Social Media Discomfort: the Clash between the Old and the New at Work

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ABSTRACT
This research investigates a conventional professional work practice and hesitant attitudes and feelings related to an introduction of a social media tool for communication and collaboration. The study was conducted at a well-established, international product development company in the electronic industry. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were carried out with engineers from the company’s R&D site. Based on the data analysis, the key findings focus upon a perception of Social Media Discomfort (SMD). Factors that constitute SMD can be divided into factors relating to arenas of social interaction (socialness) and into factors mirroring a goal-orientation in attending to work duties (usefulness). The study extends our understanding of why people might reject new social media tools. The results of this study indicate that it happens if the tools are perceived as disconnected to established structures, tools, norms and ideals shared in the workplace. The SMD occurs especially in connection with the adoption of the tool. Understanding the dual nature of uncertainty, i.e. socialness and usefulness, in relation to new social media tools is of relevance for both practitioners and scholars working with issues of the increasingly complex information environment at work.

Keywords
Social Media Discomfort, social media, workplace studies, technology adoption, engineers’ information practice, engineers’ information behavior

INTRODUCTION
After that social media entered to our personal lives, it is time for information related activities in the work sphere to adjust due to the same technology. There is a renewed and increasing belief in internal knowledge management (KM) initiatives, such as social networks sites (SNSs) for collaboration and communication (e.g., Blair, 2002; Alavi & Leidner, 2011; Blackler, 1995). Through SNSs, organizations hope to achieve a more open, transparent and digital culture where employees share knowledge, expertise, experience, best practices, questions/answers etc. Obviously this does not happen by itself, and employees’ motivation to adjust is of critical concern. In the workplace, employees are likely to relay on habitual ingrained information activities, like information acquisition and sharing. Structures, norms and ideals are shared among employees and crystallized into professional practices and organizational cultures (e.g., Giddens, 1984; Taylor, 1991; Suchman, 1987; Choo, 2006). In an established workplace with its own history, traditions, norms, goals, relationships, ways to behave and act, the practices and cultures might be particularly challenging when implementing SNSs that involve explicit changes of both technological and social nature. The risk of a bold clash surfacing between the old work practices and/or cultures and the new ideas of them is apparent.

In this paper, we aim to identify and analyze hesitant attitudes and feelings – as markers of motivation, or rather the lack of it – towards a newly implemented social media tool for communication and collaboration in relation to an established professional work practice. Thus, the attention is exclusively paid to critical views concerning the tool. The sceptical voices of participants highlight future problems that are of relevance for both practitioners and scholars working within social media field. Naturally, the collected data consist also of positive attitudes and feelings, but that part of data is left outside the present paper.

The study functions as a pilot study for coming research initiatives which will focus on private sector business organizations and the interaction within new social media sites/services as both information resources and virtual work spaces.

LITERATURE REVIEW
The explosion of SNSs in the civil society (see e.g., Boyd & Ellison, 2008 for a historical overview) is now also generating influences for our professional lives. The wide
range of studies that address users’ attitudes towards and acceptance of new technology in organizations places them into a historical and relevant field of investigation (e.g., DiMicco et al., 2008; Jackson et al., 2007; Orlikowski, 1992). In today’s workplaces, employees interact with a variety of multiple information sources of both a personal (e.g., colleagues) and impersonal levels (e.g., digital systems/platforms such as intranets and SNSs). Factors that influence on which resources are preferred and where knowledge is located can vary among employees, and are many (Yuan et al., 2011). It is generally agreed upon that accessibility and expertise are essential when turning to people as information sources, whereas for impersonal sources, the amount of information, its origin, easy availability, reputation/use of source among colleagues are often mentioned crucial qualities. Thus, the ways colleagues are conducting their information related activities are used as guidance by others in order to find suitable knowledge sources of information (e.g., Su & Contractor, 2011). This stresses the importance of identifying reasons why people are not willing to use and participate in new technology, despite the aim of enhancing their information related activities (e.g., Bock et al., 2005; Ardichvili et al., 2003; Cabrera & Cabrera, 2002).

KM initiatives in the workplace links to technology acceptance studies and KM literature where different aspects have been highlighted as critical in relation to user intentions, behaviours and attitudes toward systems. Drawing from the TAM model and the TRA model, Davis et al. (1989) strive to predict and measure why people either accept or reject different information/technical systems. The significant determinants for use of systems are perceived usefulness e.g. values/benefits which people get from using the system and perceived ease of use, e.g. how much efforts people need to put into the system. The values related to the system are of main concern in order to get people to use it; if these are not clear enough, no amount of ease of use can recompense. Trust is an additional factor that strongly influences perceived usefulness of a KMS. On a collective level, trust is a central social factor for seeking knowledge, in favour of technical factors such as perceived seeking efforts (He, Fang & Wei, 2008). How the KMS is perceived in relation to team work effectiveness may also affect the use and attitudes towards a KMS (Child & Shumate, 2007).

Thus there is a strong theoretical basis in relation to user attitudes and motivation in relation to the use of SNSs available in various research fields. Nevertheless, we have not found prior research focusing explicitly on the discomfort and uncertainty caused by the clash between information practices/organizational culture and social media implementations in the workplace.

RESEARCH SETTING AND METHOD
The study was conducted at a well-established international product development company in the electronic industry, headquartered in Europe. The chosen setting was a R&D site where new products and businesses are generated based on front-end ideas and concepts.

The internal enterprise tool under study is comparable to a well-known, frequently used global social media tools for leisure, such as Facebook. It is intended to serve as a central online hub, where employees can exchange knowledge and expertise instantly in real-time. One of the aims is to work topically across organizational hierarchies and geographical locations. It enables cross-communication between sectors, countries, departments, leaders and employees. Employees can create their own profiles that are available to anyone in the company, and thus share information about themselves and their job (e.g., photo, location, job/title, sector, contact information), post questions, join groups, engage in microblogging, submit suggestions and ideas, demonstrate their expertise, tag messages, share files, links and photos, as well as keep track on colleagues and their activities.

In order to capture and understand user attitudes and feelings in relation to the social media tool, qualitative research methodology was adopted. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were carried out with ten engineers, many of whom had worked within the company for several years. The interview questions were designed so that each participant could elaborate freely in an informal manner. The interviews were approximately one hour long and recorded, every one of them fully transcribed. A preliminary reading of research data gave basic themes that were further defined through comprehensive analysis of entire data.

RESULTS
A Social Media Discomfort
Based on the interviews, the study captured a Social Media Discomfort (SMD) which is related to hesitant attitudes and uncertainty towards the tool. The factors that were identified with the SMD are introduced below. Based on the data analysis, we were able to outline a distinction between factors that relate to arenas of social interaction and factors that mirror a goal-orientation in attending to work duties.

Areas of uncertainties within social context orientation

- The crowd fear factor

Engineers are acting as experts within their subject area. Their work tasks have elements of constant problem-solving whereupon they are expected to know how things work. This expert image of the engineers does leave areas of uncertainties within social context orientation.

[...] let’s say a supervisor asks for your opinion [in the tool] on a public wall in there, then you get kind of nervous since there are so many who will be able to view what you have written, since it's a tool that everyone [...] can use.
I don't find it very comfortable to question in the crowd, like put out a questioning in the public.

- **The context – leisure vs. work factor**
  What surfaced in the interviews was the problematic balance of professional and personal life spheres. The social part of the tool was not appreciated and participants tended to prefer keeping work separated from social elements that they perceived as leisure activities. They also questioned the legitimacy of the tool in a work environment.

  Basically, I am reluctant [...] I don't like too much that everybody can find out what I'm doing and I don't like mixing personal life and work.

- **Social networks are for private use, not for work.**

- **The word-of-mouth factor**
  The word-of-mouth factor highlights the importance of the cultural and social environment in which participants interact on a daily basis; this seemed to be connected to the personal preferences in the particular environment. Close colleagues have critical roles as promoters of the tool.

  Probably if colleges would praise the tool and say like ‘Hey, you should try this’ then I would be much more tempted to give it a try.

  I've never heard a convincing story, that I should check it out because it's a really good tool.

  [The reason] why I'm a little bit sceptic is also I don't hear it [the tool] a lot among colleagues. Nobody is talking about it. If I would hear a lot of good stories, then I might think, ok, maybe I should use it as well.

- **Areas of uncertainties within goal orientation**
  - **The lack of motivation factor**
    Throughout the interviews, it became apparent that participants had not understood the long-term purpose of the tool. The benefits were not clear and they never received any guidelines about why, when and how to use the tool. The already fragmented information environment consisting of different information sources also led to confusion.

    This tool came after a lot of other tools, so why change tool when you are already used to another one which you like?

    I don't really know what [the tool] can provide me with. If it isn't clear enough from the start then I can do without it, pretty much. I will not make an effort to try and find out by myself because that takes too much time for something that isn't that important anyway.

  - **The work task factor**
    Participants had problems seeing how the tool was related to their daily work tasks. They did not experience a need for it and had already, as they perceived, functional routines to get the work done without the tool.

    Sure, it's a handy tool but if you don't have it, you don't. You will come around it. There are other ways of making it work [...] I have other ways.

    What I wanted to know was what's in it for me? And I never got that information, so I just didn't take time to learn much about it [...] what we want to know is how useful it is for us, what we can achieve by using it.

  - **The professional secret factor**
    Since confidentiality aspects are of high concern at the R&D site, participants mistrusted the tool for sharing knowledge with geographically scattered and not personally known colleagues. The trust to other users, regardless if they were working within the same company, was low.

    Things that are too important, that would really help our progress I don't want to leak to the world. There are a lot of people subscribed that I don't personally know, people from other countries.

    If I send information to people I don't know I have no idea what they will do with it or how they will use it. On the other hand when I send it to people I know then I can be sure that it is handled correctly.

    The thing is, the [...] field is very much a field of expert people. People who know how it works. Basically, these people are afraid that if they share a trick then somebody else will be able to do the trick so then more people will know the trick. Then it will be nothing special about it and the people who came up with the trick are not needed anymore. So they are afraid of losing the job.

**DISCUSSION**

The results suggest that SMD is experienced within the studied workplace, and reveal a pallet of factors influencing the concept. The study illustrates how these factors could be divided into two parts: socialness (social context factors) and usefulness (goal oriented factors). These two dimensions stress that employees are affected by both the social constellations and influences in the work place (see Su & Contractor, 2011) as well as expectations to be effective and successful as an individual employee. Employees are likely to remain reluctant to use the tool if these factors are neglected in the design and implementation processes. In the same way as the factors point out negative effects, they can be converted in to drivers of acceptance.

The clash between the old forms of habitual ingrained information practices and the new forms of information activities is obvious. Employees experienced uncertainty in relation to established structures, norms and ideals shared at the workplace. For the workplace, the SMD stand in relation to the usage and adoption of the tool. What may be
outlined from this study is that when implementing and maintaining a new social technology a wide range of critical questions needs to be raised and addressed by the organization; they will surface under implementation, if ignored in design. Since our data is limited in size these results must be considered as preliminary and an object for further investigation.

CONCLUSION
We conclude by putting forward a number of challenges that were touched upon by the study: What are the preconditions between the use of social media tool in private and work contexts? Within the workplace there are hierarchal structures and individual appraisals; how do they affect attitudes and usage of social media tools? New social technology also erases boundaries between the private self and work roles – employees are encouraged to participate in informal and self-organizing digital milieu without particularly defined goals and rules; how to facilitate them to meet such a milieu? Social media tools do not enter into a vacuum; how do new systems support existing work models and other tools for collaboration and knowledge sharing? Finally, in the long-term, research about new social media tools within a diversity of workplaces may also tell us about the changing perceptions of work, work environments and the individuals themselves.

REFERENCES
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Research aims
This study aims to investigate attitudes and feelings towards a newly implemented social media tool for communication and collaboration and its relation to an established professional work practice.

Theoretical background
Some critical aspects in relation to user intentions, behaviours and attitudes towards systems:
• Trust on a collective level (He et al., 2008)
• Expert recognition/social influence from colleagues (Su & Contractor, 2011)
• Perceived usefulness/perceived ease of use (Davis et al., 1989)

Research design
Study setting? An international product development company in the electronic industry, headquartered in Europe.

The tool? An internal communication and collaboration tool in which employees can exchange information instantly to enable cross-organizational communication and share knowledge, expertise, best practices etc. digitally.

Method? In order to understand user attitudes towards the tool, qualitative methodology was adopted in forms of semi-structured in-depth interviews.

The study captured a ‘Social Media Discomfort’ and the factors which were identified in relation to it are:

- **The crowd fear factor**
  ‘I don’t find it very comfortable to question in the crowd’

- **The professional secret factor**
  ‘Things that are too important, that would really help our progress I don’t want to leak to the world. There are a lot of people subscribed that I don’t personally know’

- **The context – leisure vs. work factor**
  ‘Social networks are for private use, not for work’

- **The lack of motivation factor**
  ‘This tool came after a lot of other tools, so why change tool when you are already used to another one which you like?’

- **The word-of-mouth factor**
  ‘Probably if colleges would praise the tool and say like ‘Hey, you should try this’, then I would be much more tempted to give it a try’

- **The work task factor**
  ‘What I wanted to know was what’s in it for me? And I never got that information, so I just didn’t take time to learn much about it’

Results
The results of this research suggests that a **Social Media Discomfort (SMD)** was experienced, and reveal a pallet of factors influencing the concept. These factors could be divided into:

- **socialness** (social context factors)
- **usefulness** (goal oriented factors).

The clash between old forms of habitual ingrained information practices and the new forms of information activities is obvious. Employees experience uncertainty in relation to established structures, norms and ideals shared at the department. The SMD occurs especially in connection with the adoption of the tool.

Key challenges sprung out of the study:

- What are the preconditions between the use of social media tools in private and work contexts?
- Within the organizational setting there are hierarchal structures and individual appraisals. How do these affect attitudes and usage of social media tools within the workplace?
- New social technology also erases boundaries between the private self and work roles—employees are encouraged to participate in an informal and self-organizing digital milieu without particularly defined goals or rules. How to facilitate them to meet such a milieu?
- Social media tools do not enter into a vacuum; how does new tools alter/support existing information milieu?
- In the long-term, research about new social media tools within the workplace may also tell us about the changing perceptions of work, work environments and work roles.

http://www.flickr.com/photos/29148810@N05/5440728466/sizes/m/in/photostream/

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