Organisational Blogging: The Problem of Engagement

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the implementation and use of an internal organisational blog by several departments in the HR division in a large public sector financial organisation in the UK. This qualitative study adopts a case study approach and examines the experiences of staff using the blog to explore whether it can facilitate organisational learning. The thinking and decisions that informed the pilot study are also investigated. Initial findings indicate that implementing an internal organisational blog does not revolve around the technology itself, but the work required to inform and educate staff about the idea of using a blog for working purposes. This paper has practical implications for the practitioner community with reference to organisational management informing them of issues to consider prior to implementing new technology in team environments. The paper also examines approaches towards maintaining technology initiatives (in this case blogs) once they are up and running. The unique focus of this paper is that it explores blog use from the perspective of individuals who have never used them before as opposed to a department that is already familiar with the technology.

Keywords: Blogs, Communication, Communities of Practice, Knowledge Management, Learning Organisation, Organisational Learning, Reflection, Web 2.0

INTRODUCTION

Organisations today often have to re-evaluate their internal ways of communication and information sharing as a result of an increasingly competitive knowledge economy. Though the concept of the knowledge economy (Webber, 1994) is not new the approaches that organisations are adopting via technology to share and disseminate knowledge among staff are becoming more widespread (Du & Wagner, 2006). The notion of ‘Enterprise 2.0’ refers to software that allows individuals to collaborate and share information in organisational contexts (McAfee, 2006). This type of software employs the same principles as “Web 2.0,” which is often used to describe “the social use of the Web which allow[s] people to collaborate, to get actively involved in creating content, to generate knowledge and to share information online” (Grosseck, 2009, p. 478). The primary distinction between the two concepts is that Enterprise 2.0 refers to the use of social software in organisational contexts. Web 2.0 implies the use of the social Web in a general and more day to day social environment.

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Weblogs or blogs are one example of Web 2.0 technology. This paper examines their use in an organisational context and explores how they can be used to internally share knowledge among teams and departments. Though there are numerous perspectives of what blogs are they can be described as being “frequently modified web pages in which dated entries are listed in reverse chronological sequence” (Herring et al., 2004, p. 1). They can also be used to share graphics and audio. Blogs are not a new phenomenon; rather it is the way in which they are being applied combined with their evolving technological features that make them current.

This paper explores the issue that if used correctly, blogs can prove to be a beneficial communication, information and knowledge sharing medium. Though this has often been discussed in the academic literature a further objective of this paper is to analyse how blogs can promote the concept of “organisational learning.”

The theory of organisational learning focuses on three central arguments. The first view is known as the functionalistic outlook which states that learning in organisations begins with the individual (Hedberg, 1981; Kim, 2004). This standpoint believes that it is the individual who learns on behalf of the organisation. The logic behind this debate is that knowledge initially resides in the individual and it is they who learn albeit through the supporting infrastructure of the organisation (Ortenblad, 2002). The second perspective of organisational learning is referred to as the interpretive view which advocates that learning is undertaken in organisations through the form of relationships, collectively and in groups. The final perspective pertaining to organisational learning is the stance that organisations can learn (Ortenblad, 2005). The logic behind this reasoning is the thinking that organisations learn, modify and adapt themselves internally by the knowledge channelled through them via their organisational members. We adhere to the interpretive view of organisational learning.

We agree that organisational learning is the “activity or processes (of learning) in organizations” (Ortenblad, 2001, p. 9) but within a social context. This view of organisational learning is described in more detail in a subsequent section of the paper.

Closely related to the concept of organisational learning is the term learning organisation. A learning organisation is “a place where employees excel at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge” (Garvin et al., 2008, p. 110). The phrase learning organisation is sometimes used interchangeably with that of organisational learning. Learning organisations are particular types of organisation that have a uniqueness in being able to sustain numerous organisational learning processes and activities for their organisational members to learn (Baxter et al., 2009). Learning organisations are theoretically able to adapt and modify their infrastructures which evolve as a result of the learning of their employees. This study contributes to the body of knowledge in the field of blog research by comparing the social uses of blogs with the social aspect of organisational learning and examining the two concepts to draw similarities between them. It is believed that at the time of writing this is something that has yet to be fully explored in the academic literature.

This paper contributes to the body of knowledge of blogs and Web 2.0 implementation initiatives in organisations through examining the initial implementation process and user experiences of an organisation that has begun using an internal division-wide blog. This study will help to inform the practitioner community about how such an approach began and explore the experiences and lessons learnt so that they can be generically applied to other organisations choosing to undertake a Web 2.0 collaborative project.

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows. Previous research covering the topic of organisational blogs is examined following which the main characteristics of blogs are discussed and are linked to the concept of organisational learning. A case study is provided where the authors have begun working with the HR division of a large public sector financial organisation that has recently piloted its own internal blog in the UK. Finally, the experiences...
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