Chapter 12
Using Social Media Technology to Improve Collaboration:
A Case Study of Micro-Blogging Adoption in a South African Financial Services Company

Garron Stevenson
University of Cape Town, South Africa

Jean-Paul Van Belle
University of Cape Town, South Africa

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This chapter examines the use and adoption of micro-blogging within a large South African financial services company. This is done by means of a case study, which draws on three sources of data: user demographics, messages posted, and a survey focused on adoption and usage. The research objective was to evaluate enterprise micro-blogging's effectiveness as a collaboration tool, which enables informal communication among staff working in project teams. The analysis used a technology acceptance model as the theoretical framework but a more descriptive approach was used to investigate the actual use patterns as well as the barriers and benefits experienced by the users. Even though distinct barriers to adoption were uncovered, by focusing on creating the right groups within the tool and increasing management contributions potential users of micro-blogging platforms, these barriers can be reduced.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-2515-0.ch012

INTRODUCTION

In the long history of humankind (and animal kind, too) those who learned to collaborate and improvise most effectively have prevailed. - Charles Darwin

As companies become globalised, they become more dependent on networking technology to allow staff, partners, and clients to interact. The ability to work collaboratively is a core part of successful organisations and it is the trust between staff members, which forms the basis for effective collaboration (Handy, 1995). The awareness of an individual team member of his/her activities in the context of the activities of other team members can improve the collaboration between members of diverse teams (Dourish & Bellotti, 1992). This chapter will show that Web 2.0 technologies can increase the level of awareness between team members.

The success of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter in the public space has led to companies experimenting with similar technologies in the corporate space. This study examines the use of Yammer as a corporate social media platform. Launched by David Sacks (the founder of Geni, the genealogy site) in September 2008, Yammer is a corporate social network service. Unlike Twitter, which is used for broadcasting messages to the public, Yammer is used for private communication within organisations or between organisational members and pre-designated groups, making it an example of enterprise social software (Böhringer & Richter, 2009). Enabling staff to share interests and common values is vital for encouraging effective collaboration and knowledge sharing (Klein, 1998). In addition, collaboration and knowledge sharing are essential in an organisation, whether between members of the general staff population, or between specific team members.

Micro-blogs are a new arrival within the corporate software landscape (Riemer, Altenhofen, & Richter, 2011). The increasing popularity of similar tools such as Twitter within the public space has not yet seen the same rapid uptake through the implementation of collaboration tools within the software portfolios of companies. Yammer is a Web-based platform, which offers micro-blogging functionality to enterprise users in the form of closed groups of users. The groups are managed by only allowing users with a specific company's email address to sign up. In addition to standard micro-blogging features like posting messages, addressing messages and following people, Yammer also allows for threaded conversations, groups and file attachments (Riemer & Richter, 2010). These features make Yammer more useful for organisational use when compared to a micro-blogging platform like Twitter. Evidence shows that informal communication helps encourage trust and collaboration (Zhao & Rosson, 2009). However, it is not clear whether there is a corollary benefit to micro-blogging.