

Chapter 10

Managing Social Knowledge Management: Balancing the Gatekeeping vs. Crowdsourcing Requirements

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ABSTRACT

In a knowledge driven economy, the ability of a firm to grow and gain competitive advantage is defined by its ability to realize economic value from its knowledge assets. In one form or the other, firms have attempted to capitalize on the power of knowledge based economy. Multiple steps were taken by various firms to capture the knowledge and create knowledge bank in form of KM tools and other propriety media. Social media has provided firms with a very powerful tool to appropriate the benefits of such codified knowledge. Social media, in form of both public social network sites and propriety social media tools has enabled collaborative creation and storage of knowledge like never before in human history. Availability of these media has lowered the barrier of entry in a knowledge driven economy by democratizing collection and organization of knowledge. In this chapter, we present an exploratory framework to analyze the implications of use of various types of social media based KM tools on the firm's knowledge collection and sharing strategies.

INTRODUCTION

We live in a knowledge economy (Powell & Snellman, 2004). Knowledge is the new critical resource of firms. In a knowledge-driven economy, the ability of a firm to grow and gain a competitive advantage is defined by its ability to realize economic value from its knowledge assets. Various researchers have termed it as an extension of the resource-based theory of firm (Lavie, 2006; Siemens, 2014). The power

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of knowledge-based economy was realized by firms quite early and steps were taken by various firms to capture the knowledge and create knowledge bank in form of KM tools and other propriety media, but the true revolution was brought into this sector by advent of social media.

At a very generic level knowledge management has been termed to be the process of acquiring, managing, distributing and enabling the usage of knowledge within the firm (Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Dalkir, 2013). A firm may gather knowledge in multiple ways. It can either be the traditionally stored knowledge, which is nothing but processed information (Bhatt, Pankaj, & Rodger, 2014) or a formal record of tacit knowledge available with skilled workers or other stakeholders. A knowledge management system is the overarching system which manages all potentially beneficial information available within the firm or its stakeholders in utilizable form (knowledge). It can be understood to be the complete spectrum of the process by which the firm manages all the information necessary currently or in future for its successful operation. One important aspect needed to be understood in handling knowledge for firms is that there exist two kinds of knowledge within the firms, tacit and explicit (Dixon, 2000; Polyani, 1966). Careful thought needs to be given for handling both these types of knowledge as the processes for storing the two kinds of knowledge and its impacts differ vastly.

One of the issues that firms deal with today while managing their Knowledge Management (KM) processes is how to collect and disburse the information essential for firm's continued growth. Social media, in form of both public social network sites and propriety social media tools like wiki etc., has enabled collaborative creation and storage of knowledge like never before in human history (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Availability of these media has lowered the barrier to entry in a knowledge-driven economy by democratizing collection and organization of knowledge. On one hand while these media have enabled quicker sharing of information and easier storage of firm's knowledge, it has also increased the possibility of making tacit knowledge of a firm public and explicit (Allee, 2004). Such an event has the capability to severely affect the competitive advantage of the firm.

There is a definite and critical need to understand and reflect on the implications of KM in social media age. Both scale and scope of KM implementations have changed dramatically in recent times. Not only have KM tools become much more pervasive than in past allowing small and new firms to grow much more quickly but also the stakeholders of standard KM engagements have changed. KM engagements now do not necessarily rely on information management of firm's employees (Hislop, 2013). Firms gather information from customers, suppliers etc. Some of the firms as discussed in the following sections even use crowdsourcing techniques to build their information bases. The term crowdsourcing literally implies collecting from a crowd but has become popular for collection of information or funds through online channels (Zhao & Zhu, 2014). The database storing critical information can be publicly accessible as well. This approach, although still in infancy and practiced by few firms, is a far cry from the days of old when firm's knowledge database was one of most fiercely protected infrastructure. This brings us to the important aspect of 'Gatekeeping' which has been covered in this article. Gatekeeping is defined as the mechanism of controlling access to certain information available with a select group of entities or individuals. In the context of this study, the essential question is determining the extent of gatekeeping for firms with varying degree of KM integration with social media.

In this work, exploratory research methods are employed to understand the complex relationship between firm's knowledge management strategies and the implications of the use of various kinds of social media tools. Social media in the context of this article stands for a medium which allows for networked interactions and could be any of either propriety tools or public social media tools including the likes of Facebook® and LinkedIn®. This article shows how modern KM systems based in an increasingly

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