Chapter 2

The Corporate Social Network (CSN) in SME’s: A Tool for a Collective Intelligence Culture

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ABSTRACT

The authors intend to demonstrate that corporate social networks (CSN) are a very efficient tool for SME’s and start-ups, since their early launch. They will immediately create an interactive structure and a culture of collective intelligence. The chapter aims at revealing how SMEs or start-ups are able to capture the opportunities provided by CSNs, perceived as proximity social networks. The research investigates if the use of CSN at the launch of the SME promotes the development of a collective intelligence culture, but also if several CSN may coexist within the same structure according to the needs encountered: “above-the-flow” approach (dialogue, exchanges) or “in the flow” approach (integration of workflow and document). The authors strongly believe that CSN has to be introduced by a web entrepreneur at the early stage of creation of his start-up, because it supports the scaling of the business, allowing the creation of a knowledge sharing culture, making the knowledge available inside the company.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-2466-3.ch002
INTRODUCTION

Today, corporate social network (CSN) is increasingly a reality in large organizations. A recent Lecko study (2015) shows that within big companies, CSN are used to find personal expertise or access information. CSN allows having higher productivity by 49%, and over 40% of large French companies had already put in place a CSN in 2015. So this is indeed a trend and not a minor phenomenon.

What about CSN in SME’s or start-ups? The question of its use and usefulness in smaller structures are the subject of only few studies. Even if the main topic for a SME is its visibility on a competitive landscape, the implementation of a CSN could be a competitive advantage. The authors intend to share here the results of their research in this area and will demonstrate how CSN can help entrepreneurs of the XXIst century to establish a collective intelligence culture.

In an intelligent community, the specific objective is to permanently negotiate the order of things, language, the role of the individual, the identification and definition of objects, the reinterpretation of memory. Nothing is fixed. Yet, this does not result in a state of disorder or absolute relativism, for individual acts are coordinated and evaluated in real time, according to a large number of criteria that are themselves constantly re-evaluated in context (Levy, 1997).

CSN BLURS THE TECHNICAL AND SOCIAL BOUNDARIES

Today, social networks allow customers, employees, managers, sub-contractors and prospects to talk together and with others, about products, services and organizations. Moreover, CSN (such as Yammer, Knowledge Plaza, Sharepoint, Slack or even sometimes Facebook closed groups) demonstrate, for the first time for all to see, skills, interactions, and new relations between employees (Folon, 2014). Performance that management is looking for, now also lies in this ability to develop internal communication. Web 2.0 would even question the traditional models of our organizations. Manuel Castells (2006) shows that information and communications technology have not only an impact on society and information, but also a grasp on the functioning of human activities. The new logic of network, the new way of working are indicative of a profound change in our society.

How to explain today’s interest in the concept of network today, especially in Management?

While Internet was still in its infancy, Nohria (1991) already believed that the network was a form of organization adapted to the globalization of trade, because it
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