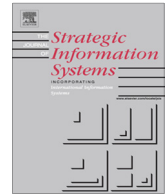




ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)

Journal of Strategic Information Systems

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jsis

Strategies and symbolism in the adoption of organizational social networking systems



Myriam Karoui ^{a,*}, Aurélie Duzert ^b, Dorothy E. Leidner ^c

^a *Ecole Centrale Paris, France*

^b *Université de Poitiers (IAE), France*

^c *Baylor University, United States*

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 4 November 2013

Received in revised form 5 November 2014

Accepted 12 November 2014

Available online 2 December 2014

Keywords:

Social network analysis systems

Social capital

Symbolic capital

Adoption strategies

Case study

ABSTRACT

Because of the important role being played by social networks, many organizations are turning to the use of social network systems to help manage these social networks and the accompanying social capital. When a social networking system is implemented in an organization, it may serve as a signal to organizational actors that social capital, heretofore largely ignored and invisible, will hereafter represent an important resource for the organization. As a result, individuals may consciously manipulate the system to either increase their own social capital or decrease the value of others' social capital. In a case study of two organizations in the process of adopting an SAP-based social networking system, our research examines how groups of actors develop strategies to control the social networking system as well as the symbolic capital that emerges during the adoption of the system.

© 2014 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

Introduction

Cross-functional, short-term, ad-hoc project teams form the backbone of modern organizational work practices. Participation in various project teams provides an individual with a cornucopia of internal organizational relationships forming an informal structure often referred to as a social network. The reliance upon these social networks to accomplish work tasks has become so extensive (Cross and Parker, 2004) that official organizational charts rarely reflect the actual relationships that individuals have with others in the organization. These social networks provide individuals access to resources – other individuals and their knowledge – that might otherwise be hard to find. They also provide individuals the ability to accrue advantages such as power (Brass, 1984), leadership (Sparrowe and Liden, 1997), mobility (Boxman et al., 1991), employability (Fernandez et al., 2000), performance (Burton et al., 2010) or learning (Borgatti et al., 1998). The totality of the resources embedded in an individual's social network constitutes the individual's social capital (Coleman, 1988; Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). Not only does social capital provide value to individuals, but it has been found to be an important enabler of collective action in organizations (Lazega, 2006).

Because of the important role being played by social networks, many organizations are turning to the use of social network systems to help manage these social networks and the accompanying social capital. Organizational Social Network Systems (henceforth, SNS) are designed to bring visibility to the informal relationships in an organization, to support cross-functional collaboration (Cross et al., 2002), to identify relations between individuals and to provide a medium for informal interactions unbounded by hierarchy constraints. Similar to their predecessors in the consumer world, such as Myspace and

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: myriam.karoui@ecp.fr (M. Karoui), ADuzert@iae.univ-poitiers.fr (A. Duzert), Dorothy_Leidner@baylor.edu (D.E. Leidner).

Facebook, organizational SNS promote networking and the benefits it can bring: SNS can improve employee productivity through the intensification of interactions, (Sparrowe et al., 2001), can improve the socialization effectiveness of new employees (Gonzalez et al., 2013), and can facilitate new relationships internally and externally (Deans, 2011; McAfee, 2009; DiMicco et al., 2008; Majchrzak et al., 2009). According to McKinsey, the economic impact of social media on business could exceed \$1 trillion, mainly resulting from more efficient communication and collaboration within and across organizations (Chui et al., 2012) (in Kane et al., 2014, p. 1). In addition to these gains in productivity and networking, SNS are being implemented because of their ability to generate collective intelligence, to facilitate collaborative work (Cross et al., 2002) and to foster innovation (Bradley and McDonald, 2011). As such, SNS are an important component of an organization's IT portfolio and strategy. Decisions about how to use SNS, as well as appropriate SNS policies, are important for CIOs (Leidner et al., 2010).

Even as SNS provide a graphical visualization of an individual's social network, they concomitantly increase the potential symbolic power of the social network: not only does the individual's network provide access to knowledge and people, the network may now also provide symbolic value. Hence, when a SNS tool is implemented in an organization, it may serve as a signal to organizational actors that social capital, heretofore largely ignored and invisible, will hereafter represent an important resource for the organization (Feldman and March, 1981). This may then motivate organizational actors to develop strategies to control this newly visible capital in such a way as to increase or redistribute their informal power (Brass and Burkhardt, 1990) and their social prestige (Bourdieu, 1994, 2000) by actively forming and displaying their relationships in the system. Using a case study of two organizations, our study draws upon the concepts of Information as Signal and Symbol (Feldman and March, 1981) and Symbolic Capital (Bourdieu, 1979) to explore how groups of actors develop strategies to control their symbolic capital in response to their organization's adoption of SNS. Strategic use of IS represents an issue that has been heavily studied in the IS literature through the last 20 years (Gable, 2010). Focusing on "individual-based IS strategies" where individuals may define "how to use the information and systems provided by the organization to carry out and develop their roles" (Ward, 2012, p. 168), our study treats a new emergent SIS tendency in the context of SNS.

This paper is organized as follows. In the next section, we provide the theoretical foundations of this research. Then, we detail the case-study methodology employed, the data analysis method used in this study and the two case sites. Next we present the within-case and cross-case analyses. In a final section, we discuss the implications, limitations and recommendations for future research.

Theoretical foundation

Information visibility and information as signal and symbol

The notion of information as signal and symbol developed by Feldman and March (1981) emphasizes the symbolic dimension surrounding the deployment and use of information in organizations. In this view, it is the visibility of information itself, more so than the content of information, that drives information use and perceptions. Early research considered the willful act of making information use visible to others in order to provide a signal of legitimate managerial and decision making practices (Feldman and March, 1981). This line of work indicates that individuals will often project an image of using computer-based information in order to convince others of their managerial competence regardless of whether, or not, they actually need the information to guide their actions. Research has found that managers often make intuitive decisions and then search for information to support their decision, in order to provide legitimacy for their decision making process (Simon, 1977). Recent work on knowledge mapping systems suggests that human resource managers may use the knowledge mapping systems to project an image of control over the organization's human resources, even if they themselves recognize the questionable accuracy of the information contained in the system (Dudezert and Leidner, 2011). In this case, the real value of the system was not in improving managerial decisions or actions, but in signaling HR's efforts to manage human resources by making the information visible.

Even while some managers may willfully choose to make information visible in order to signal managerial effectiveness or increase their own power base, others may retract from such visibility, feeling a loss of power when information about their knowledge or work becomes overly visible to individuals higher up in the hierarchy. Such was the case for nurses, as eloquently described in Bowker (1997), many of whom felt that some of their most important roles – bringing a sense of hope to patients and relieving patient stress with humor – were not accounted for in a system designed to make visible the nurses' everyday activities. Likewise, organizational librarians feel a sense of power loss when systems take over their customary role of tracking down, filtering and passing along information to managers (Schultze, 2000). These works and others underscore the political issues that surface as hidden information becomes visible (Star and Bowker, 1995; Star and Strauss, 1999). To the extent that information is identified as a political tool (Allen et al., 1979), it may sometimes be deliberately withheld from others (Suchman, 1995) and other times, deliberately shared to serve some personal motive (Wasko and Faraj, 2000). In both cases, the information itself holds symbolic value for the owner of the information who seeks to control its dissemination in order to achieve the desired signal. To further understand the symbolic value of information, we next turn to Bourdieu's work on Symbolic Capital. Other theories – such as institutional theory (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Meyer and Rowan, 1977), Bourdieu's theory of practice (Bourdieu, 1977), structuration theory (Giddens, 1976), and various theories on power and politics (Jasperson et al., 2002) could offer insights into the results of information visibility.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/556223>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/556223>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)