Enterprise social networks: Case studies
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This article examines Enterprise Social Network (ESN) implementations. It begins by discussing the elements that make up these tools and how they differ from other collaboration tools that have been around for longer. It then discusses research on the value that users get from ESNs; covers three case studies – Westfield, ING and T-Mobile; and the article concludes with a summary of good practices for ESN implementation.

INTRODUCTION
In a previous article, we recounted a brief history of social media in both the public world of the internet, the private spaces of organisations and the blurred lines in between. This article is less theoretical and more practical in focus. We will begin by discussing the elements that make up Enterprise Social Network (ESN) platforms and how they differ from other collaboration tools that have been around for longer. We discuss how these tools can generate value for users and offer case studies where they have had a positive impact on the performance of organisations. We will end with a summary of good implementation practices for these tools.

ENTERPRISE SOCIAL NETWORKS: WHAT’S DIFFERENT?
Virtual collaboration using technology has been around for a while. Lotus released their Notes product back in 1989 and newer product suites (eg Microsoft’s SharePoint) can be seen as updates of those earlier tools. While enterprise social networks share use, cases and characteristics with those tools, there are some differences. The following tables summarise those differences.

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<th>TABLE 1 Enterprise social networks compared to document collaboration systems</th>
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<td><strong>Focus</strong></td>
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<td>Typical length of content</td>
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The focus of ESNs tends to be people rather than documents. This can be seen in the importance given to user profiles in ESNs. In many old-style document management systems, user profiles were absent or hard to find. These profiles not only include contact information about the user (eg address, phone number) but also a record of their activities within the ESN (posts, comments, ratings, points etc). They may even include data from other systems (eg sales opportunities from the CRM system that the user is associated with).

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All websites viewed November 2014.
The next distinction is fuzzier. Both DCSs and ESNs provide environments for project-based, task-oriented work and also for looser discussions that typically occur in communities of practice. However, discussion tools in the DCS world are often under-developed compared to functionality such as version control. ESNs also make it easy to share conversations between different online groups rather just sticking to one conversational silo.

Document-based content tends to be document length, ie multiple pages. In comparison, the conversations that take place in ESNs tend to be shorter exchanges – in much the same way that we do not speak to each other in paragraphs. This conversational focus also means that things in an ESN can move quickly (depending on the scale and frequency of use and involvement).

Structures in DCS tend to be highly formalised with taxonomies in place. While some structures in ESNs may be controlled, many are designed to be emergent – users can tag content using the words and phrases that make sense to them. Although these exact levels of strictness vs looseness will vary from organisation to organisation.

**ENTERPRISE SOCIAL NETWORKS: WHAT ARE YOU GETTING?**

Each ESN system is different but most systems offer the following functionality:

- Profiles. The ability to capture basic user information (names, photographs, contact details), links to activities within the system (postings into conversations) and data from other systems (eg Finance, HR, CRM).
- Media contribution and collaboration. Users can post text, images, videos and other formats if they wish. Much of the interaction is likely to be textual. Use may also be able to edit each other’s content collaboratively (wiki-style) as well as to add comments to each other’s entries (bulletin board style).
- Activity Streams. Content and conversations can be viewed as a continuous timeline of the most recent content – similar to Twitter.
- Groups. The ability to create spaces within the system for specific groups and purposes. Groups may have different levels of access – eg all users can contribute, read-only by all users, viewable only by a subset of users.
- Search. Content and conversations should be searchable.
- Email alerts. While many organisations are trying to move away from email, linking ESNs back to the primary information management tool in most organisations – email – is often critical.
As ESNs focus on the “Enterprise”, they often have functionality around identity management, security and single sign-on and they have to be available through mobile devices. However, ESNs are different to other IT systems that support a specific business process (eg claiming expenses). ESNs can support a wide range of business activities (marketing, sales, finance, service delivery, HR etc). They are best thought of as “platforms”. Platforms have a broader impact but are a harder initial sell. The return on investment of a system focused on a process is relatively easy to calculate. The return on investment of a platform is more diffuse and harder to grasp.

**WHAT ARE EMPLOYEES USING ENTERPRISE SOCIALNETWORKS FOR?**

By analysing the conversation patterns within ESNs, Riemer and Mantymaki\(^1\) have identified five generic use cases for ESNs within organisations:

1. Discussions and informal talk: People use ESN to discuss and voice their opinions on general corporate matters, current affairs, politics, industry-related news, but also on informal, non-work related topics (such as sports events, hobbies and other general interests). Discussions and informal talk often leads to long conversational message exchanges.

2. Status updates and notifications: People use ESN to notify other users about what they are working on, what is happening in their work environment and also about upcoming events that they know about. In this way users create awareness in others for what is going on and at the same time present themselves and their projects and activities to the wider user group.

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Enterprise social networks: Case studies

3. Idea and input generation: Users share various forms of external input with the wider group, such as URLs to information they found on the internet, newspaper articles, research studies or various files. This is mainly done via unsolicited messages posted to no one in particular. Yet, sometimes users post requests for input and ideas regarding a product or project specified by the message sender. This solicits input and ideas from others and can result in brief message exchanges, or in more extensive brainstorming discussion.

4. Problem-solving: Users frequently draw on the ESN to ask others for help such as by outlining a specific problem or by asking others to find a resource or expert able to solve a problem. These problems are very specific and directly associated with the sender’s day-to-day work. In turn, other users provide a solution, ask for more background information, discuss the problem, provide access to a resource (such as a document), offer their experiences, best practices, or the contact details of experts.

5. Social feedback: Users share success stories or acknowledge the achievements of people to the wider group. Users also use the ESN to thank others for doing something (e.g., providing information, or finishing a project successfully).

Out of these five, Riemer and Mantymaki have found that exchanging and obtaining ideas and information is by far the most important source of value for ESN users. Users derive value not only from actively using ESN to ask for input or ideas, but also by consuming information posted by others. By following the messages of other users and searching for relevant content, ESN is valuable for generating new ideas and input even without the user actively contributing to the discussion. While the social aspects of ESN use, such as informal discussions and social feedback, did not have a direct effect on user value perceptions, these behaviors still have a role to play in setting the scene and creating the space for the exchange of information and problem solving.

Case study 1: Westfield and Yammer

The three examples of case studies that we will explore examine the use of enterprise social networks on three different levels. The first is within an organization and examines the linking together of different sites across a national retail network in Australia.

The Westfield Group owns and operates shopping centres across Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and Brazil. It manages all aspects of shopping centre development, from design and construction to leasing and management. You may not have heard of Westfield, but you have almost certainly been inside one of their properties. This business setup has a geographical challenge that is also an informational one. How can staff collaborate across multiple sites? Staff operate in an environment that requires mobility (they are out and about on site rather than sitting at their desks) and that is also fast-moving. Retail is a business where the ability to respond to dynamic environmental factors (e.g., weather) and human factors (e.g., fashion) is critical to success. Issues need to be solved in real-time with the use of rich media content (pictures and videos as well as text). Westfield decided to use Yammer as a platform to enable inter-site communication.

Two examples highlight the importance of a nationwide, multi-media, real-time platform:

• When the winner of The X Factor Australia did a tour of several centres, the team did a live feed of photographs and videos from various locations. This was shared across the network and allowed other sites to observe this event, participate in it and also learn lessons from it for similar events in their own centres.

• When there was a design flaw involving the magnetic strips on some gift cards, Westfield learned of the issue – and addressed it – on Yammer.

An ESN like Yammer is a better fit for many of Westfield’s collaboration needs than a traditional DCS. It is critical to note that the use of an ESN in Westfield was not primarily driven by IT but rather by a business executive (in this case, the director of shopping centre management). While the implementation and integration of an ESN requires the involvement of IT, its success will ultimately rest on leaders with a broader remit.²

² Yammer, “Yammer + Westfield: Using Enterprise Social for Better Teamwork for Better Teamwork and Operations” (no date)

(2014) 28 OLC 262 265
Case study 2: ING and Sitrion

The second case study has a shift in focus. Westfield was a story of linking a firm nationally whereas this second example has an international angle and one with an explicit focus on employee engagement.

ING Bank is part of the ING Group, one of the top 30 banks in the world. As a result of the global financial crisis, the global banking industry has gone through a period of tremendous change. ING leadership felt that it was critical that staff understand how their institution is adapting to new economic conditions, regulatory requirements and changes in how customers use banking services. One of the bank’s three strategic priorities has been to be a top employer by 2014 because better-engaged employees forge stronger relationships with customers. In turn, this creates a more productive and profitable workforce with lower employee churn and a larger talent pool. This emphasis on employee engagement put the existing internal communications systems under the microscope. While there were small islands of positive engagement, the intranet was not connecting people nor was it enabling the knowledge sharing vital to how the bank wanted to develop.

In response, ING Bank decided to build a new social intranet, Buzz, which could be accessed and used by its 70,000 employees across 40 countries. The team chose Microsoft SharePoint as its collaboration platform, but found it required much richer social computing functionality to be available within Buzz than what was provided in SharePoint so the bank decided to augment it with Sitrion (previously known as Newsgator). Since going live in Spring 2012, the ING Bank Buzz enterprise social network is beginning to deliver benefits in how the bank’s employees communicate and share information. One surprising development for the bank is how the MyWorkplace community has flourished as one of the first and most active Buzz communities. This sees the internal services team and staff using Buzz social tools to report issues and track these through monitoring keywords and hashtags. As a result, workplace productivity issues are being responded to much more effectively and quickly. Indeed, the popularity of using ESN as an internal service channel has led the Internal Services team to use Buzz to gather ideas about new services to support emerging ideas like Bring Your Own Device.

While the Westfield example stressed the importance of openness, this has to be balanced with security and confidentiality issues. Banks are often privy to highly sensitive information about their customers, business partners and employees. The ability to create closed communities was key for ING – as it is for many organisations. The implementation of ESNs should involve full and frank discussions on confidentiality and risk between advocates and those with risk management roles such as internal audit, or general council. These discussions should not be avoided as such discussions have to happen eventually – and should happen before something goes wrong, rather than after. However, the risks involved should be viewed with a sense of proportion and appropriate mitigations deployed (eg policies around acceptable behaviour and shareable content). Managers are often surprised by the good sense generally shown by their employees on these platforms.

Like Westfield, ING is using its ESN to bring staff together from multiple locations. One current project is creating a dedicated community within Buzz for the bank’s customer-facing staff in the Netherlands. This means a front-line staff member in Rotterdam can pose a question that is answered by someone in the Utrecht branch – and this conversation is shared among the whole community. There is evidence that staff members are using Buzz to crowdsource help inquiries and ideas. Obviously, if an organisation is international then using an ESN can become more complex. Different legal jurisdictions have to be accommodated – which means that different standards might be held to management of both data and human behaviour. Language differences also become an issue – one that there is no standard solution for at present. The fast-moving, colloquial and multi-media nature of ESN interaction makes it challenging to manage.

Finally, ING has introduced rewards and recognition capabilities and use profile badging to encourage even greater engagement. “Gamification” approaches such as points and leader boards are a

http://about.yammer.com/assets/Yammer-Case-Study-Westfield.pdf.
popular element of ESNs (as they are in many online environments). So far, one Buzz Hero badge has been awarded to a Dutch colleague who has been instrumental in kicking-off Buzz in the Netherlands.3

Case study 3: T-Mobile and Jive

The final case study is different yet again because it involved building online environment for both staff and customers. Both Westfield and ING saw developing an internal social network as a way of enabling their staff to have richer online interactions with customers as well as improving internal processes.

T-Mobile USA is a provider of wireless voice, messaging and data services, with over 43 million customers and 38,000 employees. In 2013, it became the first wireless provider to drop traditional service contracts and offer plans with no strings attached. The only thing keeping customers on board would be the quality of their experience. T-Mobile had no central system for keeping sales and support teams trained, informed and aligned. Information and processes were scattered across a variety of static content management systems. Creating content and pushing it to frontline reps was a cumbersome multi-stage process that required weeks just to make simple updates. The company launched its enterprise online community, dubbed “T-Community”, which replaced 15 separate platforms, consolidated content and radically streamlined workflow, shrank the content publishing process from 32 steps to 2, and slashed the content update cycle from weeks to less than a day. Staff hours needed to publish and manage content were trimmed by nearly 70%, saving an estimated US$8 million over three years. And by providing T-Mobile’s call centre reps with timelier, better information, the system reduced call resolution times by seconds per call, lowering costs by an additional US$3 million annually.

Spurred on by the quick success of its internal instance, T-Mobile took the next logical step: creating a Jive public-facing community for customer support and engagement. Previously, the company used a conventional customer forum that allowed limited customer interactions and had no content hosting, which meant that additional platforms were needed for knowledge base and video hosting. Now customers have one place to go for everything – from knowledge base articles to documents, how-to videos and user discussions. Customers can rapidly search across all those sources with a single query and retrieve the information they need or they can pose questions to the community and get answers back from fellow users and T-Mobile reps. Correct answers are automatically pushed to the top of discussions, where everyone can easily see them. Users can also post rich personal profiles, find like-minded users based on common interests and affinities, participate in user groups and share content and expertise. T-Mobile is also making use of community analytics, enabling the company to mine rich insights on customer behaviour, needs and concerns.4

T-Mobile’s approach to ESN implementation has been to focus on its application for business benefits. The business impact numbers for the system are small in terms of T-Mobile’s US$24 billion annual revenues but they are significant compared to its implementation costs. While some of the rhetoric around ESNs has been utopian (such as the flattening of hierarchies and power structures), they have to pay their own way. T-Mobile initially focused on two processes – content creation and call centre responses – that they had good measurement systems in place to understand and where the impact could be tracked.

As stated at the start of this case study, the other notable element of T-Mobile’s ESN experience was its willingness to create similar environments for customers. This desire to intertwine the experiences of employees and outsiders (customers, suppliers, citizens etc) has been around for a while. I can recall discussions taking place on this topic last decade. For many organisations, these inside and outside worlds are still separate. They are unlikely ever to be fully integrated. Customers


and employees have different needs and goals – and there will always be issues of confidentiality – as the ING example above illustrates. However, there are still opportunities to link these worlds to a greater degree than we do presently. The technology is largely now available. What is often lacking is the will to accept whatever risks these closer interactions may have in the short term to deepen relationships in the long term.

**CONCLUSION: GOOD PRACTICES FOR SUCCESSFUL ENTERPRISE SOCIAL NETWORK IMPLEMENTATION**

Looking across these case studies and others, there are some common lessons around enterprise social network implementations:

- **Focus on adding value.** In all cases, the platform itself is just a stage on which the drama (and occasionally comedy) of your organisation’s work can be enacted. This may mean piloting the tool with a particular group for a particular purpose before opening it up to the wider organisation. It should be noted that adoption of a tool is not the same as value generation.

- **Ensure that you have senior executive support beyond IT.** As the case studies show, it is critical to have this level of senior engagement to ensure adequate access to resources and the removal of roadblocks from projects such as this. ESNs may start in a “skunkworks” but will need official support to truly succeed.

- **Just enough structure.** Typically ESNs require a “Goldilocks” approach to governance. One form of governance is too strict – users are discouraged from participating by rules and limited in their conversations by over-designed templates. A form of governance is too loose – no one knows what’s going on, where they can find what they need or what to do if something goes wrong. The third version of governance is just right. Users have enough structure to find what and who they need while also having some flexibility. You typically do not get this right first time but move forward by testing, watching the results and listening to what your users tell you.

- **Don’t let silos form.** One risk with ESNs is that they stay apart from the rest of the systems where organisational work occurs (e.g., email, process-based systems such as ERP etc.). ESNs are hugely powerful at linking people and ideas but if they stand apart from work then they are seen as a burden rather than an enabler. This is as much about integrating them into communication and collaboration practices as it is integrating them from an IT perspective.

- **Make sure you have the people making things happen as well as the technology.** Many organisations have implemented these systems but not given individuals responsibility for facilitating conversations between people. The role of the community manager/network facilitator is a crucial one and without it, these efforts often fail. These do not have to be formal roles or represent a large headcount but they are necessary.

As our previous article stated, we believe that enterprise social networks have now moved past the peak of hype and have to deliver results to the organisations in which they are established. We also believe that if they are implemented well then they can absolutely deliver those results. Knowledge and information professionals are often involved in these implementations and they need to understand the unique characteristics of these environments to ensure success.

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