

Does social networks work for self-organising knowledge management?

Knowledge Management (D0002N)

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Introduction

For many years digitalization has been present in companies. From having meeting notes written by hand, printed and stored on paper, notes are now digitised in a word processing application, and the same goes for steering documents, routines manuals, etc. These documents are usually saved on a common drive to which employees have access. Depending on the organisation size and complexity many companies have software to help them organize documents, processes and manuals. When an employee starts working at a company, these documents are an aid to form a base on the way of working and to start learning the job and acquire job-specific knowledge. Often this is accompanied by having a co-worker as an instructor. This way of having knowledge transferred from one person to another has been used for a long period of time and is still present.

Within a company, there is also a continuous flow of information. Before the digital era, the flow of information was distributed via meetings in a fairly hierarchical way: the manager informed the employees of the status of the company and important milestones that had been accomplished. Nowadays the information flow is digitised and employees receive information on important events via email or by reading the companies intranet. Knowledge transference has become more transparent as information can be spread within a company directly from the source to the whole company.

During the last years, companies have become interested in the way people socialise outside of the workplace, for example via Facebook or LinkedIn and tried to incorporate similar solutions with the purpose to enable personnel to connect to gain knowledge or ask for help. As an example, at E.ON a group-wide intranet, *Connect*, has been launched where it is possible to create channels based on hierarchical structures but also based on working groups or projects to spread the news to people within or outside of the group. *Connect* is also used as a way to present every employee as each member of *Connect* has their own job profile page. The reason for this is to enable a person who seeks for a certain type of expertise to connect easily.

Region Västra Götaland (RVG) constitutes the county council of the territory Västra Götaland in south west Sweden. RVG has about 55,000 employees and the territory of Västra Götaland has 1,7 million inhabitants. RVG is a diverse organisation with a variety of missions and departments. Managing knowledge sharing within such an organization is a challenge. For about three years, RVG has been using the social network system *Yammer* in tandem with other communications channels such as email, intranet, Sharepoint, Skype, etc. What makes *Yammer* different in comparison to other communication tools used in RVG, is mainly the possibility to communicate in a transparent and non-hierarchical way across all the organisation, all the while ignoring potential thresholds such as job titles and geographical location.

Every company has its own way of using IT tools to connect personnel, but has there been an evaluation of the usage and results of using an IT tool to aid the knowledge transfer within a

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company? Is it enough to just launch a tool and tell people to use it? Can personnel form a social context on their own where knowledge is shared?

Aim

This paper will evaluate the IT tool *Yammer*, and specifically its usefulness as a social network tool for self-organised knowledge management at Region Västra Götaland (RVG).

Theory

A definition of Knowledge management (KM)

There are many different definitions of knowledge management and lecturer David Ban gives a good straight forward explanation; KM is the art of collecting, consolidating, distributing, the right information, to the right people, at the right time (Ban, 2020).

Collison and Parcell illustrates the process of collecting and consolidating knowledge, explaining that it's about what kind information already exists as explicit knowledge but also what others know and what needs to be captured and made explicit. The authors connect the need for knowledge with a business issue and present two paths to deal with the need – either look for the information that is already available or ask others what they know. Both ways lead to an interaction with other colleagues, either via networks or via a moderator that stores explicit knowledge. (Collison, 2004,p.18).

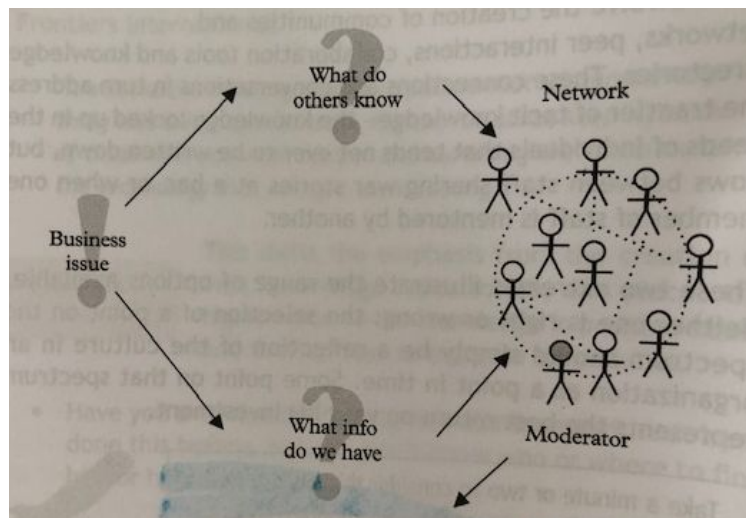


Figure 1, p 18. Collision, C. Parcell,G (2001)

As previously mentioned, while knowledge management involves people and processes, there is also a need to have supporting tools for handling the whole process from capturing to distributing. People, processes and technology are three entities that need to support each other to have a complete knowledge management system.

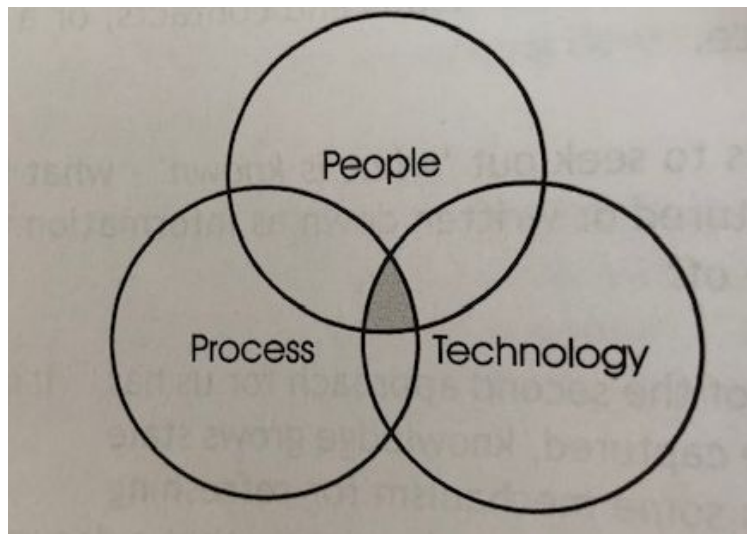


Figure 2. p 20 . Collision, C. Parcell,G (2001)

Research on social media tools in the business context

Research studies on financial companies done by professor Leonard P, show that one valuable benefit of implementing social networking in an organization is the opportunity to transform the invisible communication that occurs among employees into visible communication for third parties. In this way, other colleagues, managers, peers, get access and can navigate the transparent messages and discussions in the networks and therefore may improve both their explicit knowledge as well as their knowledge about who knows what and what others know, the meta knowledge - a term also described in Collins P. Leonard suggests that “enhanced meta knowledge can lead to more innovative products and services and less knowledge duplication if employees learn to work in new ways. By learning vicariously rather than through experience, workers can more effectively recombine existing ideas into new ideas and avoid duplicating work.” (Leonard P, 2014, p. 1)

In 2017, Tsedal Neeley, a professor at Harvard Business School, and Paul Leonard, a management professor at UC Santa Barbara wrote an article which was published in Harvard Business Review, and described the main four traps that companies can fall in when trying to implement social tools:

1. Flawed Assumptions About Millennials.

According to the authors’ surveys, “about 85% of young professionals said they struggle with social tools at work, while about 90% of older professionals viewed these tools as new and often useful modes of communication with their colleagues”.

Many leaders assume that social media is very appealing to young people and expect them to be the pioneers of using social media tools at work. While this may be true to social media outside the working place (e.g. Twitter, Facebook), when it comes to the working place, for the Millennials, social media is essential to their private lives, a space for self-expression and

communication with friends and family. Millennials “have trouble imagining how they could use social tools without getting personal. Friending the boss is reminiscent of friending a parent back in high school—it’s unsettling. And the word social signals informal and personal.”

2. Repressing Informal Communication

Generally, employees want to keep their personal lives outside the workspace. In the meanwhile, one of the key motivators for employees to be active on the company’s social tools is the curiosity about how others live outside the office. Prohibiting private information on social tools is seen by the authors as a missed opportunity. Just like in real life, in face-to-face communication, people engage in small talk about their own lives, as a way to bond and create a connection. “Employees feel better equipped for such exchanges when they have gained personal insights about their coworkers by watching them communicate on internal social tools”

3. Failure to Recognize Learning

Social tools offer the opportunity for the employees to gain knowledge by observing and/or interacting with colleagues. The risk is that the employees do not perceive this as learning, rather as wasting time on scrolling down unimportant information, compared to the active work of producing content. In the end, they might consider the tool as a waste of time and stop using it.

As described by Lombardi, by passively observing the information on social tools, people can acquire implicit knowledge as well as metaknowledge. Employees may learn how to solve a problem but also who has the expertise that could help them solve their problem. “It requires management actions to clearly highlight the potential for knowledge sharing and skill-building when rolling out social tools. “

4. Focusing on the Wrong Data

“Employees’ communications and behaviors become highly visible on internal social tools, which can make it easier to collaborate. But not all that is visible is important or useful. Sometimes social content leads people to focus—and act—on the wrong data.” Just like the bandwagon effect: the more people adopt a belief in something and express it, the more others might hop on the same beliefs or ideas without asking for any underlying evidence. This can create misleading company truths and myths. Furthermore, “the most visible information and knowledge were perceived as most important. If employees’ contributions and strengths weren’t showing up in their posts or messages, they were likely to be overlooked—and the organization wouldn’t benefit from them” (Paul M. Leonardi, 2017, pp.118–126)

One study performed by McKinsey Global Institute in 2012 based on investigating over 4000 companies showed that 72% of the companies reported using at some extent the social media

tools such as Yammer, Slack, Teams, with the purpose to enable communication among their employees. McKinsey estimated that “by fully implementing social technologies, companies have an opportunity to raise the productivity of interaction workers—high-skill knowledge workers, including managers and professionals—by 20 to 25 percent.” M, Chui (2012, p.10).

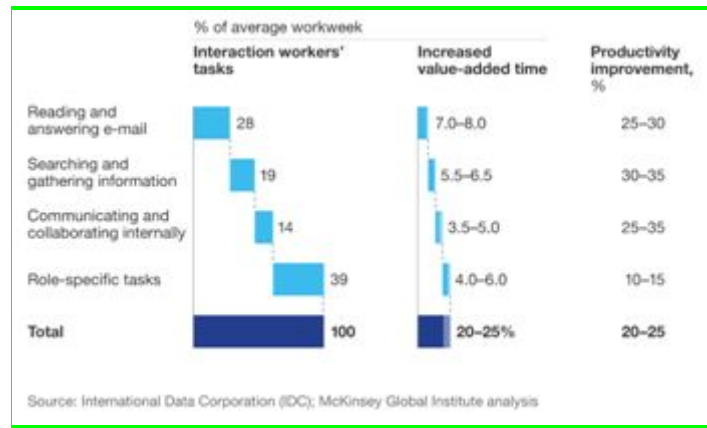


Figure 3. Percentage Average workweek and potential improvement. M, Chui (2012, p.10)

The role and emergence of social networks and self-organizing knowledge management

A definition of self-organizing social networks

The whole idea of a self-organized social network is to shift from top down to bottom up. The challenge with the bottom up is the information and communication structure.

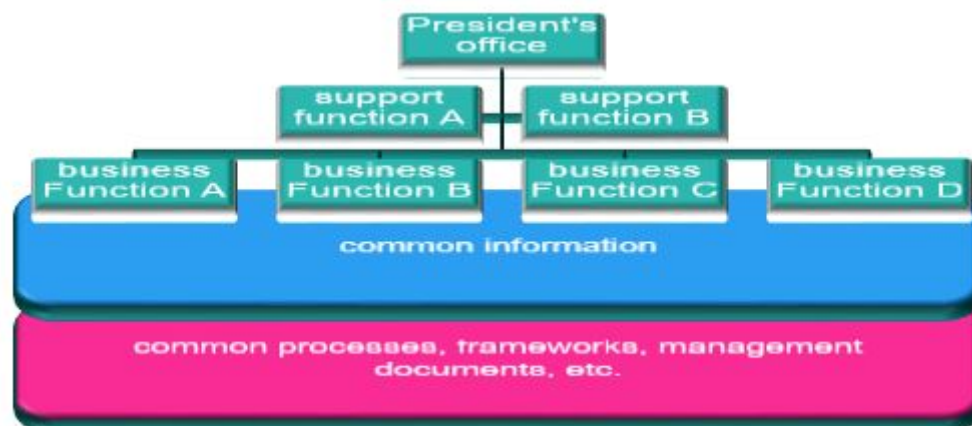


Figure 4. Image created from information by Berg (2018)

A self-organized social network is independent of the organizational structure except in terms of budget responsibility and delegation responsibility (in the public sector)

It is based on the fact that the information must be able to flow freely (the blue box), but information security must be taken into account.

The most important thing is (the red field) to work all the time working for a permissive culture where everyone comes to speak. One needs to develop the organization's culture, processes and employee behavior. Equally important is to have a technology that enables collaboration, communication and technology within the company.

Berg (2018) writes about what business value a self-organized social network can provide. The examples he mentions are:

1. The company can develop services / products faster through
 - a. crowdsourcing, White (2019) describes more what Crowdsourcing is.
 - b. Open innovation, Brattström (2015) describes that companies allow the inflow of ideas but also give out ideas that the company itself cannot or does not want to realize. That is, the boundaries of the organization are thus permeable.
2. By sharing ideas openly within the organization, you not only get valuable input faster, you also enable the so-called serendipity effect, where unforeseen views and discussions about an idea can lead to greater innovation leaps. There are examples where a single such leap has proven to be worth more than the entire investment of setting up a social network. Rundqvist (2007, p. 53) writes more about just serendipity and that he sums up, among other things, making unexpected discoveries by being able to identify successful opportunities.
3. Create synergies and identify new business. Being able to see what others in the organization are working on for a specific customer makes it easier to identify more opportunities with that customer. It is not always the salespeople who know everything about the customer; new needs can just as easily be identified by, for example, someone on customer support, a consultant out of the customer or from a completely different part of the organization.
4. Faster and better knowledge transfer. Social networks share experiences and best practices with each other in a more natural way, no matter where you are. By not having to invent the wheel over and over, you not only become more efficient, but you also improve the quality within the entire organization.

Yammer

Interactive knowledge sharing using an IT-tool

Background

According to Welch (2011), the service started as an internal communication system for the genealogy website Geni.com in 2008. The service was built by David O. Sacks.

The same year, the product was launched as an independent product in 2008, the news was released among others by Schonfeld (2008).

In 2012, the news was released by Michael (2012) that Microsoft acquired Yammer for \$ 1.2 billion. Currently, Yammer is included in all Office 365 and Microsoft 365 business plans.

However, some development took place between 2008 and 2012.

Appendix 1 contains more details about how Yammer was first developed by the company Yammer and later by the company Microsoft.

Current state

Albert (2018) describes Teams and Yammer. In order to get a good picture of how we can situate Yammer in relation to other Microsoft tools, it is good to start from Albert's (2018) description.

Microsoft 365 Teamwork: Where to Start a Conversation



Figure 5. Microsoft explains this with the 'Inner Loop' and 'Outer Loop'

Teams has been developed by Microsoft and allows integration with SharePoint Online as well as other parts of the Office 365 ecosystem. Yammer, on the other hand, has been acquired and integrated afterwards.

Outlook is a well-established product and works for all kinds of communication. Sharepoint is the platform that holds everything together in Office 365. Office 365 is a Microsoft product. Office 365 includes applications such as Microsoft Teams, Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, Microsoft PowerPoint. Microsoft Teams are excellent for smaller work groups with a centered collaboration for various projects, since Yammer works just fine for an entire company, it belongs to the middle segment and above.

Teams are not built to communicate information to everyone and for everyone to share information with everyone.

Both apps complement each other well (again according to Microsoft), and when used correctly, they give your company the conditions for smoother and better communication.

To what types of activities is Yammer useful?

Mason (2020) asked and discussed the question “To what types of activities is Yammer useful?”. Below is a summary of her conclusions.

A simple way to look at it is this: Yammer works best with a broad audience. With the ability to host conversations with more than 80,000 members, it is the star of company-wide communication and general announcements so in other words, Microsoft can now offer enterprise social networking thanks to the acquisition of Yammer.

Given Microsoft's dominance on the business side, it simplifies for a lot of users because Yammer is part of Microsoft 365.

Yammer offers:

- **Networking:** Group function has been replaced with communities where employees can participate in conversations that interest them, share files and even live-stream events. Keep track of what employees are up to, get updates and follow projects as they progress in real-time.
- **Open communication:** The new and improved publishing tool extends the reach of messages by providing a notification to all members of the community. There are added options for sharing different types of media including gifs, videos and file attachments, so it is an ideal way to send announcements, new initiatives and strengthen the company's culture.
- **Engagement:** A new event discovery page has been added to each community so members can see what's new, what's being talked about and stay informed about upcoming events.
- **Knowledge sharing:** Yammer's newer, smarter discovery flow ensures today's mindless ways to scroll and search. With built-in question and answer features, it's

easier than ever to get in touch with industry experts and get the answers you need when you need them.

Other sources and contexts for knowledge sharing outside of the organisation

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the fact that an organization is not limited to its own boundaries. Knowledge is exchanged in a complex environment including several external players, stakeholders and sources. In this chapter, we choose to write about an example from the City of Stockholm that shows how it works within an organization and an example from a national perspective, ie DelaDigitalt that includes public sector actors in Sweden.

Dela Digitalt

Dela Digitalt is a website that is built on OpenHierarchy, an open-source platform, where all employees in public organizations in Sweden have free access to share and search for projects and other digitalization initiatives. In this way Dela Digitalt adheres to the principles of self-organization.

According to DelaDigitalt (2020), SALAR¹ takes no responsibility for the content of uploaded material to DelaDigitalt. SALAR reserves the right to remove uploaded material that may be considered harmful or otherwise inappropriate for the purpose of the site.

One may compare DelaDigitalt with Facebook but with the difference that it only applies to employees in the public sector and the purpose.

The purpose of DelaDigitalt is to contribute to business development and change work throughout the public sector. By sharing development ideas, methods and tools and by pursuing development together, the public sector can become more efficient and cheaper.

City of Stockholm

According to SALAR, a municipality has a great responsibility with everything from preschools, schools, social services and elderly care for emergency services.

This means that the contact areas become varied and complex. In addition, municipalities have outsourced a number of services that entail additional contact areas.

For example, city of Stockholm has

- a contact area with the pupils of the local municipality and their parents (Skolplattformen),
- a contact area for IT-related services

¹ The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) is an employers' organisation and an organisation that represents and advocates local government in Sweden. All of Sweden's municipalities and regions are members of SALAR.

- a contact area for citizens, <https://start.stockholm/>

From the Knowledge perspective, the municipalities (such as Stockholm City) have a major challenge in making Knowledge work effectively.

Why is this a big challenge?

If we start from the entities according to figure 2 then the single biggest challenge is to involve the employees who work within a municipality.

SALAR (2020) describes how the officials shall implement the district councils/specialist committees deciding.

This means that historically, politicians have also decided on how things should be done. What we need to work on is trust which is described by TilliT(2020).

With that, it means that politicians should decide more on general issues, set policies, etc. while officials decide how it will be implemented. This also means that trust will increase within the organization of the municipality and where knowledge management has a decisive factor for how well the organization of the municipality works. The organization can work out clearer processes and thus also be able to elaborate on the demands placed on the technology to handle knowledge management.

Method

This paper will use several different ways in order to answer the questions stated in the Introduction chapter under Aim. These are; literature studies on social knowledge sharing, knowledge management and an online-survey. For investigating the use of Yammer in RVG a survey was used. The working approach within the group KEKEERA was a group meeting once a week and in between the communication was done by using LinkedIn as a communication channel. The group also used “Peer assist meeting” as a method to have a brainstorming session on defining the issue that was supposed to be researched.

Peer assist meeting

Peer assist meeting is a way of having several people involved from different professions, working together to form a possible approach for managing challenges. The picture below shows how the persons can contribute from different perspectives in the meeting. The output from the meeting is then one or several actions based on what has been agreed upon that is doable by the people involved.

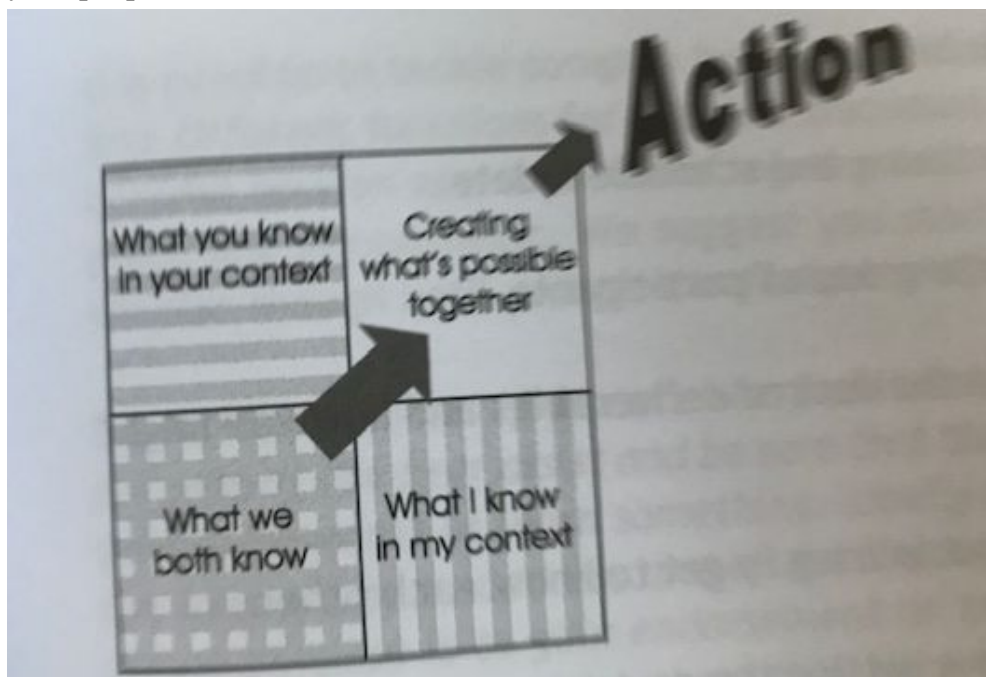


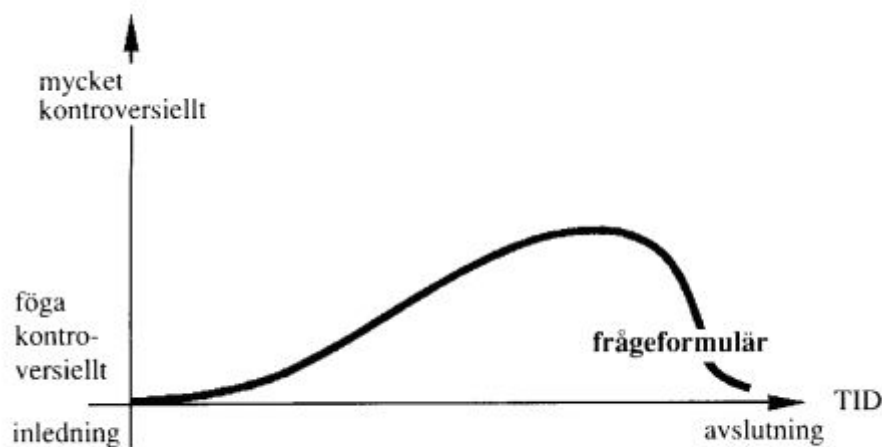
Figure 6. Collision, C. Parcell,G (2001), P103.

Survey

A survey can be used if the persons who shall participate in the study geographically spread, or are a large number of persons, and the time that is disposable to conduct the study M, le Duc (2007). A survey can also be appropriate as a first step to gain knowledge about the domain to be used further on. It is important that the structure of the survey follows the aim

that is going to be studied as the survey is the tool to operate the theoretical question that is going to be answered M, le Duc (2007).

When structuring the survey it is an aid for the person conducting the survey that the first questions are not controversial (see figure 7 below) but the further the person comes answering the questions, the more controversial the questions can become. It is important that there is a natural flow in the survey and that the questions are divided into logical groups A, Persson (2016). Regarding the open-close types of questions, it is depending on what the survey aims at answering. When choosing the open-close types of questions there are strengths and weaknesses for them both. By using the open-ended questions the respondent is able to write texta themselves but then the answer needs interpretation and also the answer can deviate from what the aim was for the question. Using the closed-ended questions the respondent needs to choose one or several beforehand stated answers to the question. The strength in this is that the respondent does not need to use that much effort in answering, the analysis is easier as the answers standardised A, Persson (2016). The diagram below shows that the longer the time consumed doing the survey the more controversial the questions can be and the peak is near the end of the survey.



Figur 11.13 Schematisk framställning av strukturen i ett frågeformulär.

Figure 7. M, le Duc (2007)

The survey for this paper

The survey used to gather information for this paper was published in Yammer of Region Västra Götaland and in two groups. One group was “All company” and the second group was a group dedicated to questions related to Microsoft Office 365 and digital workplace issues. Due to the covid19-pandemic, there were limitations on how much this kind of survey could be promoted within RVG. In order to respect and not disturb the healthcare staff, the survey was only published in Yammer and not on the intranet nor sent by email.

Results

Yammer for self-organising knowledge management at Region Västra Götaland

The survey received 100 answers during a five day period (27 April to 1 May, 2020). This chapter summarizes the result of the survey. The complete results of the survey are found in the appendix.

Questions asked in the survey

- Age
- Gender
- Professional role
- Department
- How do you use Yammer?
- How often do you use Yammer?
- What would make you use Yammer more often?
- To what extent does Yammer add value to your work?
- What do you think is good about Yammer?
- What advantages do you see with Yammer compared to other communication systems (internet, Facebook, email, etc.)?
- Technical problems with Yammer?
- What other problems do you see with Yammer?
- Do you always know who to ask or where to look for information related to your work?
- If you lack knowledge in order to perform your duties, where do you normally turn?
- On average, how much time do you spend looking for information related to your work?
- How much of the time you have to look for knowledge do you consider to be wasteful or ineffective?
- How do you react when you do not find knowledge/information that "should be available"?
- What consequences do you see when it is difficult to find the right knowledge/information? Other comments (optional)?

Diversity

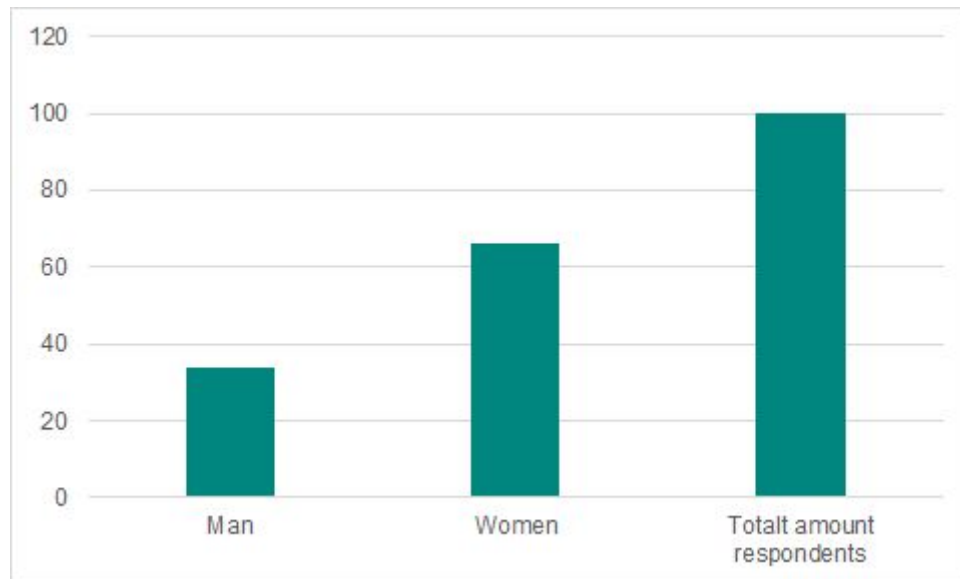


Figure 7

Man - amount of respondents	34
Woman - amount of respondents	66
Total amount of respondents	100

The respondents were majority female of the 100.

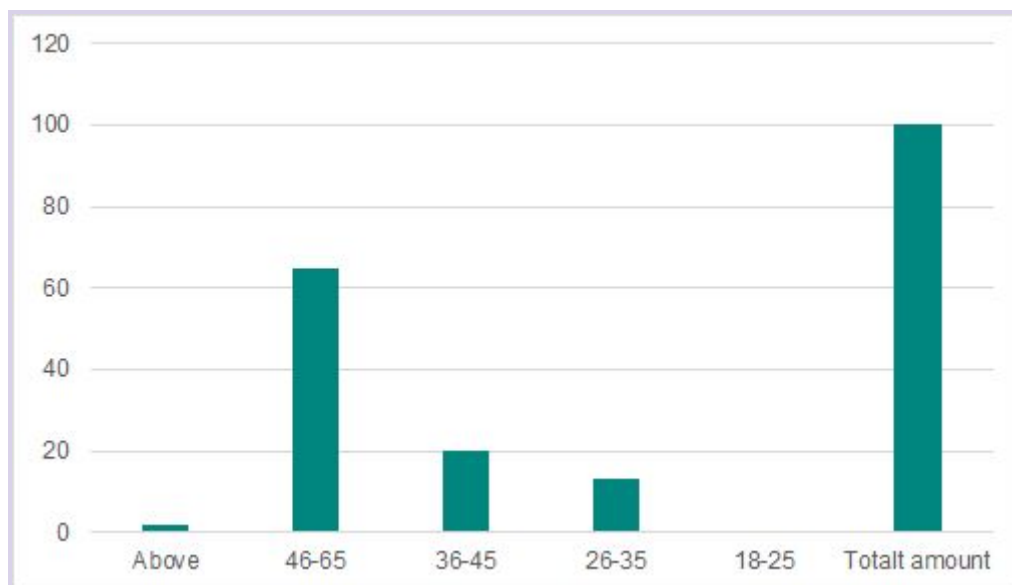


Figure 8

Above	2
Age 46-65	65
Age 36-45	20
Age 26-35	13
Age 18-25	0
Total amount respondents	100

The majority of the respondents were placed in the higher age category. More than triple the amount of the next lower category .

About 20% gave a final additional comment.

A majority of the respondents have some kind of “office job”. The top-five job categories are:

- Project manager, business developer (21%)
- Communications Officer (14%)
- Administrator (15%)
- Regional Development Officer (11%)
- IT-professional (6%)

45% work at the department *Koncernkontoret*, basically the headquarter of Region Västra Götaland.

19% work at one of the hospitals of Region Västra Götaland.

The remaining 36% of the respondents are quite evenly distributed among eight different departments.

Analysis

This chapter will analyse the answers from the survey in relation to theory and literature about knowledge management, and the aim of this paper.

Comments on the survey and bias:

The survey was published on Yammer, thus reaching only those already using Yammer. This creates a bias that has to be taken into account.

A majority of the responders, work at the department “Koncernkontoret” (45%), i.e. primarily staff working in the field of administration.

A disproportionate part of the respondents has the job position *communications officer*. This may be due to the fact that the survey was published by a person working at the communications department.

The survey was published as a *message* in one of the most popular Yammer-groups in RVG. Using the format *message* gives a larger impact compared to publishing an ordinary post. This probably helped to reach many users, even those who are not frequent users of Yammer.

The survey used both open-close types of questions. The output when the question had “free text” was interesting, as many respondents gave answers in their “own” words. Usually it is difficult to get respondents to write “Free text”, it could be because these types of questions came later in the survey after a few close-ended questions had been answered following the suggestions from M, le Duc (2007). As A, Persson (2016) suggests, a survey is easier to analyze if there are close-ended questions. The majority of the questions in this survey were of this sort, but with the use of multiple choice. The multiple choice gives the respondents the opportunity to answer with more than one answer, meaning that more information can be derived from the respondent. However without the use of priority between the options (as in this particular survey), it is difficult to judge what was the most important answer from the respondent.

Diversity

The majority of the respondents of the survey were women. Women selected more working titles in the survey as the men were the minority in the survey and also in the different working titles. It would be interesting to see if the answers differ depending on the role at RVG or if the answers are the same between the women having the same role as the men. This has not been analyzed more in this study as it was not the aim of the paper.

Regarding the age categories, the majority (65) were in the age category 46-65. This is interesting as mentioned by Paul M. Leonardi, 2017, it is often believed that social

networking tools would appeal to young professionals, but one can't assume they do per se. In this case study it seems we can endorse that statement, as Yammer doesn't seem to appeal to the younger employees at RVG. As the survey was voluntary, it could indicate that the survey did not reach the lower age category, why is an interesting study in the future. Yet another factor may be that the average age of the employees at *Koncernkontoret* is higher in comparison to RVG in general.

Use of Yammer

The second section of the questionnaire was about the use of Yammer in RVG, quantitatively and qualitatively.

- How do you use Yammer?
- How often do you use Yammer?
- What would make you use Yammer more often?
- To what extent does Yammer add value to your work?

Frequency of use

There are some 11,000 registered users of Yammer in RGV. Of these users, 100 did answer the survey, thus resulting in about 1% of potential responders (excluding the plus 40,000 employees with no active Yammer account). Out of the 100 answers, 72% *use Yammer several times a week*. Since the survey was only available for a week, this number is probably biased. However, the survey was published using the *message function* in Yammer, thus sending an email notification to about 1,200 users in RVG.

Work-related value of Yammer

The question *To what degree does Yammer contribute to your work?* gives that the respondents find a medium value of Yammer in their job. Why don't people find more value? What is the reason that some people find little or no value of Yammer? The answers or hints about this, is found to some extent in the answers to some of the open-ended questions such as *What would make you use Yammer more often?*

“What would make you use Yammer more often?”

Since the respondents on average only find a medium work-related value of Yammer, one may wonder about the underlying reasons for these numbers. This becomes clear when reading the responses to the open-ended question *What would make you use Yammer more often?*

Looking at these answers, we have identified three main categories of comments. These are: social aspects, quality & content, and leadership & integration.

Social aspects and engagement

Some comments describe the lack of activity and engagement. In order to get more value from this network, employees need their colleagues to be active. This relates to Collision, C. Parcell, G (2001) about people being an important part of knowledge management. Engagement from the persons using the technology is vital. Even though the technical platform is up and running, as in this case of Yammer, it is the people using it who creates the content. The endorsement of higher management is also an important factor for successful implementation and adoption.

Examples of comments:

- If my colleagues also would use Yammer.
- The fact that people would interact more, showing that they've read a post by liking, for example.
- If more people were active
- If more of my colleagues at the hospital used it.

Quality and content

Judging from the comments, the quality of the content in Yammer needs to become more "professional". Some comments indicate that Yammer is a social club for the *inner circle* of *IT guys, giving praise to each other*. It seems that many respondents want to use Yammer, and would do it if only the structure and quality of the content were better, or rather more relevant to their job.

Examples of comments:

- If there were more groups focused on my profession.
- Better structure in the feeds, less personal "chatting" between two people (keep it private), insignificant comments (ie everything does not have to be commented, consider if the comment really adds something), in "help desk/tips" similar cases: more reference to current routines, guidelines, documents etc if they exist, rather than writing a "personal version" in Yammer
- Less "Facebook feeling" with memes/gifs that seem unprofessional, and rather a sense of corporate networking where not just an "inner circle" converses.

Leadership and integration

The use of Yammer is voluntary in RVG, and this is indirectly highlighted in some of the answers. It seems to be a need for more involvement from management, and a proactive approach to the overall communication and information management.

For example, one comment points out possible opportunities with Yammer, but also for official support and promotion.

“(...) department promotes Yammer and its opportunities so that all of my unit's employees become part of it and that we also develop our own groups, as we spread out on 7-8 different units and locations (...)”

Other comments point out the fact that there are a plethora of channels, and that Yammer is just one of many, thus there is a need for better integration between the channels and more clarity concerning the use, status and hierarchy between the different communication channels and IT-systems.

Examples of comments:

- The presence of managers
- Better structure
- If Yammer had replaced other channels and that it would be used by the target groups I need to reach based on my assignments, and that these groups have access to and have adopted the tool.
- That my department promotes Yammer and its opportunities so that all of my unit's employees become part of it and that we also develop our own groups, as we spread out on 7-8 different units and locations in the region.
- If it became clearer how the channel should be used and that everyone uses it.

Knowledge management in general

The final part of the survey was about knowledge management and finding information in general.

Questions:

- Do you always know who to ask or where to look for information related to your work?
- If you lack knowledge of your duties, where do you normally turn?
- On average, how much time do you spend looking for information related to your work?
- How much of the time you spend searching for knowledge, do you consider to be wasteful or ineffective?
- How do you react when you do not find knowledge/information that "should exist"?
- What consequences do you see when it is difficult to find the right knowledge/information?

Finding information

Question: If you lack knowledge of your duties, where do you normally turn?

The option to this question was a multiple choice-answer, and many of the respondents chose all or many answers. This shows that managing information is a part of the job for most of the respondents. They do not rely on one source of information and consider it to be part of the job description to search for information. It may be a matter of browsing the organisation's intranet as well as using Google or consulting a trusted database related to their field of expertise. In this context, Yammer is just one of many tools used to find knowledge.

Not finding information

Some of the questions were related to not finding information. What strategies do the employees use when they do not find the sought-after information within a reasonable time-frame? What are the consequences of not finding information?

Most of the respondents seem to have a responsible and pragmatic strategy when not finding information in order to complete a task. A majority pick the answer that they will "complete the task anyway using my best judgement" and in addition, many also answer "I note what is missing and keep on searching when I have time".

Only two respondents did select or mention Yammer as an option when trying to find missing job-related information.

As consequences of not finding the right information, most respondents chose one or all of the answers Wasted working hours, Risk of mistakes and Frustration & stress. One respondent also mentions Yammer in this context:

"A positive consequence [of not finding information], can be that I find other information that may be useful, directly or at a later date. It seems that this often happens when I'm using Yammer."

Final optional comments

The last question in the survey was an optional field, allowing the respondent to leave an additional comment. About 20% of the respondents did use this option.

The final comments give emphasis to what has already been mentioned about the need for leadership, integration and better content and structure. In addition, the respondents of the final question seem to have one thing in common; they care about the information and knowledge management of the organisation. Concerning Yammer, some either like it as it while others see the potential with Yammer, even though they may be dissatisfied with the current state.

Yet another category of comments addresses the need for a more panoramic take on information and management and sharing of knowledge. The following comment illustrates this kind of opinion:

Yammer = "Go fish". It's great for sharing information with each other and giving tips, for example, how-to-trix in Excel or similar. Otherwise, whatever info I need for my job should be in a database where I can easily find the instructions, routines or similar. Protocols or similar, should also be readily available in a common interface such as sharepoint. This should be developed better and faster instead.

Finally, the following comment shows how a social network and peer-to-peer system is seen as competing channel to other formal channels such as the IT helpdesk function:

Yammer must not be a shortcut for RVG IT [IT helpdesk], and should not be used instead of the "case management system".

Discussion

The paper has focused on understanding the current situation of Yammer as a tool and on the perception of Yammer from a user perspective and the behavior of the users at RVG related to Yammer. Collison & Parcell bring to attention the mixture of process, technology and people, showing graphically that knowledge management is the area where these three pillars overlap. Having this approach in mind, it would be beneficial to compare the results of the survey with the initial intention and strategy in the business case that resulted in the implementation of the tool in the company.

A comparison between the expectations and ambitions of the leaders and managers for implementing Yammer and the actual results of the survey would be a source of improvement opportunities, a re-evaluation of the scope and a proposal for how to measure success. Was the scope implementing the social tools and technologies set based on the increasing trend of other companies having already adopted the tools? Or was there a rationale based on a solid business case, which is usually required by business owners when analyzing benefits and the performance value of technology implementation. And, if there was a business case, how were the cost-benefits identified and calculated?

Furthermore, it would be beneficial to understand if the management expectations from the users in relation to Yammer can be met, in relation to the required effort from the employees, effort in the form of time and resources and even motivation.

The method used for this assignment can be summarized in three main steps: scan the existing theory on knowledge management, scan for research done in the field of social media tools based on surveys of large companies and perform a survey for the current users of Yammer at RVG. The theory, the insights from other academic research and the data gathered from the survey at RVG has been compiled and analyzed with the purpose to put together a list of recommendations with pragmatic actions that RVG could take in order to reach the potentials that social media tools can offer in the field of knowledge management, by promoting employee collaboration and knowledge sharing. The recommendations are less dependent on the implementation of Yammer explicitly, they can be applied regardless of which tool RVG might decide to work with in the future.

While the survey is a useful tool to gather insights on the employees' perception and affection towards Yammer, other tools would have been able to provide qualitative data about the current situation at RVG: deep interviews, research on the published content, workshops.

One of the learnings is that the scope of the investigation needs to be narrow enough to be able to tackle the expectations and the time frame of the assignment. A social tool in the context of such a large organization would require much more effort to analyze in order to be able to take general conclusions. Nevertheless, even with the narrowed scope, RVG has

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received valuable insights and lessons from the survey and the analysis performed in this paper.

Conclusions and Recommendations

RVG has taken the step, like many other companies, to make Yammer available as a social network for knowledge sharing. While implementing the solution might be a fairly simple task with a low effort and little investment, implementing the tool to become part of the daily life at work for the employees, requires sustained efforts, a clear purpose and a plan for deployment and maintenance.

The results of the survey performed among the region's employees do not offer enough data to be able to conclude at a general level about Yammer at RVG as an enabler of self-organizing knowledge management in the company. Nevertheless, work that has been done in this assignment - to bring up the literature on the topic of knowledge management, to read research done on the topic and to gather some insights from the employees via a survey, made it possible to gather together a proposal of recommendations for the organisation.

Recommendations for implementing a company-wide social network

Below are the recommendations for an organisation such as RVG in relation to Yammer and using social networks for self organizing knowledge management. These recommendations are based on the result from the survey and conclusions from the literature about social networks in relation to knowledge management.

- Describe the purpose of Yammer tool, in the context of knowledge management within the organization and clearly communicate it to the employees, together with the ambitions and the potential benefits that can be gained by adopting the tool on a large scale.
- Identify and promote real examples in the company where Yammer has been used by employees to search records of knowledge, as good examples showing the benefits. Examples of benefits can be: time savings, improved collaboration among employees, knowledge sharing, avoiding duplication of work, making the same mistake, reinventing the wheel.
- Appoint digital leaders/moderators that will take an active role to maintain and continuously improve the motivation and usage of Yammer. It can be beneficial to have active roles of moderators to monitor the quality and relevance of the information posted.
- Define and publish clear and simple guidelines for behavior in Yammer (to avoid that the tool becomes more a social platform and less of a knowledge bank – for example, posts on private life, jokes, announcements). Setting clear group rules on behavior can make Yammer a safe environment where employees can open up and dare to ask

for help and engage in discussions. It takes certain trust and confidence for an employee to admit that he or she needs help to solve a problem and without a safe environment, the person might feel vulnerable and fear the loss of reputation as a knowledgeable person. It can be beneficial for the company to actively use other methods as a complement to the social media tools to support increase the connection and trust among employees, such as face-to face meetings, regular live sessions or network days, learning solutions in groups.

- Focus on creating groups, achieving the intended behavior and commitment of the employees and common goals that are agreed and understood by the users. When to keep the interaction one-to-one? When to bring it to the network?
- Understand the implications of the socio-demographics of the group members and tailor the implementation of Yammer based on the main profiles. For example, age and how to address the millenials; educational background and how to address the engineers versus communicators
- Avoid to create a cognitive link to the familiar social technologies such as Facebook and Twitter, by using the expressions “Facebook for the company” or “Twitter for the company
- Identify and address the bad experiences that the employees have encountered
- Reward the employees who behave as intended using the tool and contribute to the network
- Take actions to encourage and motivate third parties, other colleagues, managers, peers, to access and navigate the discussions in the networks as a way to improve both their explicit knowledge as well as their knowledge about who knows what and what others know. This can be particularly useful in large organizations or with multi-sites, where an employee, especially a new-comer may experience difficulties to find the needed contacts. Furthermore, it may contribute to boost innovation.
- Appoint a business owner within the company, to be responsible for Yammer at an aggregated level and able to understand and represent the needs from the three perspectives of process, technology and people.

These recommendations have the purpose to support achieving some of the great potential benefits that Yammer, as a social tool might offer: more engaged employees that will do an even greater job by communicating, collaborating and sharing their knowledge and experiences.

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Appendix

- Appendix 1 - History of Yammer
- Appendix 2 - Survey, questions (Swedish)
- Appendix 3 - Survey, complete results, excel format (Swedish)
- Appendix 4 - Survey, charts and translation of optional comments