on all accounts.

Typically, not allowing pseudonyms and making employees use their own names is all it takes to ensure appropriate behaviour: enterprise social networks effectively police themselves. At Southeastern, Andy Bindon is convinced this approach reinforces the culture of involvement and taking responsibility that senior leaders want to see across the organisation:

*'We want people to be able to say what they think, and they should say it in a constructive, respectful way. Requiring people to put their name to what they say is a basic given in most organisations. Yes, you have more aggregated approaches like employee surveys, which [are] anonymised, but I wouldn't feel comfortable running something like [WorkMate] anonymously. We try to create a culture here which says, "You can say what you think, and you won't be penalised for it." ... If you've got a strong opinion on something, you should feel comfortable putting your name to it.'* (Andy Bindon, Southeastern)

*'We've never deleted a comment from the site. ... Initially I probably started out with having it on a screen all the time and then realised that this was pointless. It monitors itself. If someone doesn't like something, someone else goes back and says, "You can't say that." ... Occasionally we might get a call from someone alerting us to a post they've found offensive. Usually it's not that offensive, but it's an open forum, someone's found offence. But what we do as a comms team is call the person who posted it and say, "Look, I see you posted something earlier on today. Someone's found it offensive and, to be honest, there's maybe a bit in it. But it's up to you, if you want to remove it or rewrite it, that's up to you," and they delete it or rewrite it themselves.'* (Rupert Atterbury Thomas, Southeastern)

Nor is inappropriate use of social media seen to be a problem at Bromford. The view here is that employees can be guided and trusted and there is hardly any need to formally discipline them:

*'Bromford always starts from a position of trust. If there are any concerns about posts on social media, that person's leader would be expected to deal with it as with any other leadership issue. The need to turn to our disciplinary procedures has been extremely rare. In this organisation, we use the common-sense rule, "If you wouldn't say it in the café, don't say it on social media." That works for us.'* (Julie Leo, Bromford)

### *Is all content relevant?*

Another aspect of the light-touch management of enterprise social networks is a common acceptance that employees will use it for personal or trivial things as well as business issues (see section on *Workplace community* in Section 3). Our interviewees generally did not see this as a problem, as the majority of discussions remain work-focused and the personal side of communications is seen to strengthen networks and the sense of community across the organisation.

A slightly different view was held in Santa Fe Group, where The Academy Online exists specifically to support learning and development, so sharing holiday photos, for example, would not be seen as a good use. But even here, the learning and development team has learned not to be too prescriptive about what is appropriate or relevant material to be sharing.

One example of this regarded an article that was shared with the

headline ‘What is the hardest language to learn?’

*That was shared somewhere in Europe an hour ahead of us. ... I'd seen it [at home on my smartphone]. ... Before I'd got into the car to go to work, [I thought], "This is going to be a political hot potato. It's not learning ... it's not going to teach anybody anything." ... By the time I had got in, parked my car, had a chat, sat down, looked at it again – so this was only in a window of two hours – the comments were just everywhere. ... I suddenly thought: this is it; this is the cultural element that we were looking for. They all have something to say about which is the hardest to learn because everyone speaks a different language in this company. Let's celebrate that; that's amazing. I would have potentially taken that down as a piece of non-learning content ... [but] what that taught me was to let peers review. The bad stuff just falls away, no one comments on it.* (Michelle Parry-Slater, Santa Fe Group)



*'People need to learn to follow things that are of current value to them, but equally to stop following conversations if they are no longer relevant.'*

#### **Data security**

Data protection is something many employees have to be mindful of anyway, but how does it apply to social media?

Clearly, the most data-sensitive organisation in our case studies is Devon and Cornwall Police. Here, the use of Twitter by officers is mainly done through personal mobile devices, which is a grey area for data security but is currently accepted:

*'They're talking as the police to the public, so if their phone isn't locked down somebody could get access to it. In that way it's a security risk for us ... obviously somebody then could potentially have access to one of their accounts. You've got 3,000 followers who believe you're a police officer and then a rogue message goes out, that's not a very good reputation for the force.'* (Reuben Millard, Devon and Cornwall Police)

Officers also need to be careful what they write on Twitter, but this is little different from normal, as they always need to be careful what they say to members of the public.

Similarly, while Bromford encourages its employees to talk about their work, all colleagues are trained and advised on data protection, in particular in relation to customer information. Any issues relating to this have become extremely rare, as the organisation has got more used to using social

media. Bromford also uses a piece of software called Crowd Control to manage and protect its official Twitter account.

The general view in Bromford, broadly reflected in other organisations, is that while data protection is an issue to be taken care with, it is best done with a view to supporting, advising and protecting employees from their own actions and not to hamper their engagement with social media:

*'Rather than, "Don't, don't, don't," it's more, "Do, do, do," you know. "Do blog. Do have a voice. And just be mindful of these guidelines. Here are these guidelines made simple to help you." Rather than, "Don't say that" and scaring people with a list of "don'ts".'* (Helena Moore, Bromford)

In essence, employees need to be made aware they have the same responsibilities when communicating on social media as they do when communicating in any other medium, written or spoken, with whichever audience has access to their posts. In an age of social media, where communications have become more instant and informal, it is far easier to 'over-share' and compromise the reputations or security of individuals or organisations. What is needed more than anything is a reminder that social media is a form of broadcasting and needs a prudent eye like any other.



## Information management

Enterprise social networks have significant implications for both communications and learning and development professionals and for employees who use them.

### *Knowledge isn't power?*

The arrival of 'Web 2.0' or 'the social web' has seen a proliferation in blogs, content creation and links to information online, as well as a far more socially networked Internet:

*“The half-life of information has decreased massively in the last couple of years. Before knowledge was power, but it's not the same anymore. Now it's the accessibility to knowledge that's power.”* (Nick Matthews, Yammer)

### *Internal communications*

professionals need to recognise that their role in the organisation changes with the arrival of an enterprise social network. Rather than holding responsibility for creating, directing and broadcasting corporate messaging, they become the engine behind communications, their role shifting towards facilitating knowledge exchange:

*“Comms belongs to everybody now. There are too many tools out there to assume that you can control and contain [communications]. ... [If] you've got to get a triple sign-off for every tweet that goes out, you're paralysing yourself, really, and you'll never be effective with it, because it's not instantaneous; it's not in the moment, which is what it's all about. ... It's*

*absolutely the comms team's role to explore new tools; see how they work; discover how they can add value to the business, and also to take responsibility for communicating some very important messages, and facilitating conversation around those.”* (Helena Moore, Bromford)

A similar thing can be said for learning and development professionals, whose role with enterprise social networks shifts from creating, packaging and disseminating learning content to curating knowledge and content.

This shift may seem to be a process of dumbing down the role of communications and learning and development professionals, but our case studies suggest that this is not the case. Although they spend less time producing content, they now need to think about using a wider range of technology, such as videos and data analytics, as well as keeping on top of and guiding people on the content that is available.

### *Overload! Turn your filters on*

As mentioned before, social media can aid the effective flow of information, changing from a 'push' to a 'pull' style of communication that gives people greater choice in what information they consume and when. However, as our recent survey shows (CIPD 2013a), almost exactly as many UK employees think that social media 'leads to information overload' as think that it 'helps get the right information to the right people'.

Herein lies the perennial challenge from social media sceptics of, 'Why do I want to know what people have had for their breakfast?' Yet the problem need not be that social media opens the floodgates to irrelevant, valueless or inane chatter. Our experts from Yammer argue that people need to learn to follow things that are of current value to them, but equally to stop following conversations if they are no longer relevant:

*“We always have too much information. Information is exponentially increasing at the moment. ... [The challenge now is] understanding how to get value from large amounts of information in a way that makes sense to you, rather than trying to control it. You can't control it.”* (Nick Matthews, Yammer)

*“When people are saying, “I'm getting too much irrelevant information,” it's by and large because their filter has failed. And the filter is something that you refine all the time.”* (Rav Dhaliwal, Yammer)

In this sense, individuals each need to make their own social media journey, finding uses that fit with their role and perhaps their preferred style of communicating. One way that organisations can support this is by facilitating discussions between peers on how people are using social media, what pitfalls to look for and how to make the most of it. For this, social media itself is a useful tool for learning how to use it effectively.

# Conclusions

*'If people are to contribute their ideas, they increasingly expect interaction, personal connections, freedom of expression (not box-ticking) and fast responses.'*

In this final section, we draw together underlying conclusions from the research.

## **The nature of social media**

There is an apparent paradox in social research. For decades, while the survey has remained a standard mode of collecting opinions, response rates have continued to decline, to the point where running a survey can feel like trying to get blood out of a stone. It seems as though the opportunity to 'have your say' holds increasingly little appeal. Yet at the same time and off our own back, we spend more and more time posting comments, links, photos and videos online. Clearly we do have an appetite to share our thoughts, views and experiences, but as a channel for this, the survey simply doesn't tick our box (if you'll excuse the pun).

Perhaps we should not be surprised. Apart from making the transition from being paper to web-based, the survey has changed very little, while the Web 2.0 revolution has transformed large swathes of our day-to-day IT usage (Silverman et al 2013). In today's age, if people are to contribute their ideas, they increasingly expect interaction, personal connections, freedom of expression (not box-ticking) and fast responses. Employees are no different and, while most employers have some catching up to do, social media stands as an obvious communication tool of choice because it is naturally engaging and easy to use.

- In one sense, therefore, enterprise social networks represent something akin to the traditional suggestion box taken to a whole new level. We cast a wide net to get feedback from peers and hone and develop ideas. Being a part of this process is far more engaging than posting an idea that disappears into the ether, and also reduces the burden on management, as ideas can be tested and refined by peers with relevant knowledge.
- Enterprise social networks can have the additional benefit of being a gated community, creating a safe place for open discussions between named colleagues. This is important given not only the sensitivity of many business discussions, but also the fear in many organisations of security breaches and reputational damage from social media. Social media does not need to open the floodgates to anonymous comments and malicious rumour.
- Enterprise social networks also naturally lend themselves to a more distributed form of leadership, in which people across the organisation can step in to lead others on areas in which they have valued expertise. Employees are more able to contribute to discussions and influence based on their insight instead of what position they hold within a hierarchy.



- Moreover, social media facilitates and encourages bottom-up change within the organisation, as *'it allows people to self-organise in a way that makes sense for the work that they do'* (Rav Dhaliwal, Yammer). This is close to the emergent structures, mass co-ordination and relationship leverage identified by Bradley and McDonald (2011).

Throughout this, relationship-building, networks and information exchange lie at the core of social media use. True to their name, enterprise social networks are inherently social tools. They are designed to make organisations better connected, and it is from this that a number of benefits flow.

#### Uses and benefits

This report has focused on specific business applications of social media with employees. It is not intended as a comprehensive summary of the uses of social media with employees. There is a growing number of case studies available, which will doubtless continue to add to the lessons we have drawn in this research.<sup>3</sup>

Nonetheless, we hope that the case studies in this research will help other practitioners and leaders envisage how they can make better use of social media in organisations. The value of being able to learn from other organisations was highlighted by our interviewees themselves. For example, in developing WorkMate, Southeastern engaged with the user community for Socialtext, the platform it uses, to draw on the experience of other professionals.

Our findings point to enterprise social networks offering a range of mutual gains for employers and employees. For employees, many of whom naturally feel engaged with their work and organisations and want to discuss these online, there is the satisfaction of having a voice and the contribution to their quality of working life. For employers, there is the insight and innovation, and reducing the risk of washing dirty laundry in public.

There is a recognition here that many of the best solutions to organisational problems lie with front-line employees who do not traditionally play a role in shaping organisation-wide procedures and guidance. This need to harness latent knowledge and experience to make improvements is not limited to highly technical industries, such as pharmaceuticals or manufacturing. It is relevant to almost any organisation, as all organisations need to continue to adapt.

With well-used enterprise social networks, service delivery can also be improved in real time through immediate updates from and to the front line and between colleagues. By contributing to an understanding of what's happening in the organisation now, as opposed to analyses of failings or pressure points last month, they help resolve operational issues quickly and with little resource.

Employers can also use social media as a channel to support communications with their workforces. If employees are actively engaging with the medium, employers have their ear and use this opportunity to put out

*'The need to harness latent knowledge and experience to make improvements is relevant to almost any organisation, as all organisations need to continue to adapt.'*

<sup>3</sup> For, example, see [www.simply-communications.com/case-studies/company-profiles](http://www.simply-communications.com/case-studies/company-profiles)

*‘Although an enterprise social network will constitute a significant intervention in its own right, it is above all a tool or platform for change, to be used towards a purpose.’*

messages, quickly understand employees’ reactions and also use dialogue to clarify points and build interest.

#### **Taking steps towards a networked organisation**

Social media naturally supports democratic and emergent discussion. This is one reason it is so popular and something that should be taken into account when introducing social media into an organisation in order to maximise the benefits. Enterprise social networks should be allowed to develop organically, as employees will be able to find uses that make sense for their roles.

However, there is a danger that valuable uses or forums don’t reach critical mass in the numbers of people using them and fade into non-existence. Thus, effective uses of social media should be identified and employees encouraged to develop and replicate them. Enterprise social networks need nurturing, encouragement and guidance to become established.

One challenge for many employers will be to loosen their grip on an enterprise social network. As Helena Moore puts it, employers should aim to *‘look at it through the lens of how you can support people to use it, [rather] than how you can control and contain it’*.

This can mean that little guidance is given on what constitutes appropriate use of an enterprise social network. Many advocates of social media would argue that the personal–professional divide is eroding. Although our 2013 survey showed that most employees prefer to keep their personal and professional uses of social media separate, our case studies generally

show that within the organisation, personal exchanges and small talk are important ways of establishing contact and can form the basis of professional relationships.

One could argue that this is the same in our face-to-face relationships: people generally connect personally first, professionally second. The social fabric of an organisation can support or hinder its main purpose and activities. In recognition of this, social use of enterprise social networks is widely accepted in the case study organisations.

We also found that organisations that faced significant negativity and criticism through their enterprise social networks generally accepted this as long as exchanges remained civil. Indeed, there is an opportunity with social media to engage with the cynics or those with an alternative view, as these are often the people who give the most powerful and salient responses. Steve Bridger, who has managed the CIPD’s online community for ten years, puts it like this:

*‘While we should avoid “feeding the trolls”, it is important to acknowledge when people are right, even if the way they express themselves verges on the hostile. It would be a mistake to dismiss them as “the awkward squad”, rather than [recognise them] as the critical friends or “strategic provocateurs” they really are.’ (Bridger 2014)*

An implication of empowering employees to have a voice and contribute to ideas and online content creation is that the role of communications and learning and development professionals shifts away from creating and



disseminating content, and towards that of curator. This needs to be an active role to avoid the danger – ever present in an age when Google is increasingly seen to remove the need for knowledge and memory – that immediate access to information takes the place of reflection and critical thinking; or as Richard Watson (2010) terms it, *'screenage brain'* and *'cerebral whiteout'* lead to silly mistakes or *'constant partial stupidity'*. The role of curator not only requires technological savvy, but also an understanding of the issues being discussed and judgement on how to guide forums and posts and make relevant content accessible.

Moving to the technical side of developing enterprise social networks, we can only imagine – as mobile devices become cheaper, IT upgrades continue and software is improved – that accessibility to enterprise social networks will also generally improve. More employees will be issued with smartphones

that can connect to social media or be able to use their own devices easily. There is usually a lag between company commitment and new devices being distributed. But in focusing on an enterprise social network and information management, there is also an opportunity for HR, learning and development and OD to be more strategically aligned and work more closely with the IT department.

This strategic alignment is crucial because, to reap the full benefits of social media, employers should pursue other complementary measures that align with the purpose they have in mind. In the short term at least, our research suggests that an enterprise social network will reflect the culture, tone and morale of the organisation in which it exists. Although an enterprise social network will constitute a significant intervention in its own right, it is above all a tool or platform for change, to be used towards a purpose.

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