Chapter 3

Challenging our Assumptions:
Making Sense of the Sharing of Social Knowledge

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the assumptions we make, the questions we ask, and the "social knowledge" we use to make decisions about our personal and business lives. It poses provocative questions challenging assumptions about using social media to know what we know. The three co-authors take the position of transparency to engage in a dialogue around issues that they agree are critical to any thoughtful exploration of social media: trust, assumptions, and reality. Personal experiences and anecdotes provide context for scholarly ideas and references. The chapter offers its readers a method to continue the dialogue.

"Cada cabeza es un mundo" ("Every head is a world") – Cuban proverb

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we explore the assumptions we make, the questions we ask, and the "social knowledge" we use to make decisions in our personal and business lives. We pose provocative questions challenging assumptions about using social media to know what we know. The structure of the chapter departs from the traditional in several ways. First, in the spirit of transparency we share who we are and describe our approach. Secondly, we disclose our biases in an effort to express our own authentic perspectives and voices to the topics under consideration. Finally, we do not attempt to provide a formal review of the literature, and have chosen instead to suggest the relevant research

and points of view which inform our thinking and may illuminate the way to greater understanding.

Who We Are

Suzanne Roff-Wexler is a consulting psychologist focused on 21st technology and psychology, social media, narrative, and collective knowledge. She is co-founder and senior partner of Psychology21C -- a collaborative venture dedicated to applying new technologies, including virtual environments, to the science of human behavior. As president of Compass Point Consulting, she provides executive coaching and consulting to client organizations. She has a passion for bringing people together to have meaningful conversations, learn, collaborate, and make sense of personal and organizational life.

Loretta L. Donovan is a cutting edge, versatile contributor to organizational development and corporate learning. Her professional life includes the internal role of Corporate Director of Organizational Learning and Leadership with the Health Quest, a hospital and healthcare system, and external consulting as an associate of Innovation Partners International, and principal of the Worksmarts Group. Based on a wealth of experience as an executive, consultant, and academic, she has focused on dialogue, knowledge creation and critical action in organizational life. She is an early adopter of Web 2.0 and fosters the use of open source and social media for digital collaboration. Technology companies, professional sports teams, healthcare institutions and universities are among the places where she has helped successful transformation of vision and viewpoints, new organizational structures, and redesign of business processes.

Salvatore Rasa claims that he usually does not fit in anywhere in particular. He has a B.A. in philosophy and a M.F.A in directing. Fortunately, he has been able to work in a variety of learning, organization design and strategic communication projects for global companies, the people who live on his block in New York City, and several of the world's wonderful arts institutions. Often, his work has involved teams experiencing radical change in over 120 countries and sometimes, it's been with a small group of dedicated professionals who understand that their own networks provide answers that should be shared. Providing, they can be heard. Sal is a founding member of im21 *(Innovation - Measurement – 21st Century)* which focuses on inclusive communication in a diverse global workplace. He is president of *generating community – driven solutions* dedicated to the notion that the ability of an organization or community to communicate is a direct reflection of the overall health of that entity.

Our Approach

When we began the process of drafting this chapter, the references that each of the co-authors assembled tended to fall along two distant poles: one abstract and statistically academic, and the other promotional and close to marketing hype. We were looking for something different – more personally expressive, collaborative; challenging not only assumptions, but the way in which much social media oriented literature now exists. We decided to position our writing within a middle zone. We conjured a place where we were transparent as co-authors and where we could dialogue around what we agree is critical to any thoughtful exploration of social media: truth, assumptions, and reality. It brought to mind a quote recently shared by a friend that came from his grandfather, "If you want to know anything, ask five biased people because there isn't any other kind." Well, here we are three biased people eager to dialogue about knowing what we know. Or as Socrates reminds us, "I know that I am intelligent, because I know that I know nothing."

"Don't Keep Secrets"

Michael is five years old. His parents work in IT. He has three BlackBerrys to play with.

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