**BUILDING SOCIAL CAPITAL ON ENTERPRISE SOCIAL NETWORKS**

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Today, in the globalized world, technology is continuously creating new ways for people to communicate. Multinational organizations have a constantly increasing need for improving communication and coordination between employees located around the world. One place to look for possible solutions is within social media, especially in Enterprise social networks (ESNs). Previous research has showed that using ESNs can help bridge distance between people in multinational companies as well as increase collaboration. The goal of this paper was to investigate how can organizations build social capital on ESNs. This paper shows that social capital is important for organizations, as it has a positive impact and promotes better coordination between people. An ESN can be beneficial to the organization, because it enables the employees to become part of a community, gather and share knowledge, solve problems, and build personal relationships and trust. Knowledge exchange is very important, because without it, ESNs would have limited value. This paper shows several ways of building social capital on ESNs as well as practical examples from several companies; Delloite using Yammer, Fakta using Faktashare and IBM using IBM Connections. We argue that building social capital on ESNs is possible but it requires effort from both sides. ESNs can serve as a potent tool that with the right effort can enable the organization to build social capital.

**Keywords:** social capital, enterprise social networks, knowledge sharing, communication

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Today, in the globalized world, technology is continuously creating new ways for people to communicate. Multinational organizations have a constantly increasing need for improving communication and coordination between employees located around the world. One place to look for possible solutions is within social media. There are already plenty examples of how social networking is not only becoming more widely used, but also how it is changing the way individuals and organizations work. Some social networks are business oriented and may generate business opportunities, and a good example of this is LinkedIn. Facebook started out as a social network for students, and later gained popularity within the business sector. Many big corporations have started using Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and other social networks in order to expand their network, reach out to customers through new channels, and create profit. While these are primarily examples of how organizations use social media for external communication, the demand for enterprise social software is growing rapidly (McAfee, 2009). The global market for Enterprise Social Networking (ESN) is forecast to reach US$4.8 billion by 2020, driven by the evolution of social networks as platforms that support enterprise-wide connectivity, communication and collaboration, and offer improved business agility through superior employee and customer engagement (Yammer, 2013, Socialcast, 2013 )**.** ESN can also support knowledge creation inside the organization, which is beneficial for the organization’s growth.

To explain why this is important to various organizations in today’s globalized world, Olson & Olson argue that “with the invention of groupware people expect to communicate easily with each other and accomplish difficult work even though they are remotely located or rarely overlap in time.”(Olson & Olson 2002:139). Groupware can be defined as a computer-based system that supports groups of people engaged in a common task (or goal) and provides an interface to a shared environment (Elis et. al., 1991). However, Olson & Olson (2002) believe that despite the new communication technologies, distance still affects the interpersonal communication. On the other hand, Cairncross believes that communication mediated through new communication technologies can bridge the perceived distance between people. Eventually locations, borders, and time zones are no longer relevant in our working and personal lives (Cairncross, 1997).

If multinational organizations want to stay competitive, they need to find ways to bridge the distance between their employees and build social capital. Social capital can be understood as: “the goodwill available to individuals or groups. Its source lies in the structure and content of the actor’s social relations. Its effects flow from the information, influence, and solidarity it makes available to the actor” (Adler and Kwon, 2002:23).

Using an ESN can be beneficial for the organization. Inside an organization, people are facing many community related challenges, such as how to keep up with activities of distant colleagues, how to get acquainted with others, or how to build more personal relationships with colleagues. Additionally, business related challenges could also emerge. For instance, how to find someone, who has the time and skills needed in order to help them with their current tasks. When using an ESN, people are able to see the information flow throughout the organization, which enable them to see what is happening within the organization, and actions can be taken accordingly (Lui, 2013). In addition, the social part of an ESN can help them gather the knowledge they need in order to collaborate efficiently with each other, solve problems, and build relationships and trust especially among people who do not work side by side (Keyes 2012).

McKinsey survey research suggested that organizations who use Web 2.0 technologies have more market share and get higher margins. The organizations use collaborative Web 2.0 technologies in order to connect their employees as well as to extend the organization’s reach to its partners, customers and suppliers. The research also suggested that those organizations who use Web 2.0 technologies for management practices are more likely to be market leaders compared to those companies which use the Web in limited ways. The research suggested a few steps in order for organizations to become fully networked enterprises like (1) integrating the use of Web 2.0 in organization’s employees’ daily activities and work flow, (2) increasing fluid information flow, deploying talent more flexibly in order to deal with problems and allow employees lower in the corporate hierarchy to make decisions, and (3) appy Web 2.0 technologies to interact with employees, customers and business partners to gain more market share and increase organizational flexibility and collaboration. (Hayley, 2014).

# 2. AIM OF THE RESEARCH

As shown, the use of ESNs can help bridge the distance between people in multinational companies, and potentially be beneficial for the organization. This research is based on the following question: **How can organizations build social capital on enterprise social networks?**

In big organizations, especially the ones that are spread out across the globe, good collaboration is vital for the organization’s work. Today, it is common to have ‘virtual’ teams working together. Building trust and shared understanding is very important for achieving their common goals (Hinds & Weisband, 2003).

ESNs are being widely used by major companies; more than 500,000 companies worldwide (like Rakuten, 7/11, ebay, DHL, xerox, Shell, Suncorp, tyco, Intuit, ABB, Unicef UK, SHARP and others) are using Yammer(Yammer, 2015), and therefore it is relevant to look at the way they are being used, and what effects they have on global organizations. Building social capital is highly important. It makes people achieve a feeling of community and that they are personally involved with their work and their colleagues, both of which obviously become harder as physical distance increases.Social capital is a very complex and broad subject and researchers have yet to fully embrace social capital as a multilevel theoretical perspective (Payne et. al, 2011), but we have chosen to focus only on a few authors, which we found are the most relevant to the study of virtual communities. The main focus will be on knowledge sharing in virtual communities, as well as building personal relationships among people, because they have been highlighted as being critical factors when building social capital.

# 3. HISTORY AND IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

Even though the notion of social capital appeared in the early 1920s in the works of Lyda Judson Hanifan, it was Robert Putnam who popularized the term in his research of civic traditions in modern Italy (Smith, 2009). In his study, he took a closer look at the differences in development of the northern and southern parts of Italy. He concluded, that the differences between the regions are a result of social capital, which was clearly more present in the northern parts of Italy. (Putnam, 1993). His study made a major impact on the scientific community.

There have been many conceptualizations of social capital. Throughout history, the concept of social capital has become more popular in many disciplinary fields, such as sociology, economy and politics. Adler & Kwon synthesized the various theories of social capital and developed their own definition of social capital. They refer to social capital as the goodwill available to individuals and groups*.* They connect social capital to various positive outcomes in society, such as more efficient financial markets, better public health, and lower crime rates Adler & Kwon (2002). Widén-Wulff & Ginman argue, that social capital affects the organizations in the way it promotes better coordination among the employees. People, who work in the company and collaborate together in an effective way, are capable of establishing deeper relationships with each other, and that can prove useful for future business projects Widén-Wulff & Ginman (2004). Nahapiet & Ghoshal define three dimensions of social capital: structural, relational and cognitive. The structural dimension is concerned with formation of relationships (ties) between people. The relational dimension explains social dynamics like obligations and expectations between people, identification, and trust. The cognitive dimension refers to the shared vision and language. However, these three dimensions are not mutually exclusive but greatly interrelated (Nahapiet& Ghoshal, 1998). Furthermore, Tsai & Ghoshal argue, that through social interactions (structural dimension) people develop trust (relational dimension) and common goals and values (cognitive dimension) Tsai & Ghoshal (1998).

The theory of social capital is still developing, but many scholars acknowledge, that social capital not only influences development of human capital and intellectual capital, but it is also important within the areas of knowledge creation. Nahapiet & Ghoshal argue, that “network ties influence both access to parties for combining and exchanging knowledge and anticipation of value through such exchange” (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998:252). Additionally, network ties provide opportunities in combining and exchanging knowledge, and the exchange of knowledge is important when building social capital.

# 4. SOCIAL CAPITAL ON ENTERPRISE SOCIAL NETWORKS

After theorizing about social capital and its importance, we must now explore the notion of distance. In the last decades, new communication technologies made interactions from a distance possible. Today people use various collaborative technologies, such as mobile phones, e-mails, social networks, audio and video conferencing, in their daily working lives. However, there is a difference between how people collaborate and build relationships with each other when they are co-located, and when they are working at a distance from each other. It is important to address these issues, in order to explore the potential of building social capital on ESNs.

Trust is important when building social capital. Olson & Olson argue, that *“*another drawback involved in working at a distance is the fact that we trust remote people less than those co-located with us, for a variety of reasons” (Olson & Olson, 2003:16). In order to collaborate effectively, people need to trust each other, especially if they cannot see each other. People trust other people who are honest, who fulfill their promises, and who will not take advantage of one another, when the opportunity arises (Olson & Olson, 2003). Rocco et al (2000) researched how trust between colleagues can be affected by distance. Their research shows, that people have higher levels of trust with their local colleagues than toward distant coworkers. However, non-work related interactions (especially over the phone) proved to have a positive impact on the level of trust. Talking on the phone with distant co-workers about non-work related issues made coworkers trust each other more, and it also increased familiarity with the distant site. Trust can generate common goals and shared understanding and those can evolve in social capital (Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998.). Additionally, the presence of social capital can stimulate the building of better and more trusting relationships between coworkers. When people trust each other, they are more willing to cooperate together. Achieving trust, common goals, and shared visions is very important when building social capital.

Olson & Olson (2003) argue, that face-to-face interactions are still highly valued no matter how advanced new technologies are. However, they believe that we will evolve our social practices in order to accommodate the characteristics of the new technologies, to revolutionize the way we work collaboratively at a distance. Therefore, “better social practice will remind us to reveal more personal information to each other” for the purpose of building trust relationships (Olson & Olson, 2003:18).

In virtual communities, such as ESNs, social capital depends on the growth of social relationships that are built on social connections (Daniel et al, 2003.) He argues that understanding people’s socio-cultural and knowledge backgrounds is vital to the development of social capital in virtual communities. When putting it into the context of virtual communities like ESNs, Daniel et al define social capital as a: “common social resource that facilitates information exchange, knowledge sharing, and knowledge construction through continuous interaction, built on trust and maintained through shared understanding”(Daniel et al, 2003:04). In that manor,definition of social capital slightly changes, when it is put into the context of virtual communities, and knowledge sharing is specifically emphasized.

As previously mentioned, there are three dimensions of social capital proposed by Nahapiet & Ghoshal (1998): structural, relational, and cognitive. As proposed by Daniel et al, the structural dimension is about how communities can facilitate the development of networks. As such, the virtual community can function as a hub for connecting like-minded individuals as well as a way to assess the knowledge of other community members without being in direct contact with them.  The relational dimension allows for checking the value and commitment of other individuals in the community, as well as examining the trustworthiness of these. The cognitive dimension is about the shared language and visions of the virtual community. In essence, the three dimensions all share the common goal of improving organizational performance. They each help the individuals to balance knowledge and participation in the organization and deliver on different key aspects of social capital (Daniel et al, 2003).

## 4.1. PREREQUISITES FOR BUILDING SOCIAL CAPITAL ON ENTERPRISE SOCIAL NETWORKS

Nahapiet & Ghoshal (1998) suggest, that social capital could further the development of knowledge capital through the exchange of information and knowledge sharing. They argue that there are four conditions that can facilitate combination and exchange of knowledge among people:

1. When people have the will to exchange knowledge with others.
2. When people believe that the interaction, exchange, and combination of knowledge with others will prove worthwhile (structural dimension).
3. When people have the ability to understand and apply knowledge (cognitive dimension).
4. When people have strong and positive relationships (relational dimension).

Without shared knowledge, ESNs would have limited value. If organizations want to build social capital on an ESN, knowledge sharing seems to be crucial. Chiu et al (2011) argue, that in a voluntary setting, for instance, when using an ESN, people who do not have confidence in their ability to share knowledge, will not engage in that behaviour. In order to share their knowledge, people must believe that their contribution will be useful to others and that new value will be created both for them and other colleagues using it (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). Therefore, expectations of personal gain can motivate people to participate more actively when it comes to sharing of knowledge on the ESN. Some researchers argue, that there also is an intrinsic motivation that drives people when actively participating in knowledge sharing. They can perceive that sharing knowledge and helping others can be challenging and fun, and also, it feels good to help others (Wasko & Faraj, 2005). There will always be ‘lurkers’ (people who just read, without actively participating) on ESNs, but as we will later discover, there are certain things that organizations can do in order to avoid that behaviour.

In order to engage in knowledge exchange and actively participate in the ESN, people need to have some sense of shared language. Chiu et al (2011) argue that:

“Shared language not only helps share ideas but also enhances the efficiency of communication between people with similar background or practical experience. Accordingly, shared language will help motivate the participants to actively involve in knowledge exchange activities and enhance the quality of shared knowledge.”(Chiu et al 2011:142).Shared language helps people to access other people, and their information also helps in evaluating the benefits of knowledge exchange (Nahaphiet & Ghoshal, 1998).

Having strong and positive relationships within the organization is vital for gaining social capital. Identification and shared vision with the collective are very important. Nahapiet & Ghoshal argue, that “identification is the process whereby individuals see themselves as one with another person or group of people” (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998:256). They state, that identification can influence the motivation behind knowledge exchange. In order to actively participate in knowledge sharing within the ESN, people must recognize each other as part of the same collective. Rocco et al argue, that “geographically distributed workers benefit from the creation of shared group identities that extend beyond local boundaries” (Rocco et al, 2000:06). Creating shared identities can be difficult when people come from different sites. Individual sites have their own culture, history, and leaders, but that can possibly be bridged by having shared visions and goals (Rocco et al, 2000). Tsai & Ghoshal state, that having a shared vision “embodies the collective goals and aspirations of the members of an organization” (Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998:467)*.* They view the shared vision as a bonding mechanism, that helps people with integrating and combining resources. People within the organization, who use ESNs, can benefit from having shared visions and goals, and that can facilitate the creation of social capital. Maznevski & Athanassiou argue, that social capital must be invested in and maintained in order to continue being useful. For virtual teams and colleagues, the biggest challenge is to build relationships. They suggest that virtual team members “must build social capital with quantity, transferability, flexibility built on trust, and power” (Maznevski & Athanassiou, 2003:211).

Technical and social affordances of ESNs enable people to communicate with each other when working from a distance. ESN is a work tool as well as a communication tool. They are used by organizations to further their communication and collaboration.

Craig points at many advantages of using the ESNs such as:

a) Searchable knowledge base from which everyone can benefit, even people not involved in the original conversations

b) Modern document management system that allows collaboration and sharing of documents, and allowing companies to connect with their employees.

c) Possibility for companies to connect with their employees on a more personal level (Craig, 2013).

## 4.2. HOW TO ACHIEVE SOCIAL CAPITAL ON ENTERPRISE SOCIAL NETWORKS

If an ESN is going to be a success for an organization, critical mass is vital. People need to use it! There are differences in how different types of people use the ESN. For example, new employees, and employees who are about to leave the company, might use the network in a different way than people who are planning to stay in the company for a long time. New employees do not know the company’s culture and they would often be afraid to say something ‘wrong’, so they would hesitate before posting on the ESN. On the other hand, employees who are ready to leave the company will probably not share that much information. Sometimes, employees could be too busy to participate in online sharing of knowledge.  Young argue, that “creating clear guidelines for appropriate messages is key to ensuring strong content, as is encouraging and incenting valuable participation at all levels of the company” (Young, 2012). In her research about motives for online political participation, Samuel concludes, that the best way to get people to participate and contribute is to provide incentives to do so, e.g. offer them benefits from it. These benefits should only be available to the people, who are actively engaging in sharing behaviors (Samuel, 2004)**.** This approach can help with engaging the previously mentioned ‘lurkers’. It is also important that the community on the ESN is friendly and not intimidating, so people will be willing to contribute. In addition, people should be constantly encouraged to contribute to the network, and community designers should create activities that will facilitate sharing behaviors (Young, 2012). Young states, that “the more people and knowledge that users have in common, the more social capital is created” (Young, 2012a). Even ‘lurking’ can allow people to get to know each other and acquire shared knowledge. ‘Lurkers’ can also be valuable to the company, because they gather knowledge even without sharing it, but the community designers should strive for active participation of all the parties. “Enterprise social networks should be designed to be open and accessible to any member that chooses to participate actively for the first time or even just browse the topics being discussed” (Young, 2012a).

One way of making employees participate actively on the ESN is to find people, who are avid users and try to build a community around them. In every ESN, there are people and certain topics that can stimulate the discussions. Finding those catalysts can be of strategic importance to the company, and it can help to strengthen the network in general (Young, 2012).

There are many ways to build social capital on ESNs. ESNs should be used more than just for updating statuses. In order to build social capital, employees who are using the ESN, need to be able to help each other, work together on projects, and comment on each other’s work. Even though sharing basic information (like status updates) is important, employees should also be able to get support in their daily work practices (Young, 2012). Face-to-face communication is still very important, and bringing people together face-to-face can facilitate the creation of social capital by making employees more comfortable with participation on the ESN (Olson & Olson, 2003).

As shown, identification inside the collective can be important, and therefore employees should be allowed to form informal groups inside the network. The groups can be formed by employee’s personal interests, like music, sports, or cultural affinities. That can overall strengthen their ties to the network (Young, 2012).

# 5. THE CASE OF DELOITTE AND YAMMER

Deloitte is a professional service company, which provides services such as consulting, financial advising, risk management, auditing, and tax services.  According to the study of Reimer et al (2012) and the Yammer’s customer care study, Deloitte Australia has approximately 512 partners and 5700 employees located across the country. Deloitte Australia started using Yammer in 2008. Yammer is an ESN that provides private communication within the organization. Yammer allows users to communicate with each other, share messages, statuses, files, and collaborate together by creating ‘pages’, which basically are documents made for a group setting. In the beginning, Yammer was only used by a few individuals, who had an interest in social networking, but in 2009, the trend spread out throughout the company. The study shows, that within a short time, Yammer was used as an important tool for company-wide collaboration and decision making. Moreover, Yammer became a tool for people to share information and knowledge, as well as to develop new ideas. The research also showed that active participants on Yammer are less likely to leave the company, because they build personal relationships with the community. By reducing employee turnover, Deloitte saved money on the recruiting, interviewing, and hiring of new people. Deloitte called Yammer their ‘personal Google’ because of their exemplary knowledge sharing practices. Deloitte said: “When you have a question, chances are you can search Yammer and find a thread with the answer.” (Yammer Customer Care Study, 2011). Sense of community was also greatened with the use of Yammer. People with similar interests connected with each other and created groups. For example, ‘Deloitte Mums Group’ was created and used by female employees, who discussed maternity leave and supported each other in general. Group ideas and tips were always welcomed. One managing partner posted sale tips on Yammer on a daily basis for two months, and that sparked enormous engagement across the whole company.

From this we see that Yammer helped Deloitte in building social capital by increasing the number of ways in which people can connect with each other, build personal relationships and trust. By participating in groups with others, who shared their interests, employees felt like part of the community. Having relationships with others and being a part of the community also facilitates knowledge sharing between the employees. Things like posting sale tips and working together on the same documents and projects made employees aware, that others also share their visions and goals, which in conclusion helped Deloitte to create social capital.

# 6. THE CASE OF FAKTA AND FAKTASHARE

Fakta is a Danish chain of supermarkets, which has around 400 stores in Denmark and about 7000 employees (Christensen, 2012). Fakta wanted to get a competitive advantage in the market, by introducing new knowledge sharing practices among employees spread across different stores. They created the ESN called Faktashare in May 2012. The main idea of Faktashare is to facilitate sharing of knowledge, where every employee is encouraged to write posts about solving their daily challenges and good ideas they come across. In order to prompt the participation on Faktashare, managers offered rewards for the employees with the best ideas. Another important aspect of Faktashare is the creation of informal dialogue between all levels of the organization in the hope of creating personal relationships between employees and managers. The research shows, that there are approximately 1600 users of Faktashare and more than 150 unique daily visits. The users also created more than 120 personal groups.

Even though Faktashare was less than one year old when we received the report, it is obvious that Fakta has succeeded in the facilitation of knowledge sharing, and the existence of 120 groups shows that people are bonding and creating personal relationships with each other. In addition, competition and rewards for the best ideas, can help to create the environment, which can lead to achieving shared visions and goals between managers and employees.

# 7. THE CASE OF IBM AND IBM CONNECTIONS

International Business Machines Corporation (IBM) is an American multinational technology and consulting corporation from United States of America. It manufactures and markets computer hardware, middleware and software, and offers infrastructure, hosting and consulting services in areas ranging from mainframe computers to nanotechnology. In 2012, Fortune ranked IBM the second largest U.S. firm in terms of number of employees (435,000 worldwide),the fourth largest in terms of market capitalization, the ninth most profitable, and the nineteenth largest firm in terms of revenue. IBM Connections is a Web 2.0 enterprise social software application developed by IBM to provide online social networking tools for people associated with a company. It was first released in 2007 but it spurred in 2014. Žugaj (2016) states that in 2014. IBM launched an internal project “Knowledge management” in which they wanted to find the best way to generate, preserve and develop the company’s wisdom. It turned out that ESN IBM Connections was the best tool to achieve it. As he states, IBM Connections became mandatory environment for knowledge sharing between employees and teams. New processes and routines were established for better knowledge harvesting. Using IBM Connections also significantly reduced times (30-50%) to obtain needed information or documents (i.e. internal standards, recommendations, guidelines). It also significantly improved internal collaboration and networking (My Network), visibility of employee data (Profiles), and exchange and sharing of information and knowledge (tacit knowledge).

# 8. CONCLUSION

Distance is a determent factor when it comes to collaboration between people. Co-located colleagues are easier to trust and more trusted than distant colleagues. Trust is important because it can generate shared goals and shared understanding among people, and those can evolve into social capital. Social capital is important for organizations, as it has a positive impact and promotes better coordination between people. Multi-national organizations have a great need to improve the communication between distant colleagues in order to build social capital. One solution could be the implementation of an ESN. An ESN can be beneficial to the organization, because it enables the employees to become part of a community, gather and share knowledge, solve problems, and build personal relationships and trust. Knowledge exchange is very important, because without it, ESNs would have limited value.

There are several ways of building social capital on ESNs. First, people need to actively participate on the ESN, and it is crucial to reach critical mass. People engage in active knowledge sharing behavior, when they know, that they will be rewarded for it (extrinsic motivation) and they see it as fun and rewarding (intrinsic motivation). Community designers should create activities, which will facilitate knowledge sharing behavior, like rewards for best ideas and most active members. Second, finding people that act like catalysts and building the community around them, could be vital for the success of the ESN.  Third, it is important that people see themselves as part of the community. It is very important to let them build personal relationships by offering the possibility to build personal groups for people, who share common interests. That will also help to facilitate mutual trust between individuals. Building personal relationships is especially difficult when people cannot see each other. Offering them the opportunity to work together on projects and helping each other can make them aware, that others also share their visions and goals.  Finally, if possible, people should meet with each other face-to-face to make them more comfortable with participating on the ESN. All these initiatives should help organizations create social capital on the ESNs.

The cases of Deloitte, Fakta and IBM showed us, that both companies from completely different sectors gained benefits from using ESNs. Yammer helped Deloitte to build social capital by enabling people to connect with each other, build personal relationships and trust. By being part of the community, people engaged in knowledge sharing activities and everyone involved benefitted from that. Fakta also succeeded in the facilitation of knowledge sharing practices and their monthly rewards for best ideas made people participate more actively. The employees were able to develop more personal relationships with each other, because Faktashare enabled them to create personal groups, where they connected with each other through mutual interests. IBM Connections proved to be a great tool for knowledge sharing between employees and teams.

Building social capital on an ESN is possible, but it requires effort from both sides. Setting up an ESN is not a simple, easy fix-it-all solution for improving the collaboration and communication within the organization. It is rather a potent tool, that with the right effort will enable the organization to build social capital.

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