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# Short Message Discussions: On The Conversational Nature Of Microblogging In A Large Consultancy Organisation

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# SHORT MESSAGE DISCUSSIONS: ON THE CONVERSATIONAL NATURE OF MICROBLOGGING IN A LARGE CONSULTANCY ORGANISATION

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## Abstract

*With the rise of Twitter Microblogging as a phenomenon has gained widespread popularity. As with other social software (e.g. Wikis), organisations have begun experimenting with the application of Microblogging for facilitating internal communication and group processes. However, research on the topic is still in its infancy. In this paper we explore how Yammer, a Twitter-like platform, has been adopted within Capgemini, a large, globally operating consultancy business. In contrast to existing findings on Twitter usage and other Enterprise Microblogging (EMB) cases, we find that EMB in our case is a predominantly conversational medium, where people interact with each other explicitly. Rather than using the platform to inform others about themselves (Twitter) or, about their immediate task/team context as has been described in other EMB cases, the Yammer users in this case are expressing views, discussing opinion and responding to each other. We discuss these results in light of the particular organisational context of the case and the emergent nature of communication technologies. We further demonstrate how the interactive and conversational nature of short message communications has led us to investigate the classification of Microblogging according to the context of its use. We conclude that the appropriation of Enterprise Microblogging is shaped largely by the characteristics of the organisational context in which it is used and propose a model that supports this.*

*Keywords: Enterprise Microblogging, Platform appropriation, Social Software, Yammer*

# 1 INTRODUCTION

With the advent of Twitter, the phenomenon of microblogging, which presents a platform for short message broadcasting and exchange, has gained traction and attention from both the popular media and academia alike. Microblogging allows users to send short messages (140 characters in the case of Twitter) into a message stream, from which users can create their own personalised information view by following the messages of a select number of users (Riemer & Richter 2010). As a growing number of providers offer platforms to facilitate what has been named Enterprise Microblogging (EMB) inside a company's firewall, it remains unclear to what extent this service might present a potential for improving organisational communication and how it might be appropriated and used in a corporate context.

In this paper we explore how Yammer, a platform for Enterprise Microblogging (EMB) has been adopted within Capgemini, a large, globally operating consultancy business. For consultancy firms such as the case company, the quality of services offered to customers correlates directly with the abilities and knowledge of the individual consultants. Thus, both individual skills and the motivation and ability to transfer knowledge between consultants and from one project to another are essential, especially for younger employees who were hired in large numbers, because of the strong growth in recent years. For this reason, in late 2008 a few employees of Capgemini have started to use Yammer, a Twitter-like platform, to support knowledge sharing in the continuing development of the firm. Until today, the platform has been adopted by more than 17,000 users. However, since adoption and use of the service has not been mandated and left largely to the user base, it remains unclear to what extent EMB presents a potential for improving internal communication, facilitating collaborative processes, or information sharing. It is unclear what its role is for the case organisation in particular and how it might best be used in a corporate context in general.

With our study we want to contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon of (Enterprise) Microblogging, the benefits of this form of communication to organisations and the communicative practices embodied therein. To this end, we apply genre analysis to the short message communications collected from the Capgemini Yammer platform to identify the repertoire of communication that is taking place and the communicative purpose of the platform's users. To better understand the role of EMB, we compare and contrast our findings with communication patterns in two other EMB studies, as well as Microblogging behaviour in Twitter. Surprisingly, and contrary to prior observations, we find that EMB communication in Capgemini is distinctly interactive and conversational, with posts mainly being part of shared discussions, rather than one-off signalling or information delivery by broadcast. Its main purpose is one of context building and social networking, through the discussion of professional practices, the aligning of activities across the organisation, and the sharing of information and resources. However, we find little evidence for immediate use in task-related environments. We discuss our findings in light of contextual differences between our case and cases reported in prior study and the open nature of communication platforms, which impact on user appropriation. We suggest to distinguish between two distinct Microblogging phenomena: Enterprise Microblogging as observed in our case, where users engage in context building across wide distances and large user groups, and Workgroup Microblogging, as has been described in prior research, where small teams appropriate the service for task and team coordination, but not social networking or discussions (Riemer & Richter 2010).

Our paper proceeds as follows: Next, we introduce Microblogging and briefly summarise recent research. In section 3 we introduce the case company and its EMB platform. Section 4 provides an overview of our study, while section 5 describes the different genres we identified. Section 6 discusses these genres in light of recent results of two other studies and provides explanations for differences of EMB usage in the two contexts. We then discuss implications and point to study limitations and future research in section 7. Section 8 concludes the paper.

## 2 MICROBLOGGING

The general idea behind Microblogging is simple and can best be described illustrating Twitter. Users write short messages that appear in a chronological stream on a microblog page associated with the user's Twitter name. Such messages are typically restricted in length (e.g. 140 characters on Twitter) and contain characters only. Moreover, users can configure their own personalised message stream by following others. All messages of these users then appear on the user's personal Twitter start page. New messages can be created on the web or via third party software, which are available as desktop clients and mobile applications for all common platforms. This wide range of applications in connection with the briefness of updates makes Microblogging "pervasively accessible and a low-cost operation, both in terms of time and cognitive load" (Zhang et al., 2010, 142).

### 2.1 Microblogging on the Web

In 2006 a group of three software developers from San Francisco launched a platform called Twitter, which quickly grew into a strong competitor for established Social Networking Services and has enormously influenced the further development of such platforms. Since then, several studies have provided descriptions of the phenomenon in general (e.g. Krishnamurthy et al., 2008, Huberman et al., 2009, Java et al., 2007) or focused on aspects such as intentions for continuous usage (Barnes & Böhringer, 2009, Liu et al., 2010) or Twitter as a form of electronic consumer word-of-mouth (Jansen et al. (2009)).

With regards to understanding Twitter usage and impact, a study by Naaman et al. (2010) is noteworthy, as they investigate the content of Twitter messages. The authors discovered that "a majority of users focus on their 'self', while a smaller set of users are driven more by sharing information" (Naaman et al., 2010, 192). About 80% of messages generated on the platform exhibit what the authors term "meforming" behaviour, while only 20% of messages are written to truly "inform". While the term "Meformer" might potentially lead to negative associations the authors emphasise that "these messages may play an important role in helping users maintain relationships" (Naaman et al., 2010, 192). In addition, they discern that "Informers" tend to take part in conversations as they use the reply and mention functions of Twitter more often. The latter aspect was investigated more explicitly by Honeycutt and Herring (2009), in their study on the use of the @-sign in Twitter. The researchers found that 27.2% of all messages on Twitter were part of a conversation and that most of these discussions took place between two users. Together, these results show that Public Microblogging in Twitter is largely characterised by single posts informing others about what one is doing or thinking (meforming posts). After all, this is consistent with the original Twitter idea, which was to get users to post about what they are doing.

### 2.2 Enterprise Microblogging

Following the success of Microblogging in the public space, corporations have begun exploring the use of the service "behind the firewall". But despite promising predictions of market analysts (e.g. Gartner 2010) and the wide range of available platforms the adoption process takes place rather slowly. It has been argued that managers fear to import procrastination behaviour or "chatter" as they introduce the technology in their company (Riemer & Richter, 2010).

However, some companies have started to experiment with Microblogging and introduce EMB platforms for their employees to use. While first use cases proliferate, still little is known about the forms of use and likely potentials of EMB as a technology in group communication, knowledge sharing etc. In the following, we briefly outline some results from initial case studies, before we introduce our case.

Existing studies in the field have explored a small number of EMB cases by scrutinising the communications that take place on these platforms. A suitable method for such communication analyses is genre analysis, which has been applied in two recent studies by Riemer & Richter (2010) and Zhang et al. (2010). Zhang et al. (2010) have investigated the use of Yammer usage in a medium sized organisation; they found that EMB usage in their case is distinctly different from Twitter, in that “employees use Yammer more for publishing news about their groups or business units instead of news about themselves” and that “there are long conversations and discussions in Yammer, which are features of intranet community forums” (Zhang et al., 2010, 13). Riemer & Richter (2010) on the other hand have analysed the usage of the EMB platform Communote in one software engineering team. The authors too found that EMB usage is highly different from Twitter, albeit in a different manner. Employees in their case used the platform mainly for work-related status updates in order to provide “awareness information and [for] coordinating task and team matters” (Riemer & Richter, 2010, 11). Following these results, concerns of importing to the organisation unwanted procrastination behaviours seem unjustified, while potentials for enterprise application of Microblogging are evident. At the same time however, more case-based research is needed to gradually gain a more holistic understanding of the different facets of EMB. With our case study, we aim to contribute to deriving such an understanding. To this end we will compare and contrast our findings with the above studies.

### 3 THE CASE

In this section we will provide a brief overview of our case, in particular the Microblogging platform Yammer and our case company Capgemini, before we introduce our study design in the next section.

#### 3.1 The platform: Yammer

Yammer was launched to the public in September 2008 and is now the most popular platform for EMB with over 90,000 companies and organisations using the platform worldwide. The service is organised using the concept of networks, with one network typically representing one company. Anyone can create a network for their company by registering with their email address on the platform, and depending on the setup, new users can join easily by way of registering with their corporate email address, which serves as their identifier.

The web frontend resembles the look of Twitter or Facebook with the posting stream being the focal element. Like Twitter, Yammer is based on the "follower"-principle i.e. users can choose which user to follow. Whenever new users join a company network they initially subscribe to the message streams of all users within the network. The platform also features other Twitter-like functions, such as bookmarking of posts, tagging, mentioning of and replying to other users, as well as direct messages. However, unlike Twitter, Yammer features a threaded layout of message replies, where replies are not sorted chronologically into the message stream but listed below their initial post, providing for the distinctive presentation of communications that are explicitly related to each other in conversation like fashion (see screenshot). A further characteristic that distinguishes Yammer from Twitter is the groups feature. Groups consist of different members within a network and can be created according to requirements, e.g. for a specific topic or a project team. Users then can choose whether they want to post their update to all followers or only to members of a particular group and are able to read posts within a group by selecting it from a dropdown menu without following all group members explicitly. Contrary to the common restrictions of Microblogging platforms posts on Yammer are not length-restricted and users can attach files, links and images to share resources. While Yammer officially describes knowledge sharing as a main benefit of Yammer, little is known otherwise with regards to the particular nature of how the users appropriate the platform in different corporate contexts and what kinds of messages are exchanged on the service.

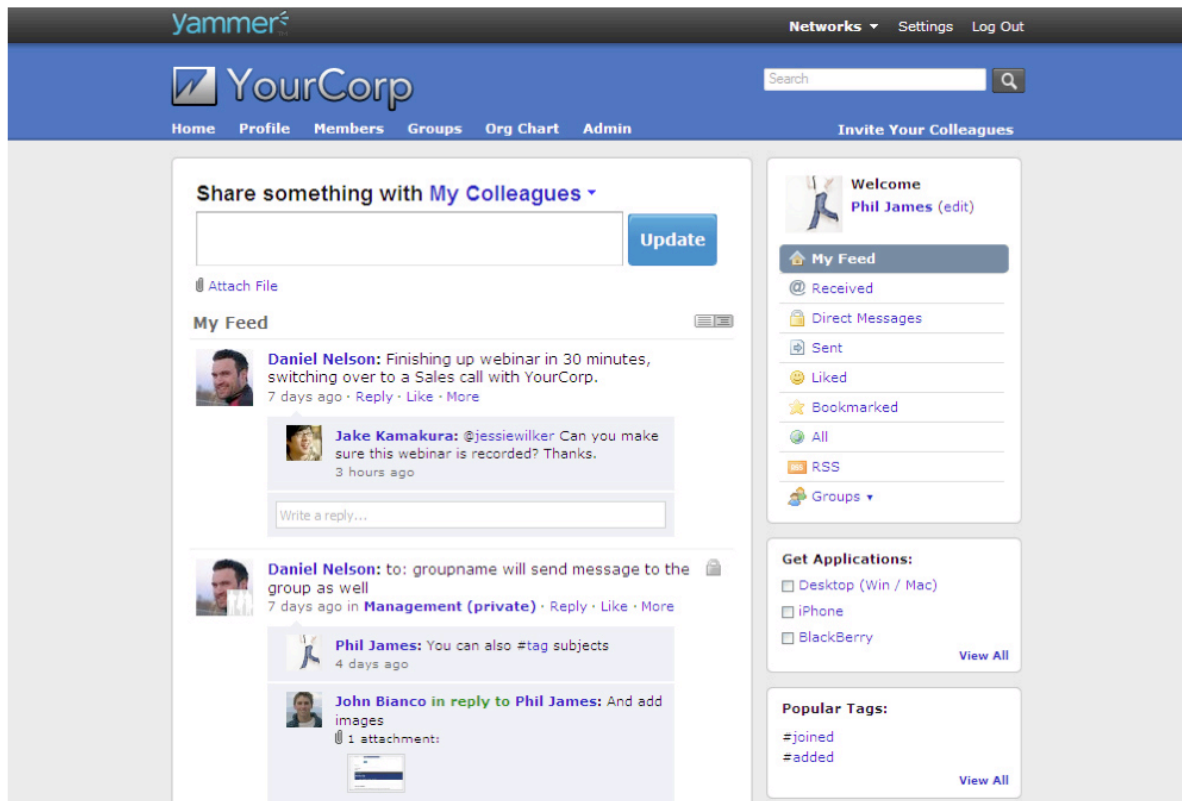


Figure 1. Yammer web frontend (taken from [www.yammer.com](http://www.yammer.com))

### 3.2 The company: Capgemini

Capgemini was founded in 1967 in Paris and employs 106.000 people in over 35 countries. The company offers services and solutions in the areas of management consulting, technology and outsourcing and is organised in separate business units with offices worldwide. Against this backdrop, having a platform for information sharing across units and countries is of particular importance. Yammer was first used in Capgemini by a small group of employees shortly after its release in September 2008. These users had positive experiences with Twitter and Chatterous, which provided a closed environment for Microblogging, and wanted to explore the possible benefits of Yammer usage within Capgemini. Whereas at the beginning, Yammer was only adopted slowly its uptake has meanwhile proliferated to the extent that in the last corporate annual report Yammer was listed in the knowledge section and employees started to notice it as a tool to improve communication and collaboration. From June 2010 to September 2010 the number of users had doubled and Yammer is now used by over 17,000 people within the company's network.

## 4 STUDY OVERVIEW

The main aim of this study is to investigate the communication practices within the Yammer network of the case company and to compare those results with existing findings of (Enterprise) Microblogging research, as is evident in the above-introduced literature. Much like existing exploratory EMB research, our study is based on an analysis of messages captured on the company EMB network. Hence, we apply genre analysis to uncover structures in communications on the platform, in order to describe communication practices. In addition to the analysis of microblogs we conducted one in-depth interview with a Capgemini manager, who is a promoter of the platform, an early adopter and heavy user, and held a workshop with another user, which included a demonstration of the Capgemini

Yammer platform. This served to gain a deeper understanding of the company context, the platform history and the context in which the platform is used.

#### 4.1 Genre Analysis

Genre analysis has been applied in information systems research to investigate “the relationships between communication practices and technologies within organizations and to trace technology adoption and patterns of communication that emerge in the process” (Westman & Freund, 2010, 323). Yates & Orlikowski (1992) first adopted genre analysis to explain organisational communication as a structuration process. Genres can be defined as “socially recognized types of communicative actions [...] that are habitually enacted by members of a community to realize particular social purposes” (Yates et al., 1999, 84). Genres develop over time due to the dynamic nature of communicative events and alter “the ongoing communicative actions of community members through their use of it” (Orlikowski & Yates, 1994, 542). Essentially, genres act as templates for communication and thus shape social activity (Kwasnik & Crowston, 2005, 80). Consequently, by identifying a genre repertoire one is able to capture the essence of the communicative practices of a social group. For doing so, it is necessary to identify the multiple, interacting genres that are enacted by the group members. Swales (1990) states that a collection of communicative events turns into a genre when they share the same communicative purpose. Hence, communicative purpose is considered as the primary criterion to identify genres (Askehave & Swales, 2001). The purpose of a communicative event “is not the individual’s private motive for communicating, but a purpose constructed and recognised by the relevant organizational community, whether small or large” (Yates et al., 1999, 84). Hence, in our analysis we mainly concentrate on communicative purpose in identifying genres. However, due to the particular nature findings in our case, we also draw on the content of communications in order to describe different types of conversations in a second step (see below).

#### 4.2 Case Sampling and data analysis

The total number of messages posted on the Yammer Capgemini network since its launch exceeded 110,000 until July 2010, which is far beyond what can reasonably be coded qualitatively. We aimed to derive a sample representative of current Yammer use by, analysing a two-week period from the most recent data available. Hence, the data included in this study consists of messages from a period of the most recent two weeks in July 2010. Before cleaning, this data set contained 3,310 messages. We then removed incorrectly exported messages as well as automatically posted messages of the system (e.g. new users joining the network). Furthermore, we excluded messages posted in languages other than English, as well as messages, which belonged to conversations that began before the two week period, since their context was lost and it was not possible to make sense of these communications. The final data set contained 1,196 messages, of which 905 posts were part of conversations (communications with replies), while the rest were single posts without replies. The average length of posts was 152.5 characters, which is quite close to Twitter, although Yammer does not impose restrictions. Finally, 88.3% of all genre instances were work-related and 11.7% dealt with non-work related topics (e.g. the 2010 Football Worldcup). All work-related posts (1,056 posts) were included in our genre analysis.

The data set was imported to the qualitative analysis software ATLAS.ti 6.2 for text coding and qualitative analysis. The data was coded by one researcher with a second acting as a discussant and analyst in a confirmatory role. The codes used were not predetermined but emerged through analysis of the communicative purpose evident in the messages. The approach taken for determining codes was constantly recursive and reflexive with an aim of being “...systematic and analytical but not too rigid (Althiede, 1996, p.16).” We frequently reviewed the genre repertoire and the already coded posts. Any deviations were discussed and after resolving conflicts by either adding a new genre, splitting an existing one or merge two genres, already coded posts would be recoded. This process was iterated until all posts were successfully coded and both researchers agreed on the outcome. As a result 17 single genres, grouped together in five top-level genres emerged. While most posts were coded as

single instances of a genre, several messages contained more than one genre. In total, we coded 1,056 posts with 1,279 single genre instances (1.2 genres per post). In the next section we will discuss the identified genre repertoire.

## 5 FINDINGS: YAMMER MICROBLOGGING @ CAPGEMINI

The genres identified provide deep insights into Capgemini's use of Yammer and fresh insights onto the role microblogging is playing in enterprise communication. Since the communicative purpose was the primary criterion for coding, the genres allow us to explore why and how employees use Yammer and to reason on the role of the platform for the case company. Figure 2 provides an overview of the different genres subsumed into the five top categories, which reflect the communication practice that proliferated on the platform.

### 5.1 Genre Repertoire

*Opinion and Clarification* is the largest genre category; it accounts for 44.3% of all genre instances coded during analysis. The genre captures all posts that initiate or are part of explicit interactive discussions, in which users ask others for their opinion, voice their own opinion or engage in clarifying various matters of interest. While users only rarely ask for opinions of others (in 3.4% of all genre instances), they draw on Yammer to freely express their opinions on various work-related matters, often in response to other posts (29.5%) (e.g. "*Scrum is not an iron fist. It is a helping hand. But a mirror too.*"). On the other hand, employees might voice their opinion, which then leads to a discussion (e.g. "*Invited by my employer to fill in 28 pages long ('20 questions each') survey on 'New Way of Working'. That does not sound very new way to me.*"). Clarifications account for 11.5% of genre instances and refer to posts that were intended to clarify particular aspects by providing additional information or rectifying other user's statements. In summary this genre category shows that the opportunity to discuss points of view, express opinions and gain clarification are an essential part of the conversation taking place through EMB in the case company.

*Problem Solving and Support* contains 18.8% of all genre instances and reflects communication that is intended to solve specific (often pressing) problems (7.6%) or to find resources to support one's immediate work (11.2%). Resources refer to files (e.g. a template for a digital business card) and URLs (e.g. a link to a Wiki), which are shared upon a user's request. In addition, providing contact to experts falls into this genre as well. Furthermore, employees often use Yammer to find or provide solutions for different problems. In general, this genre category signifies that Yammer is seen by the participants as a vital medium for receiving and providing work-related support, with such a large user group increasingly significantly the likelihood that someone will be able to know the solution to a problem or the required resource.

The category *Update and Notification* represents 16.7% of genre instances and subsumes genres that reflect the intention to provide others with work-related updates regarding status, tasks and events. The majority of messages in this category refers to various status updates of a quite general nature (15.4%). Those updates are quite close to the original Twitter motto "What are you doing?" (e.g. "*In my daily update meeting with my partner in Waldorf*"), but the genre also contains updates on the in-availability of certain pieces IT infrastructure. However, posts that refer to concrete task updates, i.e. updates on task progress or completion, with relevance to other employees, are an exception (1.3%) rather than regularity in Capgemini's use of Yammer. This finding suggests that Yammer is perceived to be a platform for sharing the details of one's current situation with others ("That's what I'm doing"/"That's where I am"), but that the medium is not used for immediate task coordination with co-workers.

*Information Sharing* represents 12% of all genre instances and captures the sharing of useful work-related information with others. Mainly, people would share work-related news in form of web URLs or other references (11.5%). Posts captured under this genre are sharing information with others out of



their own initiative, without others requesting such information. The latter (information requests) are captured in the genre "Provide resources" as part of *Problem Solving and Support*. This distinction is important for understanding EMB practices and the role of Yammer for the organisation, as it makes a difference whether people see EMB as a medium for getting help and responding to requests for help or, for proactively sharing information with whoever might be interested. Finally, this category also contains messages that are intended to inform users of general events like conferences or workshops (0.5%).

While the first four categories represent 91.8% of all genre instances coded the last category contains genres that were rarely found in the data set and did not fall under any of the other top categories or appeared only in connection with the previously described genres. Capturing these explicitly is important to show what kinds of behaviour only occur very rarely. For example, the "Self Marketing" genre (0.5%), which captures Twitter-like behaviour of self promotion, where one would inform others about one's knowledge and skills, only appeared very rarely (*"I of course know of things like MechanicalTurk, HireACoder and such."*). The genre "Provide social feedback" contains posts that show appreciation of another employee's work and thank for support in conversations. The last genre in this category refers to messages which are intended to note for future reference tasks that need still to be done, i.e. the coordination of tasks (0.4%).

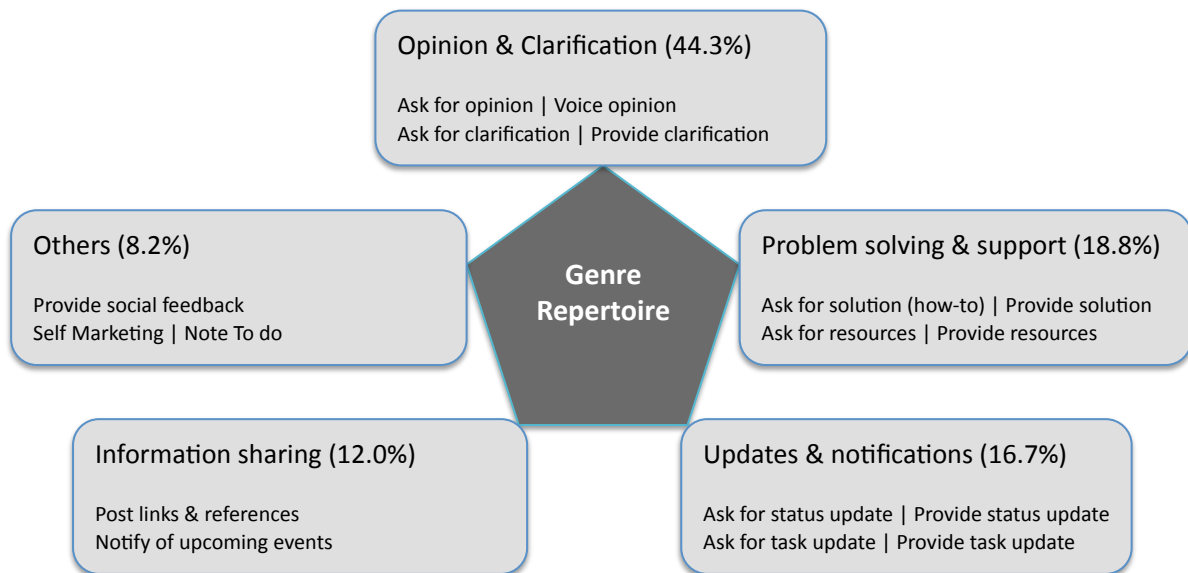


Figure 2. Overview of Micoblogging genre repertoire at Capgemini

## 5.2 Microblogging as Interaction, not Streaming

According to the above, the most common genre category is "Opinion & Clarification", which accounts for 44.3% of all genre instances, with all other behaviours being much less common. Much in line with this observation, the most striking finding from our genre analysis is that Microblogging has been appropriated by the Capgemini employees distinctly as a discussion medium, where people utter opinions and discuss various matters. The extent to which Yammer is used for conversational interaction is a surprising finding, given what we learned from other EMB cases so far (see discussion below). Moreover, opinions are typically voiced in reply to other people's posts, which means that communication on Yammer in our case is very interactive. It resembles a discussion space more than a stream of single posts. This is clearly signified by the fact that 75.7% of all posts in our data set were part of a communication thread (which include an initial post and multiple reply posts), with the rest (24.3%) being single posts that did not solicit any replies.

Triggered by these findings, we elected to complement our genre analysis of all posts with a second layer of analysis, in which we coded communication threads by topics describing what the threads are dealing with. In total, our data set included 142 threads with an average of 6.4 posts. We assigned to each thread *one* general category best characterising the conversation. This further analysis aimed to provide a richer understanding of what people interact about, i.e. to find out what the kinds of topics are make Capgemini employees engage with each other on Yammer.

The majority of threads show conversations around jointly discussing and solving various work-related problems (26.8%). People would voice opinions, provide clarifications, suggest resources and so on, often helping to solve a problem one of the users has voiced in a message. Second, 25.4% of conversations capture what we term the “aligning of activities”, which turns out to be an important exercise in this particular context (see discussion below). For example, one employee would provide a general status update, posting what s/he is currently working on. Other users, often from very different parts of the organisation, would engage with this by describing how they have done similar things, what their experiences were, giving tips and providing resources regarding the particular matter (e.g. a certain type of project). Furthermore, 15.5% of all discussions were about professional practices (e.g. certain administrative practices in the company such as travel requisitions) and 14% about technology, including conversations about Yammer itself, which account for half of all discussions about technology (i.e. 7%). Conversations about work-related news (6.3%), private matters (7.7%) or public events (4.2%), such as the 2010 soccer world cup complete the sample. Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of the different topic categories about which people engage in conversations. In total, 84.5% of all conversations were about work-related topics, while 15.5% dealt with private matters or public events.

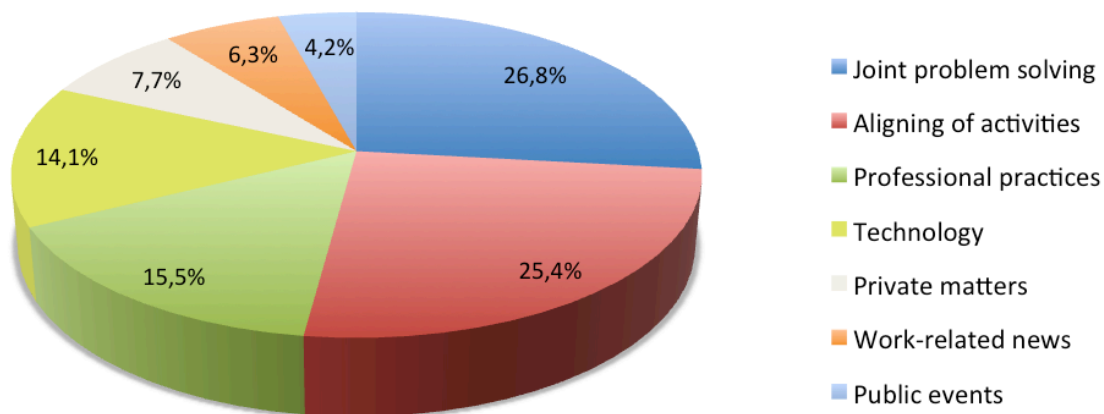


Figure 3. Content of conversations in the Capgemini Yammer network

## 6 DISCUSSION

In this section we compare our results with existing EMB studies, as well as findings on Public Microblogging on Twitter. This further highlights the distinct conversational nature of Microblogging in our case, which we discuss in the second sub section. Our discussion leads us to propose that the corporate use of Microblogging is a diverse phenomenon, which warrants further classification regarding its application in an enterprise-wide versus a workgroup context.

### 6.1 Comparison with existing studies

First of all, our findings reveal that Microblogging in Capgemini is very different to what has been found on Twitter, where the majority of posts focuses on communication about “self” rather than to inform (Naaman et al., 2010). In contrast, this type of posts (“Self Marketing”) is only very rarely

found in our case. Moreover, Public Microblogging is not very interactive, with the number of conversational posts being much lower than in Capemini (see Honeycutt and Herring 2009). However, the finding that EMB is different from PMB is not surprising. On the one hand, differences in Internet and Intranet usage of social software have been uncovered for other technologies such as Wikis and Blogs before (Danis & Singer, 2008, Yardi et al., 2009). On the other hand, Riemer & Richter (2010) in analysing EMB in Communardo, a German software development company, also found that Microblogging differed markedly from Twitter, albeit in a very different manner.

Yet, a comparison with the latter study reveals fundamental differences in the interpretation of the Microblogging principle for corporate application, too. The main usage practices identified by Riemer and Richter (2010) are task coordination and team-related awareness creation. The authors make clear that EMB in Communardo has been appropriated as a task- and team-focused communication medium, while in our case such communication does not occur to any significant extent. On the other hand, Riemer and Richter (2010) point out that there is no voicing of opinions in their case, nor do they note any significant degree of replies. Unlike in our case, EMB is not found to be a conversational medium. Rather, EMB in the software development context resembles a stream of activity and awareness-related posts, on which people can draw to enable coordination and alignment of immediate, joint work and project matters.

Zhang et al. (2010) describe another Yammer case. While this case shows some similarities to our case, it is again quite different. It needs to be noted that the authors used a classification slightly different from ours, and the one used by Riemer and Richter (2010). Notwithstanding, Zhang et al. find that information sharing is the most common communication practice accounting for 37% of posts, while a striking 21% of communication centres around talking about the use of Yammer, which is due to the fact that the service hadn't been adopted by the case population for long. Conversations, while still part of the EMB behaviour, were found to be more comparable to Twitter, but nowhere near as prevalent as in our case.

These comparisons reveal that the most notable finding from our case analysis is indeed the conversational nature of Microblogging, which is markedly different from all three cases discussed above. We discuss this finding and then propose to distinguish between different Microblogging types.

## 6.2 Conversational Nature of Microblogging

In our case, EMB resembles an open platform for conversations, problem solving and information sharing. The most striking finding is the conversational nature of Microblogging, which manifests in two aspects: 1) the degree of interaction through replying to other people's posts and 2) the extent to which users engage personally in discussing various topics by voicing their own opinions. Taken together, this behaviour remains unique so far in the arguably still limited body of literature on Microblogging. The way in which EMB has been appropriated in Capgemini can be explained by the particular organisational context, which is shared by the Yammer user population in our case. In fact, context can also explain the particular ways of using in the other cases as well:

Capgemini Yammer users, while sharing the same general, corporate context and culture, come from different parts of the world and various professional branches within the consultancy; also the number of users is large. In general, these users do not share an immediate work context, nor are they aware of each other or their particular projects. Hence, very fitting with this situation, the platform has been appropriated as a conversational, context-creating space, where people engage in aligning of activities, making each other aware of available resources and expertise and discuss their general professional practices or company news. Ultimately they engage in social networking, i.e. they establish and maintain professional and personal relationships. They do not however engage in immediate task-related collaboration. Much to the contrary, the users in the Communardo case (see above) already share an immediate work context and have other means for discussing; also the user group is small. These users have appropriated the EMB principle for task and team coordination and EMB resembles an activity stream more than a series of conversations. On Twitter on the other hand, users typically do

not share any meaningful organisational context, hence communication is much less conversational overall and postings are generally about sharing general interest information or me-forming behaviour.

Consequently, we reason that while the total lack of a shared meaningful context in the one case (Twitter) effectively inhibits conversations, while in the other case (Communardo) the fact that users work in the same project context means that conversations in EMB are not a necessity. Our case resembles the middle ground in this continuum, where people share a general context and use EMB conversations to build common ground and engage in network building (among other things).

Our findings are consistent with the general observation that Social Media platforms are open technologies, which do not determine usage, but are appropriated, shape and are shaped, by their users in emergent ways. Riemer & Richter (2010) refer to this characteristic using the German term *Nutzungs Offenheit* (openness of use). Drawing on the discussion above, we argue that one important factor influencing EMB appropriation is context that it is open to or, more precisely the extent to which the user group shares the same organisational or work context.

## 7 IMPLICATIONS

One main finding of our study is to expose the diverse nature of communication taking place in Microblogging within and beyond the firewall, since the appropriation of technology always happens locally and in a particular context. The comparison with existing EMB cases has shown that Microblogging turns out quite differently according to the context of the organisational forum in which it is used, i.e. an enterprise-wide forum or workgroup/project forum of communication. Based on what we have learned we assume that Microblogging will generally proliferate in similar ways in similar contexts, albeit with distinct local variations due to platform openness. Since the observed phenomena for each context is quite different, with very different ways of using and resulting organisational benefits, we propose to differentiate between Enterprise Microblogging (EMB) and Workgroup Microblogging (WMB). Whereas the Capgemini case resembles a case of enterprise-wide Microblogging, the usage in Communardo is more similar to the application of tradition groupware solutions, albeit with a distinct short messaging character. Hence, we propose to distinguish these two forms of corporate appropriation of the Microblogging idea (see table 1) and to further investigate their proliferation, differences and similarities in future research.

	<b>Public MB (Twitter)</b>	<b>Enterprise MB</b>	<b>Workgroup MB</b>
Context of the forum	Public forum	Enterprise forum	Activity-focused forum
Typical communications	Self presentation, self promotion, information sharing and distribution	Conversational: Discussions, problem solving, context building, social networking, information sharing	Activity streams: Task awareness creation (signalling), team coordination (delegation etc.), input generation

*Table 1. Different forums of Microblogging*

The forum in which Microblogging takes place is both structured by and structuring communication practice. Most particularly, it is shaping the types of interactions that are taking place between users. It is not our contention that the three forums classified here are the only forums in which Microblogging will take place. It is, for example, quite feasible that both Enterprise-wide (EMB) and Workgroup Microblogging (WMB) could take place on the public platform of Twitter. It is the context of use that shapes the forum, not the platform.

## 8 CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

In this paper we have analysed communication on of the Capgemini Yammer network. In contrast to existing findings on Twitter usage and other Enterprise Microblogging (EMB) cases, we found that EMB in our case is a predominantly conversational medium, where people interact and discuss, rather than only inform others about themselves (Twitter) or about their immediate task/team context, as it has been described in other EMB cases. We have attributed this to the fact that Social Media platforms are open technologies, which do not determine usage, but are appropriated by their users in emergent ways dependent on the use context. While the changing nature of communication is facilitated and enabled by the characteristics of social technologies, we contend that the openness of these technologies means that it is largely in non-deterministic ways. This phenomenon has been referred to as the duality of technology by some (Orlikowski, 1992) or the co-evolution of technology and practices, where particular uses trigger changes in the technology (e.g. platform providers implement certain features following the emergence of user behaviours, such as the @-sign or #-tag in Twitter), which then further spur certain behaviours. In the Yammer case, one such technology change is the threading feature, which facilitates conversations on the platform. Since our study only used two weeks of data, we were not able to study this development over time. Thus, as a next step, we will explore the influence of the threading feature, launched by Yammer in 2009, after Zhang et al. (2010) collected their data, but before our data was collected. With the full dataset we will then be able to investigate changes in user conversation behaviour after introduction of the feature.

While we have proposed a framework to classify different contexts and forums for communication that Microblogging is supporting, our study has also pointed towards the need for a much deeper understanding of the conversational and interactional nature of short message communications within organisations. We consider the implications for organisational information management and knowledge management to be significant. To this end, future directions for this research include the investigation of conversation and interaction as theoretical dimensions of the research. At this stage their remains the opportunity to confirm and enrich our understanding of genre repertoires and the characteristics of communication identified in the study by undertaking qualitative interviews with the participating organisation. These interviews will be completed as the second phase of this research project.

Our study has begun to shed light on the different contexts of organisational Microblogging and the interactions between its participants. However, more research on EMB and the organisational application of social media is needed. Much like existing studies, a main limitation of our study is that it includes communications from only one case. With more organisations adopting the new technology, and with more case studies appearing in the research space, further studies comparing findings across cases become more feasible, providing the opportunity to contribute to a better understanding of the potentials and role of EMB, social media technologies and their impact on the communication practices of organisations.

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