

Managing with Social Technology

A McGraw Hill Brief Case Series Book

By Scott Klososky

Introduction

What is Social Technology?

Kim runs a marketing office with six direct reports. Four of her people are under 32 years old and have been with the company for less than two years. More and more these days she notices them spending time on their computers using Facebook, Twitter, and watching YouTube videos. She cannot help noticing that they send links to each other and share interesting articles and videos. At times she is sure they are helping each other be exposed to new ideas and information, yet she also has a sneaking suspicion that they also use company time to communicate with friends. More and more her four young direct reports spend time on their mobile devices during meetings – either checking social sites, or taking notes – it is hard to say.

Their performance still seems to be up to par, but Kim wonders if they could be doing a better job if all these online communities, to which they seem to be addicted, did not distract them. In the last six months she has noticed them putting in less hours at the office, yet they also seem to be working after hours and on weekends at times. Worst of all, they seem to have command of new tools that are regular parts of their day that Kim has never heard of. Part of her wants to counsel them to quit spending so much time online, and the other part senses this is a new way of working that can be effective... What should she do next?

Managing people is always a challenging task. Human beings can be unpredictable, emotional, and hard to organize into a frictionless team, even for the best leader. Add to this mixture a sophisticated set of technology tools that enables them to communicate for free, with billions of other people instantly, anywhere in the world, and you have the recipe for disaster, or stunningly good results. Today's organizations have never had four

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generations that are more different in how they view the world, and have never seen a fire hose of free tools coming at them like we see from the Web today.

These dynamics create a wonderful opportunity for managers to have a big impact on the glide path of how social technologies get integrated into the daily activities in organizations. On the other side of this wonderful opportunity is a very real possibility of tremendous mess if managers are uneducated about these technologies. If the manager also provides a poor example by failing to use these tools personally, they will not only be failing as a leader, they will also create a chasm between themselves and those they lead. It is clear that social technologies are not a fad, and are here to stay. This demands that managers become very knowledgeable about the field.

Without a huge amount of fanfare, the term Web 2.0 made its debut shortly after the Dot Com crash of 2001. People were searching for an answer to the question of where the Web would go after its over heated rise in the late nineties, and subsequent return to earth. While some people began to write off the Internet as having much less impact than was predicted, the first signs of a new era were budding. Instead of people just connecting with companies offering products, they began to connect with each other. Communities of interest began to form where people from around the world, who have specific areas of commonality, can find each other, and share information, ideas, opinions and files. Then savvy young entrepreneurs began to build tools that let us share content, and opinions in various formats – for free. Whereas Web 1.0 was all about ecommerce, Web 2.0 was about connection. So much so that the term Web 2.0 gave way to a more specific moniker – Social Technologies.

There seems to be confusion around the vocabulary of Social Relevancy, Social Media, Social Networking and Social Technologies, so let's clear that up first... Social Technologies

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is the umbrella term that encompasses three discreet areas of the Web 2.0 era. The first is Social Relevancy. This is the description for the concept of an online reputation, or credentials, and all the tools that are available for this area. This includes the online reputations of both an organization, and an individual. Both have a level of social relevancy online today – whether they choose to influence it or not.

The second is Social Media. This is the description for any Website or service that facilitates using a piece of media to share an idea, advertise, promote, or just deliver content. Media in this case could be a document (scribd.com), a presentation (slideshare.com), a photo (flickr.com) or a video (youtube.com.) For some reason, the press seems to use this term as the umbrella term in many cases and that just confuses the matter.

The third is Social Networking. This describes any Website or service that facilitates people communicating one to one, or one to many, in a conversation. This includes MySpace, Facebook, Ning, Linked In, Plaxo, Twitter, blogging, etc. Social Networking includes everything from eCommunities, to broadcasting communications to through text, audio or video in a live format. Social Networking is about connection through conversation between a people independently, or through organizations speaking with an organizational voice.

Key Term

Social Technologies

When people use the incorrect vocabulary to describe an area of the Social sphere, they simply confuse people and weaken the ability to discern the three areas of social relevancy, social media, and social networking. Once you really understand the difference between these three areas, you are better prepared to manage people to successfully use them

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There seems to be many people – especially in the older generations – that are really struggling to understand what the whole phenomenon is around Social Tech. They cringe when they see a teenager texting at the dinner table. They have little idea why someone would watch YouTube as if it were a TV channel, and they clearly are confused by the concept of Twitter and why people would share their thoughts and activities with the world five times a day. Social tech just seems to be this big amorphous trend that is growing quickly, in lots of directions, and with no instruction manuals.

It actually can be defined pretty easily if you just think of it as a collection of new forms of communication and community. With the Internet acting as a transport service, hundreds of Web tools are being built (and offered for free in most cases) that provide various methods of connecting with others. These connections can be with people that we know personally, or collections of people that have our shared interests. They often provide information streams in real time, meaning that the information is received moments after an event happens, or someone has a thought they want to share. Along the way, we also developed ways to search and find specific people, and to connect to them in various ways based on the information stream we prefer to get or provide.

Now, these tools are not restricted to a chosen few. They are offered to anyone that has Web access, and an estimated 1.7 billion people do as of this writing. This is an amazing thing because never before in the history of man have we had the ability to talk to 1.7 billion people for free and unfiltered by traditional media sources. Not only that, we have a growing list of possible ways we can “talk” to the rest of the world. We can do it with pictures, we can do it in 140 character microblogs, and we can do it with page long blogs.

Key Term

Microblogging

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This term refers to any service that allows a message to be delivered to a person, or group of people, with a restricted amount of characters.

The “micro” prefix dictates that this message is typically less than 200 characters (for Twitter the number is 140 characters.) The “blogging” piece of the word creates a distinction from text messaging in the fact that it is designed to deliver the message one to many, in some cases to millions of people with the press of a button.

We can use free tools to call someone anywhere else in the world, and oh, by the way, you can do video calling as well. The scale and speed of our new found ability to communicate with each other is staggering.

With every blessing, comes a curse. For the people that are responsible for managing others, this newfound capability adds to an already growing list of complex areas that need to be watched over. This is not a collection of new tools that can be ignored, blocked, or forbidden because already, too many people rely on them in their personal lives, and to enhance their business careers. Especially the younger generations who have adopted these tools with velocity, and fearlessness.

Understand this, social tech is more than Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. From an organizational standpoint, these applications are a tiny part of the overall picture. We will explain in detail many of the concepts that now fall under the social tech umbrella, and by the end, you will have a much broader vision of how pervasive this new field will become. Hence, the need to develop management skills to leverage social tools, instead of being frustrated by them.

How Did We Get Here

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Before we launch into discussing best practices for managing peoples use of social technologies, we should take a step back and examine why social tech is exploding at all. Nothing like this happens without a logical reason behind what drives heavy adoption of a tool, and understanding these dynamics can help us have an improved vision of where it might go. It is an interesting scenario we find ourselves in because the youngest people in the workforce have naturally adapted to many of the new social tools, while the oldest generation follows behind after the experimentation has been done, and clear value has been proven.

When viewed from a very high level, social media, and social networking are driven by people's desires to connect, and communicate. This is a very basic desire, and for most of humanity, has been limited by geography. As transportation improved in the 20th century (trains, planes and automobiles) we were able to expand our reach in communicating and connecting. For that entire century, we improved the telephone as a connection device that could electronically allow us to reach out and "touch" someone. Just as the automobile changed our lives in dramatic ways at the beginning of the last century, social tech is changing our lives in this century. It is all about connection, and communicating – plain and simple.

Social tech has not created a new human dynamic, it simply has enhanced our ability to communicate with others – anywhere, anytime, in multiple ways, for free. It also has allowed us to build communities of interest that do not concern themselves with demographics, geography, or language. Then it provided a giant database of conversations and content that can be searched to see patterns in news, subjects talked about, or information about a person or company. This enhanced ability to communicate in so many different ways, is a powerful tool for organizations because a huge part of the success of

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organizations is communicating with constituents. This could take the form of branding, messaging, sales, relationship building, or simply informing. Once communities began to form, organizations could participate in the community, or can advertise to the members. This form of advertising has huge benefits because these eCommunities have the ability to provide the advertiser very concise demographic information on their members.

For Example

The Power of Facebook

Most people have no idea how deep the demographic data is that Facebook provides to advertisers. Nor do they realize that the vast majority of the soon to be over \$1billion in revenues a year that Facebook garners is from sell out data to these advertisers. The trade off is we get to use Facebook for free so that we can connect with friends, family and business contacts on a streaming basis. Organizations are finding many clever ways to leverage the access Facebook provides to their hundreds of millions of users. This is a perfect example of the dynamics behind an eCommunity.

In some ways, it is kind of funny that some people are having such a hard time accepting that tools like Twitter, text messaging, Facebook and YouTube are becoming common place. It harkens back to the days when people were scared to use the telephone for fear that moving their voice over long distances was a form of black magic. Or when people refused to actually do email on the computer because it was more comfortable to have someone print it out, and to answer it in notes written on the bottom of the paper. We are simply developing new variations of tools with specific purposes for enhancing our ability to communicate and connect.

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As mentioned at the very beginning, the third branch of social technologies is Social Relevancy and this is a different animal than Social Media, or Social Networking. Social Relevancy is all about the online credentials or reputation that gets formed from the content and comments that get posted about an organization, or an individual. This is a byproduct of all the communication and connection that is now going on. We are creating digital shadows online, and these shadows paint a picture of us that is getting more detailed all the time. This picture is also being painted by what others are saying about us, more than what we say about ourselves.

For Example

Digital Shadows

In the last year, the top social networking sites have agreed to let Google and others tap into their entire stream of users conversations. For example, Twitter now provides their entire daily stream of tweets to companies that wish to purchase the rights to this. The U.S Library of Congress has decided to archive every tweet that has ever been done in a database for public access. This means that if your name has ever been mentioned by one of your friends, or a coworker on Twitter (or some of the other top sites) any other person that is interested in you can do a simple Google search and get a glimpse into your life. Add to this any content you have posted online, and that picture of how you think, what you do, and where you are just gets clearer. This is what we mean by casting digital shadows online

An typical organization with a Website, has for the last 15 years, worked to make sure that when someone types in the firms name, their Web properties come up at the top of the list. Now we are quickly reaching a point where a search of an organizations name, might deliver a stream of mentions on Twitter, YouTube, Slideshare, Scribd, in blogs, and discussion groups, all on the top search page. The Website might be at the top of the page, but it is

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surrounded by snippets of conversations. This now gives a searcher the ability to quickly assess what the Internet Herd thinks of a brand or organization.

Key Term

The Internet Herd or Crowd

Social tech is providing many different ways to leverage the power of the scale of the Internet user base. The 1.7 billion people we now have online is continuing to grow quickly and they are collectively referred to as “the crowd” or the Internet Herd. This will be important to understand when we start talking about leveraging this crowd through the practice of crowdsourcing later in the book.

In addition, any content the organization has published through their “conversations” on Twitter, Facebook and blogs will also be quickly visible, as well as any content posted in social media sites. In other words, it is now possible to develop a quick opinion about an organization by aggregating what you find online, that DOES NOT exist on the organizations Website, but is supplied by people that have come in contact with the organization or are individuals within the organization that have posted thoughts and opinions. The fact that firms cannot control the message any longer has deep impact on the brand, the reputation, and the ability to sell products for companies.

The same situation exists for people in general. When you search on the name of a fellow employee, a sales prospect, or a candidate for a job, you now have access to growing database of information provided by that person, and more importantly, by people around them. By reviewing the content a person has posted, peoples reaction to that content, the number of people the person is connected with, and the comments made by others about this person, you can literally establish their credentials in many cases.

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We are in a stage of using these new social tools where many people really do not understand that what they post is forever, searchable, and public. This is leading to many well known stories of people losing jobs, losing opportunities, and losing friends, over what was posted without giving much thought to the repercussions. Just the other day, a young girl blogged a negative comment about a company that was a customer holding an annual convention at a hotel. The company that had been besmirched runs a listening campaign online and immediately saw their name in a negative blog. They called the manager of the hotel and complained, and the young girl was summarily fired.

Smart Managing

Monitoring Your Online Relevance

There are a number of tools that can help you discover what your online presence is like. These include Websites like Addictomatic.com (searches social sites for mentions of a name) to relevancy measurement sites like socialmention.com, and twittalyzer.com. A smart manager monitors their own online relevancy, works to improve their influence, and can also help others understand the importance of an online reputation these days.

We will talk more about online reputations later in the book. The take away from this early mention of Social Relevancy is that it will be critical to manage our online reputations, and those of the organizations for which we work. Perhaps you are now thinking that maybe you will try to separate yourself from any of this by staying as far away as you can from online sites. It will not be a positive thing to be invisible online, and the truth is you will not be able to stop others from talking about you, so we need to learn how to find what is said, and manage the positive and negative content the best we can.

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All of this newfound capability has come to us because we have now mixed our desire for connection and communication with the digital plumbing system that is the Internet. History has shown over and over that what we crave as human beings, we often figure out how to supply. We wanted to fly, and we learned how. We wanted to move fast across the land, and we conquered this. We wanted to be entertained in our homes, and we got radio and TV. We wanted to cook meals quickly and got the microwave. We want to cure all disease, and we have made a big dent in that. Personally I would like us to develop a vegetable that tastes like rum raisin ice cream, but that has not happened yet. We have always wanted an instant and robust ability to talk to any other human one to one, or one to many, anywhere in the world – for free. Now we have it.

Along with that, we have created an archive of conversations and content that has turned the word “privacy” upside down. Now instead of seeking to hide information from the rest of the world, we will need to provide lots of information about our thoughts and actions so that we can move forward in our careers, and connect to people that are looking to find us. This may sound like heresy to people that have grown up for years being taught to hide personal information. The truth is, the game is changing and it will not go back to the way it was in the past. Another truth is that some people are going way to far in providing information, and lacking the discretion to see where certain facts are dangerous to supply to the world at large.

Caution!

TMOI – Too Much Online Information

In the excitement to join the social tech world, some neophytes forget that whatever they post online is permanent, searchable, and public.

There are many stories of people discussing their upcoming vacations online only to come back and find their houses broken into. Or the

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people that over share details of their personal life that end up haunting them when they apply for jobs. A new area of TMOI is people posting negative comments about their employer, or a customer during online discussion with friends only to learn that these organizations run alerts on any mention of their name.

Why it is Critical to Actively Manage Social Tech Usage at Work

With all of these new capabilities being brought to work by users, we are seeing a lot of chaos inside organizations as to how they will use, and govern, social tech as a tool. Having an unfettered ability to communicate and connect is shaking up how people work, how they talk to each other inside the organization, and how content is provided internally and externally. We simply lack the rules, mores and regulations to assure that these powerful tools benefit the organization instead of drain it.

Standing in that breach is the manager. If we are to quickly harness the power of social technology, it is going to happen because millions of managers the world over, provide a handful of critical leadership tasks. The first is to put in place proper cultural rules for how people access, and use, social tools at work. The second is to document the policies that need to be institutionalized for communicating externally with social tools. Finally, managers will need to provide the vision, and training to help employees learn to leverage this growing inventory of tools. Absent playing this role, organizations will stumble around trying to figure out what this field is all about.

Tricks of the Trade

Employee Fact Finding

The first step that a smart manager does in order to get control of the use of social tech is to meet with team members and survey them on

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what tools they are now using. This includes gaining an understanding of the software services they use daily, and the devices they use. It is critical to understand what they are now comfortable with as it goes to online platforms, and whether they are using company computers, or their own mobile devices to access these services. It also helps to get a sense of how much time they spend a day using social tools. One cannot assume they know the level of usage and proficiency because it will normally vary widely from person to person – regardless of age or demographics at times.

Executive are quickly learning that they need to deal with social tech as a trend, and most of them are struggling to find ways to leverage it, or “protect” the organization from its use. It will really be up to the managers in the trenches to manage up and help the executives learn what is going on with the staff, and at the same time, provide good counsel and guidance to their direct reports. To the extent that older executives try to make decisions on a set of tools they may have no experience with, good outcomes will be hard to find. You simply cannot judge the worth of a social tech tool if you have never used it consistently.

A very real example of the positive role managers can play is simply being the go between with the staff and the executives on the value and potential positive uses of social tech. Many executives have an irrational fear that young people will spend all day long texting, updating their Facebook profile, twittering with friends, and watching YouTube videos. Managers are in the unique position of being able to judge if the time spent by their people using social tech tools is actually benefitting the organization, or killing productivity.

We can benefit from finding an analogous example of a technology like social tech, and examining how we learned to leverage its strengths, and minimize its distractions. In this

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case, let's look at the Web in general. In the mid nineties, to the year 2000, we dealt with people excitedly finding thousands of interesting uses for the Web in organizations. We also found fantasy football, and porn addictions. Many organizations blocked Internet usage, limited it to a few Websites, or found safety in allowing only a few people access. We quickly learned that you could not really throttle this tool by simply denying all access, because people either found a way to get it, or were forced into using it to access tools other people were providing online. We eventually settled on models such as blocking porn and gambling sites, or opening up usage and monitoring it for abuses.

The lessons we should have learned from our first time around with Web 1.0 are that it is not wise to block all usage of tools that are potentially powerful positives for the organization. We also should have learned that you must monitor usage to assure that people do not abuse access. Like any other tool that has the ability to be wildly productive, or dangerously distracting, the use must be managed.

Social technologies will likely change our lives and work patterns more than we can see at this stage. Its impact on us will be akin to handing a telephone system to a tribe in the jungle, and then studying what kind of changes come with their ability to now communicate in ways they never had. We are only a couple of years into the social tech phenomenon, so have many years to go before we have fully normalized its use. Now is the time to reign in this powerful set of tools and point them, and the people that use them, in the right direction for our organizations!

It's time to explore how you can be a great manager who leads with social savvy.