

Chapter 8

Predictors of Social Networking and Individual Performance

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ABSTRACT

Public organizations that can successfully predict participation and understand the value propositions that drive performance can be very effective in social networking, which is a process and practice by which people and organizations are drawn together by family, work, or hobby to interact via websites. This chapter examines the relationship between social networking and individual performance and suggests a social networking participation model that takes advantage of innovation adoption and other important theories to help public organizations understand acceptance or rejection of participation. In a recent study, responses from 191 public administrators were analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM) to focus on the relationship between participation and five constructs: perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, perceived improvement potential (PIP), intra-organizational trust, and type of use. The study found favorable model fit statistics that support positive correlations between the latent variables examined and the dependent variable, participation. The results demonstrate the potential of the survey instrument to serve as an adoption and participation methodology that can provide public organizations with knowledge that predicts and promotes social networking activities as they relate to perceived performance improvement. This approach arms organizations and leaders with a new lens with which to focus on the value proposition regarding perceived improvement potential based on social networking participation.

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INTRODUCTION

Several studies examine social networking in the workplace (Hendrix, 1984; Kwon & Wen, 2010; Leaman & Bordass, 2000; Mazman & Usluel, 2009; Nakata et al., 2008; Venkatesh, 2000; Warshaw & Davis, 1985), but research is scarce when it comes to what drives participation in social networks, especially in the public sector. Employees accept or reject participation in social networking activities. They determine who they want to connect to while participating, and they decide how much time and effort they are willing to commit to the activity. This chapter theoretically and empirically examines a model of social networking participation that can improve an organization's ability to enhance employee participation in social networking.

Social networking goes beyond widely-used tools or applications of choice, such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, or MySpace. Understanding social networking behaviors is necessary to evaluate acceptance or rejection of participation. Innovation adoption theory promotes evaluation of internal decision processes and leads to an understanding of how users are attracted to a system, how their behavior is affected, and how they make decisions.

Social networking provides vital opportunities to build and enhance social capital. Organizations and people are involved in a daily struggle to understand and manage social networking. In building social capital through social networking, it is important to provide evidence of a return on the investment of time. If employees perceive a return on the investment of their time, they may be more inclined to participate, or they may participate at higher levels. Even if there is simply a perception of a benefit, users may be more inclined to participate or may be moved to increase their participation levels. In this chapter, we propose a social networking and performance model based on an examination of the relationships involved in predicting participation in organizations.

BACKGROUND

The lack of research and discovery in social networking as it pertains to social networking and individual performance constructs is primarily caused by the relative newness of the social networking phenomenon. The lack of research also indicates the need to examine social networking with a particular focus on perceived performance improvement. As many organizations work to create social media policies, performance is neglected or reserved for later consideration. Organizations do not tend to inquire about return on investment or performance implications until they are well into social networking activities. This article offers ways to understand participation in the beginning stages of social networking activities and policy decisions. It offers organizations tools with which to impact online interactions as they happen, and to affect behaviors that support the organization's goals and objectives.

The newness of social networking leads to limitations in the body of research in terms of available data and depth of examination of the construct. There appear to be no direct examinations of social networking as it pertains to individual improvement potential, whether one considers productivity, performance or some other aspect of personal- or organizational-driven improvement possibilities. Further, a review of the literature does not reveal much in terms of organizations that evaluate individual improvement, skill, capacity, time, etc., in concert with innovation adoption prior to making the decision to engage in social networking. Studies show that it is relatively easy to convince individuals, and organizations, about the benefits of social networking activities (Boyd & Ellison, 2008; Brandyberry et al., 2010; Pallis et al., 2011; Preece & Shneiderman, 2009).

Social networking is important to organizations because there is a "digital conversation" that is constantly going on around the world. Organizations can improve their chances for success and explore new opportunities by employing social network-

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