

**Enterprise Social Networking to Enable Knowledge Management- An Exploratory  
Cross-Section Study With a Focus on Corporate Culture**

Bachelorarbeit

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## **1 Introduction**

Enterprises are confronted with growing dynamic of their environment, what is caused amongst others by the development in area of information technology which is continuously pushing forward and penetrates the enterprises. Another issue is the increasing networking of the world which stepped up the pace of change (Buhse and Stamer 2008, p. 244). Results of research show that the manner of work permission shifts from individual processing to project work in teams (Gorla and Lam 2005, p. 79; Ammeter and Duckerich 2002, p. 14). Due to increasing complexity of projects and associated tasks, employees are forced to revert to knowledge of personal contacts (Richter and Koch 2009, p. 2; Pearce and Conger, 2003, p. 2), thus changed demands according to the IT-support of knowledge can be recognized, which are necessary to react to a changing working environment in order to respond to competition (Richter and Koch 2009, p. 2; Günther and Spath 2010, p. 6). Technologies which are summarized under the term of web 2.0 or more precise social software, shall contributed in support of distributed collaboration and knowledge management (KM) (Koch and Richter 2008, p. 1). Year to year the number of enterprises implementing social software for intern communication and collaboration rises, nevertheless there is no consensus about the value of social networking sites in organization (Richter et al. 2012, p. 133; Figuera and Cranefield 2012, p. 3; Herzog et al. 2014, p. 1). However a few researchers argue that these networks can enhance business effectiveness and performance by the facilitation of communication between employees and executives, context awareness as well as optimal and sustainable KM (Pawlowski and Pirkkalainen 2013, p. 637; Figuera and Cranefield 2012, p. 3; Richter et al. 2012, p. 133). The latter is of particular interest since increasing relevance of knowledge has led to the fact that knowledge of employees become not only a production factor, but also an important strategic resource (Figuera and Cranefield 2012, p. 3). So that knowledge has gained in strategic importance for innovative power and competitiveness (Cohen and Prusak 2001). This is the starting point of the present work. Of particular note is that most of existing studies focus on certain platforms or user groups (especially students), that's why further comparative investigation in enterprise context is needed (Richter et al. 2011, p. 100). The organization provides the frame during the development and the implementation of a social network and the sum of values, settings and norms which have an influence on executives and employees, form the corporate culture (Gerold 2004, p. 212). So that consideration of this aspect is necessary. For this

purpose in three enterprises Deutsche Telekom AG, Continental AG and Allianz Deutschland AG, which already use an enterprise social network (ESN), nine semi-structured interviews were conducted with the intention on the basis of consequential information to give answers to the following research questions: The first (RQ1): “How can ESN enable KM?” And the second (RQ2): “How and by which means does corporate culture play a role within the context of ESN and KM?”

This thesis consists of 7 chapters. First, theoretical background related to this thesis is presented in chapter 2 including an explanation of ESN, presentation of knowledge management (KM) and the importance of corporate culture. Chapter 3 gives an overview of the research design and presents the investigated companies. In chapter 4 the capabilities of ESN to enable KM and in chapter 5 the role of corporate culture in this context are discussed. Results from the qualitative analysis, limitations and implications are presented in chapter 6. A conclusion and outlook on the continuation of this work conclude the thesis.

## **2 Theoretical Background**

### **2.1 Enterprise Social Networking**

The aim of this section is to bring different aspects together and give a brief overview and understanding of ESN as well as work out a short working definition for the following course of this work.

Enterprise 2.0, this means that application of social software within an enterprise and consequential transformation is focused for many practitioners and researchers (Mazarakis et al. 2011, p. 81). Social software is software which connects people, allied people and supports collaboration (Schönefeld 2009, p. 45). Therefore actors use the potential and contributions of a network of participants (Back and Heidecke 2009, p. 4). For social software the following three basic categories of impact potential have been worked out by Back and Koch (2011):

- **Information management:** users are collecting, co-writing and explaining information, e.g. tagging or in group editors like wikis
- **Identity- and network management:** users are presenting themselves to others and are searching/ finding others by information about the current status e.g. social networking, tagging and blogging

constructive criticism are seen as particularly suitable within the context of ESN and KM. These results can be picked up, adapted or can be developed. Since, with many organizational issues the prescription that is appropriate for one organization is unlikely to work for another, with its different people, practices, history and contexts.

## **7 Conclusion and Outlook**

Starting point of this thesis was the challenge for enterprises resulting from increasing task complexity and dynamic of their environment. This leads to the necessity of changing work methods which in turn require corresponding changes in IT support. This demand is covered by social software like ESN which additionally contribute to KM, which in turn serves increasingly as an important strategic factor. So that the first research question arisen: "How can ESN enable KM?" It was presented which capabilities ESN has to enable KM, but at some points the necessity for further investigation was identified in form of corporate culture. So that the second question arisen: "How and in what sense does corporate culture play a role within the context of ESN and KM?" Through a qualitative analysis of nine semi-structured interview in three different companies, answers to these questions could be given. ESN as a sociotechnical technology provides for an organization the possibility to create a virtual place where people can meet and exchange opinions, information and knowledge. Furthermore people can collaborate, help each other and provide new perspective on different themes. Capturing the full value from the use of ESN will require a change in corporate cultural compatible with a high level of openness, motivation, trust and media competence as well as freedom from fear and culture of constructive criticism. With this findings in mind, organization have an impression which aspects of KM can be enabled by use of ESN and according to the experiences of investigated enterprises, some adoption can be made to be more successful in future. Moreover it became clear that companies which are not willing to take ESN and changes in consideration, will have increasing difficulties to deal with increasing complexity and thus difficulties to stay competitive, up to failure. But not because of ESN or specific cultural aspects, it will be more because of external surrounding conditions to which they did not adapt timely. So that it is not a matter of implementing ESN or not, it is more about a general attitude of each individual and the organization as a sum which is decisive. Therefore one of the most important practices that organization will have to adapt is to discover what combination of practices and technologies will create value in

their unique situations. That requires organizations to experiment, learn and adopt appropriate approaches.