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**Tweet Talking - Exploring The Nature Of Microblogging
At Capgemini Yammer**

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Abstract

Microblogging has gained widespread popularity with the emergence of Twitter. While Twitter has shaped public perceptions of Microblogging, organisations have begun experimenting with Microblogging 'behind the firewall', for facilitating communication and group processes. However, research is still in its infancy. In this paper we explore how Yammer has been adopted within Capgemini, a large, globally operating consultancy business. In contrast to existing findings on Twitter usage, we find that Enterprise Microblogging (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 has also been described in other EMB cases. We discuss our results in light of the particular organisational context of Capgemini and the general open nature of communication technologies. We conclude that appropriation of Enterprise Microblogging happens largely in accordance with the organisational context in which it is set. Microblogging is a diverse phenomenon, which is not sufficiently defined via the underlying technology characteristics.

Keywords: enterprise microblogging, social software, knowledge sharing, yammer, capgemini

Introduction

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 ability to harness the knowledge of individual consultants. Thus, both individual skills and the motivation and ability to transfer knowledge from one project to another are essential, especially for younger employees who were hired in large numbers, because of 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 been non-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 this study we aim to make a first cautious step towards a better understanding of the benefits of Enterprise Microblogging for organisations. To this end, we apply genre analysis to a series of short message communications collected from the Capgemini Yammer network, and identify a diverse set of communication activities taking place. To better understand the role of EMB, we compare and contrast our findings with communication patterns in two other EMB studies. We find that EMB communication in Capgemini is distinctly conversational, with posts mainly being part of interactive discussions, rather than one-off signalling or simple information sharing. Its main purpose appears to be 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 studies and the open nature of communication platforms, which impact on user appropriation.

Our paper proceeds as follows: Firstly, we introduce Enterprise Microblogging and briefly summarise recent research. In section 3 we introduce Yammer and Capgemini. 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 EMB studies. Section 7 concludes the paper.

Enterprise Microblogging

The general idea behind Microblogging is simple and can best be illustrated through a description of Twitter. In 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).

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 to group communication, knowledge sharing and information exchange. 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 that employees will import unwanted behaviour, like procrastination, in to the organisation 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.

The Case: Yammer@Capgemini

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.

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 (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.

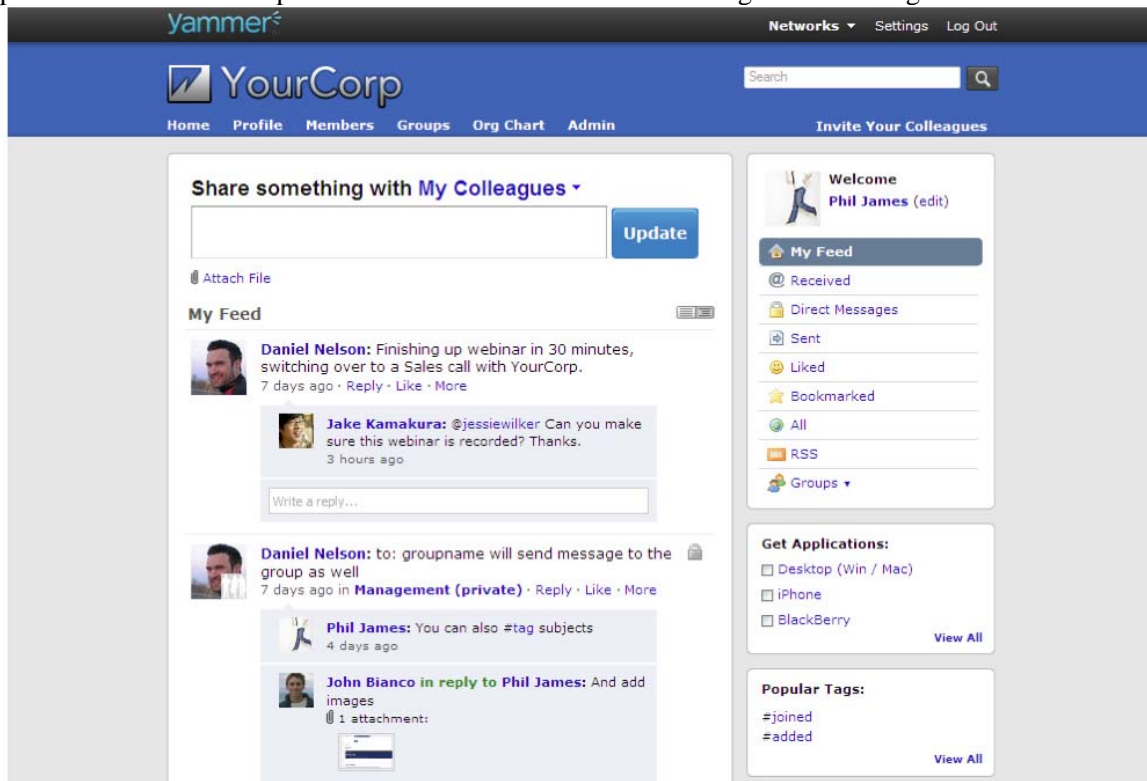


Figure 1. Yammer web frontend (taken from www.yammer.com)

The Case 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 (a group chat service which also provides a closed environment for communication), 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.

Research Design

The main aim of this study is to investigate Capgemini's communication activity within the Yammer network and compare the results of the study with existing findings. 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 how these facilitate communication practices. In addition to the analysis of short message communications 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.

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 inform us about the organisation of social activity (Kwasnik & Crowston, 2005, 80). Consequently, by identifying a genre repertoire one is able to capture the essence of the communicative action of a social group in its context. 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, the purpose of the communication 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). We follow this pattern in our analysis and concentrate mainly on communicative purpose in identifying genres. However, due to the particular nature of the findings in our case, we have also drawn on the topical content of communications in order to describe different types of conversations in a second step (see below).

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. Since we aim to derive a snapshot of the current communications in Yammer analysing a two week period seems appropriate. 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, 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 mainly coded by one researcher with a second acting as a discussant frequently reviewing 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.

Findings: Yammer Microblogging @ Capgemini

The identified genres provide deep insights into Capgemini's use of Yammer for communicating. Since the communicative purpose was the primary criterion for coding, the genres allow us to explore why and how Capgemini employees are using Yammer and to reason on the role of microblogging for the company. Figure 2 provides an overview of the different genres subsumed into five top categories that reflect the type of communication that is proliferating on the platform.

Genre Repertoire: What do users do in Yammer?

Opinion and Clarification is the largest genre category; it accounts for 44.3% of all genre appearances. It captures all posts that initiate or are part of 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 the genre appearances 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 demonstrates that the role EMB has to play in facilitating discussion and conversation on various matters of interest may be an essential part of tacit knowledge exchange for the case company.

Problem Solving and Support contains 18.8% of all genre appearances 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 explicitly 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 the likelihood that someone will be able to know the solution to a problem or the required resource is significant.

The category *Updates and Notifications* represents 16.7% of genre appearances 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%). These updates come 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 focussed task updates, i.e. updates on project task progress or completion, with relevance to other employees, are by far the exception (1.3%). This finding suggests that in the case company the Yammer platform is perceived as a way to share one's current situation and circumstance with others ("That's what I'm doing"/"That's where I am"), but that the medium is not used for immediate task coordination between co-workers.

Information Sharing represents 12% of all genre appearances and captures the sharing of work-related information with others. Mainly, people would share work-related news in form of web URLs or other

references (11.5%). It's important to note that posts captured under this genre are those with which people share information with others out of their own initiative, without others requesting such information. The latter is captured in the genre "Provide resources". This distinction is important for understanding EMB use in the organisation, as it makes a difference whether people see EMB as a specific question and answer medium for getting help and helping others or, for proactively sharing with whoever might be interested. In this case it is the latter. 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 appearances 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 and explicit me-forming, 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%).

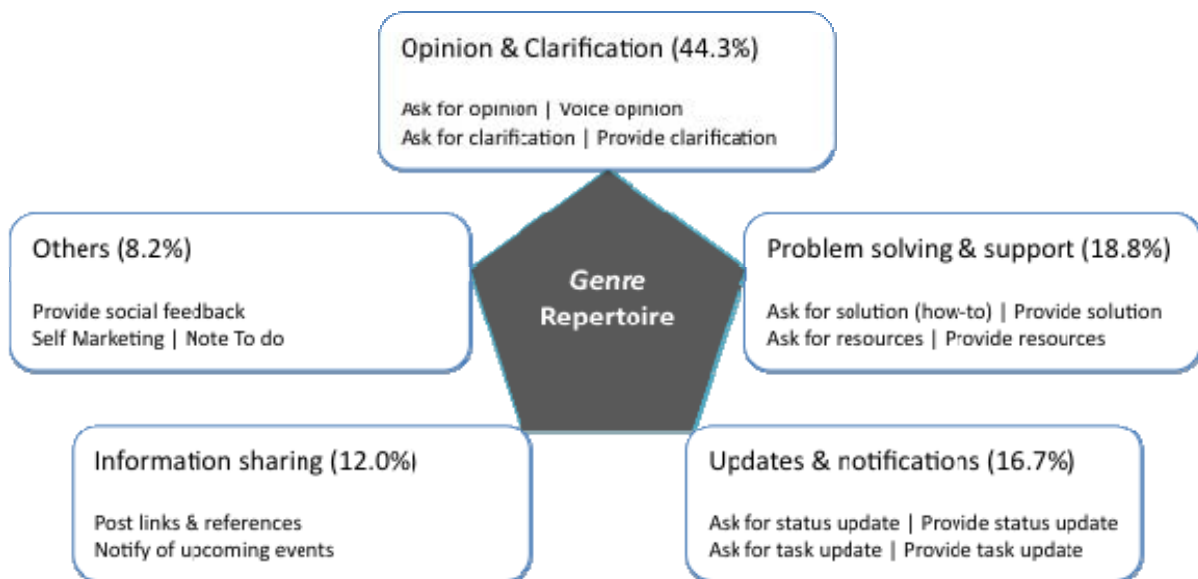


Figure 2. Overview of genres grouped by communication practices

Exploring Conversations: What are they talking about?

According to the above, the most common genre activity is to provide "Opinion & Clarify", 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 voice opinions and discuss various matters. The extent to which Yammer is used for conversation and discussion 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 the topics they 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 topic of 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, which make Capgemini employees engage with others on Yammer.

The majority of threads show conversations build around jointly discussing and solving various work-related problems (26.8%). People would voice opinions or provide clarifications or suggest resources to help solve a problem one of the users had voiced on the platform. 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 suggesting resources regarding the particular matter (e.g. a certain type of project). Furthermore, 15.5% of all discussions were about professional practices (e.g. around certain administrative tasks 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.

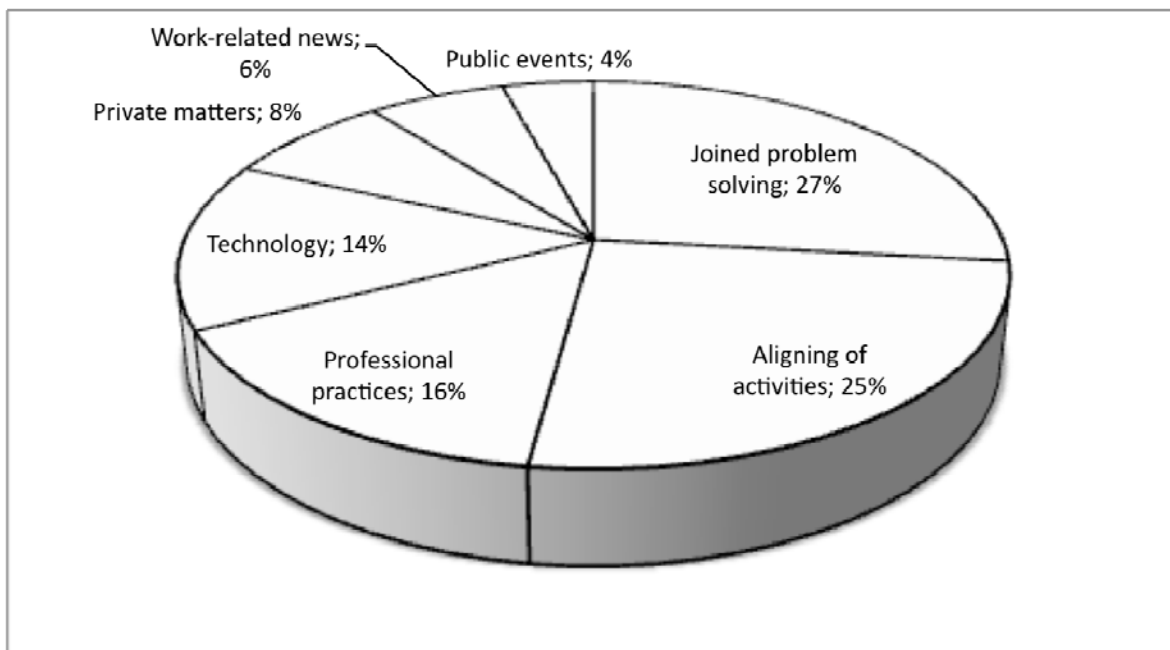


Figure 3. Content of conversations in the Capgemini Yammer network

Microblogging as Discussion Medium

A comparison of our results with an earlier study reveals fundamental differences in the role of Microblogging in different corporate contexts. The main types of communication identified by Riemer and Richter (2010) in a study of the software development company Communardo were *task coordination* and *team-related awareness creation*. In that study the authors describe how EMB has been appropriated as a task- and team-focused communication medium, while in our case such communication does not occur to any significant extent. In the Communardo case, Riemer and Richter (2010) point out that there is no voicing of opinions, nor do they note any significant degree of replies. Unlike in Capgemini, EMB is not found to be a conversational medium. Rather, EMB in the software development case resembles a stream of activity and awareness-related posts on which people can draw to enable coordination and alignment of immediate shared 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 this case, 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 all posts, while a striking 21% of communication centres around talking about the use of Yammer itself, 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. In the Capgemini 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:

1. **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 discussing their general professional practices or company news. Ultimately they engage in social networking, i.e. they establish and maintain personal relationships. They do not however engage in immediate task-related collaboration.
2. 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.
3. 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 (e.g. Honeycutt & Herring 2009, Naaman et al. 2010).

Consequently, we reason that the lack of a shared organising 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. These may be seen as two points on a continuum. 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 by their users in emergent ways. Riemer & Richter (2010) refer to this characteristic using the German term *Nutzungsoffenheit* (an openness of use). Drawing on the discussion above, we argue that one important factor influencing EMB appropriation is context, or more precisely the extent to which the user group shares the same organisational or work context.

Conclusion and further Research

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 (e.g. Communardo). 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 context of use.

However, these practices are facilitated and enabled by the characteristics of the technology, albeit 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 forms of use 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.

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 only includes one case. With more organisations adopting the new technology, and with more case studies appearing in the research space, meta studies, which compare findings across cases, become more feasible, which will finally contribute to more generalised findings with regards to the practices, potentials and role of EMB in particular, and social media technologies in general.

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