Chapter 11
Applications of a Social Software Model

Tanguy Coenen
Vrije Universiteit Brussels, Belgium

Wouter Van den Bosch
Katholieke Hogeschool Mechelen, Belgium

ABSTRACT
This paper discusses social software technologies and presents an integrated social software model that can be used to achieve collective goals. This model has grown out of a need among practitioners to identify useful social software functionalities and to find out what to do with them. As the number of social software technologies increases, the question increasingly remains what to do with them and how to apply them usefully. The model can be used within an organization, to guide it in attaining organizational goals, but it can also be used to support activities in a network of organizations or in a network of non-affiliated individuals. First, we discuss social software in general. Subsequently, we discuss a model for understanding social software data and functionality. Finally, two possible applications of the social software model are discussed: knowledge sharing and increasing social inclusion among youth.

INTRODUCTION
Social Software and Web 2.0

Around 2004, a new generation of Web-based technologies emerged, characterized by the following aspects:

- **Easy content creation interfaces.** Before, one needed to know how to program HTML pages in order to create a Web page. With the coming of new, easier interfaces, Web content could be created using WYSIWIG interfaces, making content creation by non-technical users more feasible.

- **Easy content publishing.** In order to place content on-line, there was no longer the need for an ftp-client. One could create content on-line, which would be available on the World Wide Web at once.
To name this transition, the concepts of Web 2.0 and social software emerged on the Web. This emergence was not driven by any one in particular and therefore both concepts deserve some clarification. The emergence of the term “social software” coincides with the concept of Web 2.0, indicating a move from older Web technologies to a new generation of systems. Both concepts are very similar in the technologies they denote, but differ in the emphasis they place on these technologies. To users of the Web 2.0 concept, the essence is the fact that the technologies are new compared to “1.0” systems. This was important in the light of the.com bubble of 2000-2001. The fact that a new generation of Web-based systems had arrived indicated that creating a business based on Web 1.0 technologies, which had proven to be unsustainable, was not the same as building a business on Web 2.0 technology. This idea spurred a new wave of investment in Web 2.0 technologies.

The concept of social software emphasizes the technology’s support for social behavior, rather than the fact that the technology is something new, as is the case for the Web 2.0 concept. Social software allows people to do things together. In order for this to happen, it is imperative that this type of software be Web-based. Only by using the World Wide Web as a platform are different people able to interact in a way that scales as growing numbers participate in the interaction. According to Shirky (2008), a sharp drop in transaction costs for on-line communication and collaboration was spurred by the creation of easy to use Web-based technology. Through these reduced transaction costs, social software is creating new forms of social organization at a massively distributed and global scale. Indeed, it is now much easier to organize a civil protest or a party by using a social networking system like Facebook. Another advantage of the drop in transaction costs is that it has become easier to sustain relationships with people you don’t know well. These so called “weak ties” are a form of social capital that can be activated to obtain certain advantages, like for example access to information. The lowering of transaction costs for communication and collaboration has also spurred a change in media-production power relations. It has placed a substantial portion of the mean of production, traditionally owned by large centralized entities like governments and media corporations, in the hands of the masses (Benkler 2006).

We believe it is more significant to focus on these new forms of social organization, than on the fact that there is a new software kid on the block. It is for this reason that this chapter focuses on social software instead of Web 2.0, although the systems denoted by both concepts are essentially the same.

On-line communities also use social software, although the nature of community support is changing. The forum-style of community support, where member of a community can post messages and answer these messages, has been around since the days of the bulletin board systems, which largely predate the world-wide Web. Communicating over such systems has proven to be highly effective, yet can be hard to set up. In recent times, community support has become something that can be created on-the-fly, in social software systems. When a need for such support is felt, the people who drive the community can us systems like Ning to set up a space with a large number of features to support the community interaction. Another option is to create a group in e.g. Facebook. The fact that most of these group spaces have a short life span, reflects the transiency nature of on-line community life. Indeed, most users have a loose affiliation to a great number of communities and participate to these communities in a fashion that is limited in time (Wellman et al 2003).

Enterprise 2.0 and Socialprise

The same parallel can be drawn between two terms in current business language: enterprise 2.0 and socialprise. Enterprise 2.0 refers to the application of Web 2.0 technologies to serve the