Into the Ether?
Harnessing Social Media to Engage in Change

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Social media has changed the world we live in. Real time 'news' is now being created by and delivered to people wherever they are and whatever time of day it is through smartphones and tablets, the effects of which can be both positive and negative. To demonstrate this we only need to think back to the riots seen in London during the summer of 2011; criminals organised activity through BlackBerry messaging but the Twitter hashtag '#riotcleanup' got 90,000 people involved in the community effort to take back the streets. So with news earlier this month that Facebook has reached over one billion users, LinkedIn introducing a new feature allowing its 175 million users to follow a 150 individuals that it has identified as 'Top Influencers' and Twitter hitting a record 10.3 million tweets during the 90-minute period of the first US presidential debate, **our latest research** in the Change Mastery series examines how **social media** can be used to **engage employees in change** and **increase organisational collaboration.**

Many organisations are already using social media to connect and converse with customers but it can also be a powerful tool for driving change inside an organisation, particularly where employees are geographically disparate or functionally siloed. Our research suggests surprisingly few organisations are using social media tools effectively to engage employees and increase collaboration. In writing this article we interviewed a number of business people who had diverse interest and views on the use of social media. In this paper we will share these views and the experiences from those already using social media within their organisations, highlighting the lessons that can be learnt from external use of these tools and show how this research can be applied to strategies for internal use of social media.

How are organisations using social media as part of internal communication and to drive organisational change?

Amongst our research participants there was a diverse range of experience of the organisational use of social media. Almost all of those interviewed were clear about how their organisations were using social media to promote the organisation externally, with many having a distinct social media strategy that sat with the marketing department. However, typically organisations were less advanced in capitalising on social media tools for internal use. Specific collaboration tools (such as SharePoint, Yammer and Jive[i]) were the main ways that social media appeared to be used for internally, whilst other tools such as LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook and blogs sometimes spanned both internal and external use.

Collaboration Tools

Collaboration tools, such as Sharepoint, are the main medium used for internal social networking across the organisations that we spoke to. Some had been using some kind of internal collaboration tool for some time, others were beginning to embark on embedding such a tool and a few viewed existing external tools as a more cost-effective way of increasing collaboration and communication within their organisation.

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Into the Ether?
Harnessing Social Media to Engage in Change

GlaxoSmithKline: With over 100,000 employees finding the right person to talk to can be pretty tricky and employees were wasting both time and money trying to find the 'right' person. The introduction of SharePoint as a collaboration tool was hailed the source of people power – employees had searchable profiles bringing together people who were unknown to each other. Employees also had a personal space from which they could share photos, documents and collaborate with peers. SharePoint brought a consistent global approach within which local Team and Community sites made use of discussion boards to engage employees. The sourcing of brilliant ideas from any employee and using technology to change the way they worked resulted in some great achievements. For example, Research and Development reached out to other functions through social media soliciting ideas around the feasibility of a new drug. The diverse expertise across GSK produced answers that closed the study within one week at virtually no cost, potentially saving millions of pounds on a traditional testing phase that would have ended with the same result.

LinkedIn

Whilst LinkedIn is often recognised as a way of keeping in touch with professional acquaintances, increasing networking activity and opening up career opportunities, the potential for internal use has not yet been fully tapped into by many organisations. Through its 'groups' facility LinkedIn offers a way of bringing together selected individuals in a private forum to share ideas and discuss the current topical subjects of an organisation.

Grant Thornton: Going through a brand update prompted Grant Thornton to ensure employees could behave in a more dynamic way; social media was seen as a good way of giving people the space to share and collaborate more. Grant Thornton's aim is to push people out of the silos they operate in and work cross-service lines. As part of the process, they enrolled about 10% of their people onto workshops where they experienced a deep dive into the new brand; these people were then tasked to act as advocates of the brand and share their learning with colleagues. For many, this advocate role was a challenge, so Grant Thornton wanted to create a private social space for them to share ideas and challenges. Not having the technology available internally, the firm created a private LinkedIn group for this purpose. Olivia Gadd, Director of Communications, says "*People were surprised that LinkedIn could be used in this way and are now thinking about how they can use it for clients. The great thing about social media is that you don't have to be an extrovert to contribute, you can listen and learn and contribute when you feel comfortable. When these individuals start extending their use of LinkedIn groups for client interaction I advise them that 'you fish where the fish are' – they don't necessarily need to create things, they can join existing conversations*".

Twitter

Whilst social media is often viewed as a young people's favourite more than half of Twitter's 500m plus users are over the age of 35. Although it is becoming increasingly popular with 25-34 year olds, the 35-64 year olds still hold the same share of the user profile as this younger group. Recent research in the USA suggests that just under 50% of employees are likely to have a Twitter account and around 10% of employees are likely to use it on a daily basis (Pew, 2012). Tapping into this network can provide a key way to build relationships internally as well as externally.

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Random House: As an organisation that had already realised business benefits from using social media externally - connecting with potential authors and with readers - Neil Morrison, Group HR Director, suggests that recognising it for internal potential was perhaps an easier idea to sell. Whilst Board usage, aside from Neil himself, is not that prolific he suggests that its members do recognise the need for others to use it and this value provides the comfort for people to contribute. Neil believes that the use of social media by employees helps to involve a wider variety of people in conversation and encourages people who would not normally be in contact to connect with one another. He gave the example of a sales conference that was being run with an external Twitter feed that was then picked up and tweeted on internally, which in turn started useful and interesting discussions across a wider section of the business. He suggests that the fun and light-hearted element of Twitter is what makes it work so well – that 'water cooler banter' than can turn into deeper connections.

Facebook

Whilst in the USA Facebook is already used as a personal marketing tool, in Europe it is still seen primarily as a tool for socialising with those you already know and also for B2C businesses to connect with consumers. However with its recent developments in the way information can be shared differently with different groups some believe the way Facebook is used will begin to change and more will use it for other types of connections. Currently the most prolific use of Facebook by businesses is to promote product sales, however more and more organisations are using it to create brand presence to enhance their employee value proposition; beginning to connect with potential employees before they even consider apply for a job.

L'oreal: With a presence in 130 countries and over 68,900 employees, L'oreal have been effective is engaging with potential employees across the globe through social media. L'oreal's talent recruitment Facebook page has over 30,000 'likes' suggesting it is working well in attracting attention. The organisation uses the page to post the latest company news, photographs of staff events and contains videos of current employees talking about their experiences in working at L'oreal. Their Facebook internship ad campaign generated 4,167 clicks and led to L'Oreal receiving 153 applicants with almost all of them being pre-qualified due to the specific targeting options (e.g. education and experience) that were chosen for the ads. Within 12 hours of launching the campaign L'Oreal received 17 qualified CVs, which is a much quicker and more efficient targeting than traditional methods of job advertising (Hebberd, 2012).

Blogs

More and more organisations are using blogs to stimulate debate both inside and outside the organisations. Many leaders are using it to share their activities with employees and help to increase knowledge about how the strategy is being informed and implemented on a day-to-day basis. Not only are leaders writing blogs but employees are keen to read them; recent research suggested that 44% of employees would like to read a blog written by their CEO (Gold, 2009).

Into the Ether?
Harnessing Social Media to Engage in Change

Realising the benefits of social media

With predictions that by 2014 social networking services will replace email as the primary vehicle for interpersonal communications for 20% of business users (Gartner, 2010) there is serious need for organisations to review how email is used and whether it is any longer the most effective medium for internal communication. Organisations that are using social media for internal communication purposes reported a number of benefits over traditional email communication, these include increased collaboration, quicker feedback, more two-way discussions, richer dialogue, wider contribution, less convoluted email threads and greater knowledge transfer.

Paul Thomas, Senior Manager for Digital Communications and Social Media at Grant Thornton UK, says "*We need to go back to basics, email is systematically abused. People get into the office and open their inbox and their job becomes about responding to emails. We hope to be launching a product like Jive as a direct challenger to email; if you are sending an email to a group of people or CC-ing lots of people then is it best to be using email? These tools can be used to post a message that the whole group can respond to so that the email thread doesn't become convoluted. Also discussions can be recorded so that knowledge can be managed and shared - this is one of the key aims in us using social media. Transfer of knowledge often happens in an adhoc way but using social media we can have water cooler sharing on steroids!*"

Not only can social media help organisations move away from ineffective email use between employees but can also better help in promoting strategy changes or internal projects in a way that can be more engaging than just hearing it through top-down channels as we have already seen with how Grant Thornton have used it to support advocates for their new brand ethos. Alkesh Shah, who was Internal Social Media Demand Manager at GlaxoSmithKline and now helps other organisations derive optimum value from social media technologies, agrees observing that the way consumers use Amazon as a great example of why peer-to-peer communication works. Consumers are likely to have already made a decision to purchase a product yet they read the customer reviews, in particular any negative views to discover what might be wrong with it and, on balance, whether they can accept those pitfalls. This peer power is what sells the product not the information from the vendor. They can whether to read the product description from the manufacturer but it is unlikely to be the sole deciding

factor, in the same way that whether we support a new strategy or internal project is unlikely to be based on an email or an address from the CEO alone but much more likely to be influenced by our peers. Conversation with peers prompts people to really think about issues and the different perspectives they can be viewed from. This conversation seems to go further than just dialogue but actually prompts action where perhaps previously there may have been none. This is an interesting challenge for those leading the business, who will have traditionally had greater power to decide what others may or may not need to know.

Considering how many organisations now have a global workforce social media is also helping to connect people across time zones. Telephone conferencing has been readily adopted by many companies, particularly with increasing concerns about cost and environmental factors of business travel. However, it does rely on business hours overlapping across time zone and the more global the organisation the more problematic this can become. A benefit of using a social media collaboration tool is that contributions to discussions can be made 24 hours a day and then ideas and discussions drawn together to ensure involvement from all areas of the organisation and encourages less head office-centric knowledge power and decision-making.

Pearson, owners of the FT, decided to implement a Jive-based tool to replace their traditional Intranet in order to encourage its different brands to work together. Their initial pilot of 700 users grew organically to 5,000 users before their community, which they called Neo, went live. Following the launch, users increased to 27,000 in six months and by the end of 2011 nearly 75% of Pearson's employees were engaged in the community (Jive Software, 2012). One of the big advantages to using a tool like this is that users can search for expertise without using names, meaning that if a journalist needs an expert opinion for an article comment they may be able to find it in-house or if a designer goes on holiday and a book cover needs altering an alternative resource may be able to be found.

What challenges are organisations experiencing in using social media?

Some of the wider criticisms of social media include the collection of data, which not only supports advertising but some argue is invading privacy to an extent that can never be returned from and that this information has the potential to be abused in the future. Care must therefore be taken by organisations to safeguard not only its own sensitive data but also the privacy of its employees. Also whilst there are some excellent opportunities to move from long email trails to an easier to follow conversation, there are many conversations that do need to take place one-to-one basis. Just as email can be used in an ineffective way there is an argument that social media can sometimes lead to issues being discussed by lots of people that would be better reserved for individual face-to-face discussion.

Another of the wider criticisms of social media is the rise of narcissism that it can create, with users building their own credibility in an inappropriate or inaccurate way. We have seen how LinkedIn groups can be utilised to create support and enable information sharing but there is evidence from external LinkedIn groups that suggests that when membership is open to all, individuals can inappropriately use them to self-promote and espouse views that may not be factually correct. This could easily become an issue for larger organisations, although our research participants suggested that erroneous information is often quickly corrected by comments from other users in the organisation.

Into the Ether?
Harnessing Social Media to Engage in Change

Our interviewees suggested that often one of the biggest challenges organisations are facing is getting buy-in from the most senior leaders and the term 'social media' has been found to be unhelpful, with many managers having the misconception that it just means Facebook and people updating their friends on what they had for tea. Dudley Backhouse, who was Global Head of Service Architecture at Thomson Reuters Group and now helps clients with their digital collaboration and social smart capabilities, suggests that CFOs often struggle to see the value of social media as the indirect benefits are difficult to quantify. More creative industries tend to have more liberal policies, Neil Morrison suggests that where organisations are not allowing people to "play" they can't see the results so have difficulty convincing senior managers of the benefits of social media tools. Olivia Gadd agrees saying "*With the social media platform trial we have run it has been fun to see how people play, we started some small groups to get people involved, it's not all work related, one has started a blog 'Thoughts from a small holding' about her veg patch and keeping a few chickens. Conversations have started there that have morphed into other things. We have to think about how we network online; we connect and build up trust and then when we meet the conversation is the richer*".

On a more individual level there is a suggestion that some people show a reluctance to share their knowledge so openly; knowledge is often power in organisations and people who might have previously been a 'go to' person may not be happy to let this go. For these people it may be important to ensure that using collaboration tools can be seen as a way of building up a personal profile with a wider audience in the business, as long as this profile is related to their experience and expertise. Also trying to highlight the benefits of using the tools is a key part of ensuring widespread adoption and contribution. Paul Thomas explains "*We couldn't go into the business and sell social media without first understanding how our people work day to day and supporting them in change. We have to look at what is eating into people's time. Often they are bogged down with email and so we look at how we can reduce it. Some partners swear they don't have time for social media, but somewhat ironically, social media can actually solve some of our over-reliance on that channel*".

One challenge that sometimes hinders the effectiveness of using social media tools is making assumptions. Lincoln Coutts, Head of Knowledge Management, Research and Information at Savile Group says "*It is often assumed that Generation Y are keen users of social media and so like to receive messages through it, but they are not necessarily the first to adopt it.*" Ensuring that everyone knows how to use the technology can be time consuming but where the tool is unfamiliar (i.e. not one that people are already using in their personal life) it is essential to ensure they feel comfortable enough to contribute. Organisations are approaching this in a variety of ways – some are using big launches and completely replacing other systems such as their Intranet, others issue handbooks and some are valuing more individual support.

Another difficulty that organisations are facing is knowing where responsibility for social media should sit. Previously, due to the external-facing role that it has played, marketing departments have held the responsibility for social media. With internal use becoming more of a focus it can sometimes be difficult to understand where it should now sit; organisations are employing a variety of standpoints with several placing it with internal communications, others with human resources and some with organisational development departments. IT departments are often involved but our interviewees suggested that, whilst involvement from

Into the Ether?
Harnessing Social Media to Engage in Change

IT can be key to ensuring effective integration with any existing systems, it works best when the perspectives of different areas of the business are integrated in order to ensure that the tool itself is not the main focus. No matter where it sits it is important that it feels like individuals are speaking to one another 'in their own voice', when used as a broadcast tool for corporate messages, or communication has been moderated to ensure it is in line with branding guidelines, there is normally less engagement and contribution.

What are the resource implications of using social media?

There is a misconception that social media is a cheap and easy way of communicating but the same principles apply to it as those in other forms of communication; sometimes comments on social media can be easily misinterpreted so it is important that everyone understands that they may need to take time and work through their message, particularly when talking about something contentious. However a lot can be achieved with very little; using existing tools such as LinkedIn groups, Twitter and Facebook groups can often be just as good if not better than investing in a bespoke system, they also have the advantage that a lot of people already understanding how to use them.

Often the biggest resource, particularly when trying to initially drive adoption, can be time and energy. If we take learning from external use, Claudia Turner, Marketing Manager for Financial Times Career Management, suggest that on their Non-Executive Director's Club LinkedIn group they aim to post at least seven articles or topics every week to try to stimulate discussion. For an organisation with a large amount of content, such as the FT, this may not be such a tall order, but for other organisations more creative solutions may need to be considered. In either situation, discussions may need to be monitored to see if a response is required from leaders or other parts of the business in order to further the debate. Paul Thomas advises "*Make sure you have got some good shoes - you need to do a lot of walking and talking to different people and groups – in some organisations you may not be able to just put something out there and expect people to take it up*".

How is the success of using social media being measured?

Many organisations suggest that the value of using social media is difficult to measure in a traditional way. Olivia Gadd says "*I'm passionate about measurement but sometimes you have to suck it and see. It's difficult to measure a conversation that at first glance seems trivial, but is actually the building of a relationship that could lead to sales or innovation in later months, but if our brand is about deep connectivity, and in a year's time there is lots of contributions then it has been a success*". Several are taking this approach; measuring success through the number of users actively contributing and the volume of communication to show how engaged employees are with the organisation and then relating this back to the Service Profit Chain. The Service Profit Chain shows that the deeper the employee engagement the higher the level of customer satisfaction and retention, which in turn has a positive impact on the bottom line (Heskett, 1994).

Internal social media activity can also have an impact on employees' belief in the organisational strategy. When Peter Swinburn became CEO of Coors in 2008 he was faced with sliding sales during an economic the downturn. He decided his priority would be forging a cohesive

corporate culture and trying to get workers on three continents to feel part of one company. He introduced Yammer, an internal conversation tool similar to Twitter, to the 15,000 employees and after 18 months over 2,000 employees had become contributors. He believes the additional contact with senior leaders through this medium was one of the contributing factors in a rise from 73% to 87% of employees believing that the company had a 'clear vision for the future' (MacMillan, 2010).

Stepping forward: How to start using social media to drive change?

The resounding piece of advice our interviewees gave was to know what you want to achieve. They said that organisations should not be using it just because they believe everyone else is and that it is not about what technology is used, but should be about what the technology enables people to do. They also advise not to try to do too much, identify which channels are likely to be most effective for the purpose you are looking to achieve and focus your energy and resources there.

Experiment first
Neil Morrison also suggests that managers shouldn't be afraid to play with social media personally before committing to introducing it in the organisation. He says this will allow them to see how it can be used but they should not expect to understand everything immediately as sometimes it takes time to see the value of different tools. Whilst no organisation should jump into using social media because they believe everyone else is, if you are still unconvinced that social media can work then google how other organisations are using social media and what impact they are seeing. From the eight staff at Earth Hour (a small public sector project) using Yammer to engage with each other and volunteers to the huge conglomerates such as Walmart, who have 1.2m internal users (Thurber, 2011), there are many different ways and means to embrace internal social media. Walmart provides the following four key pieces of advice, which also fits with much of what our research participants told us: build trust, stay relevant, simplify life and acknowledge.

Build trust
Almost unanimously our research participants were against regulating the use of social media by employees; many organisations talk about empowering staff but if social media sites are blocked this gives the impression of mistrust. Our interviewees recommended a softer approach of creating helpful guidelines, such as information on how employees can utilise social media in a useful way. They suggest that most standard codes of conduct will adequately cover misuse and that damaging abuses should be treated as any other case of misconduct. Many raised the point that having a policy does not prevent misuse but it may inhibit valuable contribution.

Stay relevant
Social media is by its natures a social beast; see what people are talking about and get involved. If discussions are gaining lots of contribution then it is probably an important area for lots of employees, think about what you can add that may be related to the topic that might also get people talking and provide additional value to the debate. Most interviewees told us that growth and adoption is often organic; social media is less about 'broadcast' and more about multiple-way conversations so keep discussions at a human level rather than

corporate content. Al Shah says social media and collaboration has to be driven around fun; the more fun it is the more people will be willing to try it. Introducing tools then allowing employees to 'play' develops familiarity and conversations quickly move from discussing celebrities or thoughts about the latest iPhone to more work related discussion, which in turn bring faster information gathering and informed decision making. Shah believes that this natural approach to learning and using the technology, rather than using forced education and directed use (i.e. trying to constrain the conversation to business context alone) increases the speed of productive results.

Simplify life

The tools must be available for people to use via the multiple ways that people now communicate whilst on the move (e.g. through their smartphones and tablets) as without this ease organisations are unlikely to see the adoption they desire. If people are checking their personal Twitter or LinkedIn feeds and see a relevant work post they are more likely to contribute than if they have to log in to a separate system that is only available from the their office PC.

Acknowledge

Whilst most commentators would suggest that it may be inadvisable to moderate comments too much it is important that someone is monitoring contribution to highlight when a response may be required or when ideas might need to be acknowledged. If, as an organisation, you are trying to increase collaboration to benefit the business then it will be important that successes achieved through social media are recognised in order that individuals believe their input is valued, which will have an impact on their decision of whether to continue to contribute.

Conclusion

Social media is unlikely to be a fad, though the way that individuals and organisations use it will continue to evolve as technology advances and more people globally become regular users. While some organisations see integrating social media as a huge change, when their employees leave the office at the end of the day a large proportion will log on to Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn. Many graduates are now leaving university with the expectation that everyone is already using social media so using it in the workplace will feel fairly comfortable to incoming employees. This increased receptivity to connecting online can be harnessed by organisations that are willing to release some of the control over communication. So if your organisation is not already harnessing the power of social media, to drive internal collaboration and change, then at least ensure you have a valid rationale for why this is the case and that you have considered whether there are any benefits you may be missing.

Into the Ether?
Harnessing Social Media to Engage in Change

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Into the Ether?
Harnessing Social Media to Engage in Change

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Crelos consult in organisational development and change. Our expert team work in partnership with clients to understand their strategic business agendas and develop solutions that achieve improved business performance.

Our consultants use the best proven and scientific research regarding how and why people react and behave as they do to design bespoke solutions that effect change. Through consultancy, facilitation, executive coaching and professional development we support executive leaders and their teams to solve their most complex business issues.

If you would like to learn more about Crelos and our approach to organisational change please contact Alison Gill on +44 (0)7770 668776 or via email at alison.gill@crelos.com

[i]Appendix: Collaboration Tools Explained

Microsoft SharePoint is a web-based platform that has historically been associated with intranet content management and document management, but recent versions have broader capabilities. SharePoint can integrate with the Microsoft Office suite and has a similar interface with the web tools designed to be usable by non-technical users. SharePoint can be used to provide document and file management, collaboration, social networks and workflow automation.

Yammer is a microblogging social network service now owned by Microsoft. Yammer is used for private communication within organisations with access being determined by a user's Internet domain, so that only those with an organisation email addresses may join that organisation's network.

Jive is a collaboration and knowledge management tool that integrates the functionality of online communities, microblogging, social networking, discussion forums, blogs and wikis so that they can be accessed from one unified user interface. Content created in any of the systems (e.g. discussion forum, blog, wiki, etc.) can be searched through one single search interface.

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