

Replacing the water cooler: connecting through enterprise microblogging

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Abstract:

This paper, founded within Enterprise 2.0, knowledge management and informed learning theory, outlines the introduction of Yammer, an enterprise microblogging application at CPA Australia. The implementation and adoption process is discussed through usage analysis, and resulting outcomes through user success stories. Lessons learned provide a framework for organisations looking to adopt social networking tools within their own organisational environment.

Introduction

Since the introduction of 'status updates' on social networking sites such as Facebook, microblogging has become increasingly popular. Microblogging services allow users to publish and share brief update messages via multiple access points, across borders and time zones. Originally purposed to enhance friendship connections by providing information on moods and activities, the advent of platforms such as Twitter has seen microblogging evolve into a tool to build conversations, ask questions, share information, insights and rapidly spread news (Dawson, 2009; Gunther et. al., 2009). It has emerged to be one of the fastest growing web trends in 2009. In Australia alone microblogging platform Twitter, experienced a 6122% increase in unique visitors from June 2008 to June 2009 (comScore, 2009).

Enterprise microblogging and more broadly Enterprise 2.0 technologies can assist in addressing some issues of corporate scale in regard to enabling findability of corporate information and knowledge, through the immediacy of the organisational network (McAfee, 2006). Enterprise microblogging enables a safe space behind the firewall for an organisation to share information and converse. In addition, in replacing the water cooler, information and conversation shared via microblogging is stored and easily retrievable to all within the platform's population rather than existing fleetingly in the moment and stored within the individuals who participated in the exchange. This phenomenon refers to the notion of local knowledge of individuals and teams extending beyond boundaries and becoming part of the organisational global knowledge (Howard & Somerville, 2008). The potential for facilitating the work of distributed teams, improving transparency and collaboration, dealing with the expert finding problem, quick answers to questions and decrease in email are all cited advantages of microblogging (Gunther et. al., 2009).

CPA Australia has approximately 450 employees distributed across 16 offices in 11 countries. With a focus increasingly on working within a global marketplace, communicating, collaborating and sharing information across the business is paramount for organisational agility and maximum success. With a geographically dispersed staff, across multiple time zones, enterprise microblogging provides an opportunity for employees to connect, share and develop collegial relationships beyond the water cooler, regardless of location.

This paper, founded within Enterprise 2.0, knowledge management and informed learning theory, outlines CPA Australia's experience in introducing the social collaborative tool of enterprise microblogging. The implementation and adoption process will be discussed through usage analysis; and resulting benefits and challenges through user success stories. Finally, lessons learned will provide a framework for organisations looking to adopt a similar tool.

Foundation

Analogous to the concepts of Web 2.0 and Library 2.0, Enterprise 2.0 expresses the notion of creating the next version of the enterprise. Harvard Business School Professor Andrew McAfee (2006, p.23) coined the term in 2006, where he defined Enterprise 2.0 as 'the use of emergent social software platforms within companies, between companies and their partners or customers'. His core focus was on the

potential for new technologies to facilitate knowledge work in organisations that were previously not possible. Similarly, Dawson (2009, p.25) describes Enterprise 2.0 as combining two concepts: 'the application of emerging technologies including Web 2.0 and mobile; and establishing organisational structures and processes that will enhance organisational performance and success in a rapidly changing environment.' For the purpose of this paper, we use the following definition: 'Enterprise 2.0 uses Web 2.0 tools within the enterprise to enhance communication and generate business value. It is based upon opening communication lines and augmenting collaboration across organisational silos'.

Web 2.0 technologies provide the Enterprise 2.0 infrastructure, however the human element is critical to foster community driven content and transform the organisation for successful Enterprise 2.0 adoption (Dawson, 2009). First, a collaborative organisational culture needs to be developed in order for new collaborative tools to make a difference. Determining which tools to adopt is dependent on the perceived need and required outcome. Once collaborative tools are adopted and well utilised, organisational performance will be enhanced (Dawson, 2009).

The primary goal of Enterprise 2.0 is to assist organisations in becoming more flexible, adaptable, responsive and agile in an increasingly complex business environment (Dawson, 2009). It marks significant changes to internal and external collaboration, efficient practices, introducing new communication channels and moving beyond email, distributed work, and faster innovation (Dawson, 2009).

Many of the characteristics of Enterprise 2.0 are synonymous with key knowledge management concepts and goals including its ability to capture tacit knowledge, best practices and relevant experiences (McAfee, 2006); open sharing of information and ideas; transparency of knowledge and, as Jedd (2008, p.28) states, 'collaboration, collaboration, collaboration'.

In recent years, the field of knowledge management has shifted its focus significantly, toward investigating social networks and communities to understand the potential of advancing knowledge creation and transfer through social learning (Wenger & Snyder, 2000; Griffin, 2002; Stacey, 2004). This shift evolved from the growing realisation that knowledge is primarily constructed socially through formal and informal relationships amongst people over time (Jakubik, 2008). When social relationships are able to flourish in embedded workplace systems, organisational learning is activated, perpetuated and new knowledge created (Howard & Somerville, 2008). This is heightened with the advent of Web 2.0 and the plethora of social applications and systems available that enable knowledge sharing, creation and transfer to occur with ease. Web 2.0 delivers benefits by multiplying the opportunities for collaboration and allowing knowledge to spread more effectively (McKinsey, 2009).

In turn, this supports Christine Bruce's (2008) concept of informed learning, Bruce's most recent iteration to her information literacy research, which links information literacy with workplace performance (Goad, 2002). Bruce reasons that for potential learning to occur, information encounters must be contextualised, to activate and extend prior understanding. In amplifying Bruce's theories, Lloyd's (2004 & 2005)

research findings suggest that informed learning involves collaborative, socio-cultural practices within a context specific environment.

In the workplace, informed learning is about recognising that new learning experiences lead to understanding the organisation and world in new or more complex ways (Marton & Booth, 1997). From a holistic viewpoint, informed learning can be understood as a cyclical process of acquiring information for the purpose of using information for learning (Lupton, 2008). Information exchange and knowledge creation occurs within organisational culture through everyday social interactions with colleagues. Within the workplace, this might involve a variety of communication means including enterprise microblogging and other Web 2.0 enabled communications (Howard & Somerville, 2008). These technologies offer interactivity to bring more employees into daily contact with one another, regardless of location, and at a lower cost. When used effectively, they also encourage participation with others across the organisation, in projects and idea sharing, thus supporting organisational learning and deepening the organisation's knowledge (McKinsey, 2009).

This framework of Enterprise 2.0, knowledge management and informed learning provides a powerful foundation for introducing Web 2.0 and other collaborative tools within the workplace to enhance knowledge management practices, organisational learning, and workplace engagement and performance.

Implementation

Two major challenges that CPA Australia has been attempting to resolve for many years are the issues of a silo mentality between business units and a Melbourne-centric focus to projects; and problem solving within a growing global organisation. These issues continue to occur, as staff focus on the task at hand and are not afforded the opportunity or capacity to communicate with staff members in other business units or geographic locations.

Enterprise microblogging can assist in alleviating this problem. The original concept was for staff to share short status updates alerting others to what they are working on, a challenge they are working through or a success story they want to share. That update is then visible to all staff members to see and reply to.

CPA Australia chose Yammer (<http://www.yammer.com>) for their enterprise microblogging platform. Yammer is an online microblogging application that focuses on the notion of 'What are you working on?' to encourage conversation. Yammer offers a free or paid service. CPA Australia utilises the free version, which for the vast majority of organisations would be sufficient. It requires no technical setup, involving a simple sign up process and basic customisation, similar to setting up a profile on any social networking site. Each network restricts invited users by their email domain name. In the case of CPA Australia, only email addresses ending in @cpaaustralia.com.au are allowed to join our network.

Enterprise microblogging usage in CPA Australia started as a trial within the Knowledge Networks business unit in November 2008. Knowledge Networks understood that enterprise microblogging could prove to be extremely valuable to CPA Australia, and under the guidance of the organisation's corporate plan theme to

'utilise innovative mediums for knowledge exchange', tried the tool with a small group.

From November 2008 through to early February 2009, the number of users grew from 3 initially to approximately 38. These users came from areas as diverse as Knowledge Networks, Technology Business Unit, Events, and Publishing. Indications suggested it was proving to be useful in a number of scenarios to tap into the collective knowledge of the organisation, to assist with problem solving, technical questions, and finding organisational resources; sharing industry resources; what staff members are working on; and team wins. Each of these examples, Figures 1-4, occurred organically over the early adoption period.

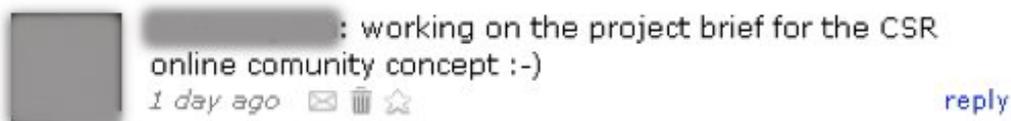


Figure 1: Sharing what a staff member is working on

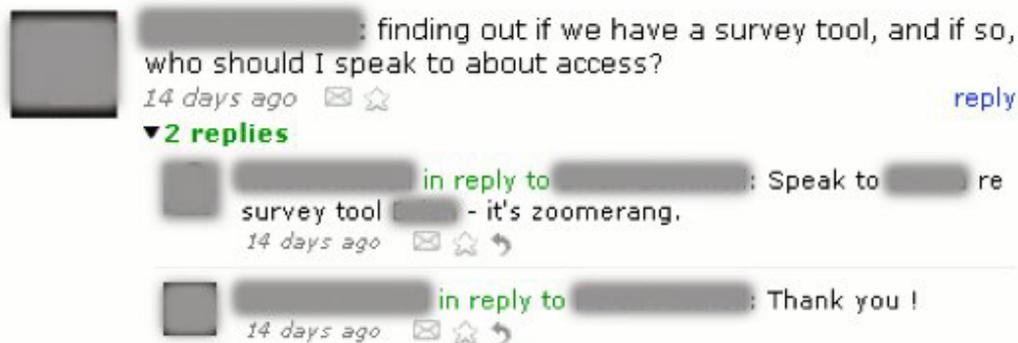


Figure 2: Asking for help finding organisational resources

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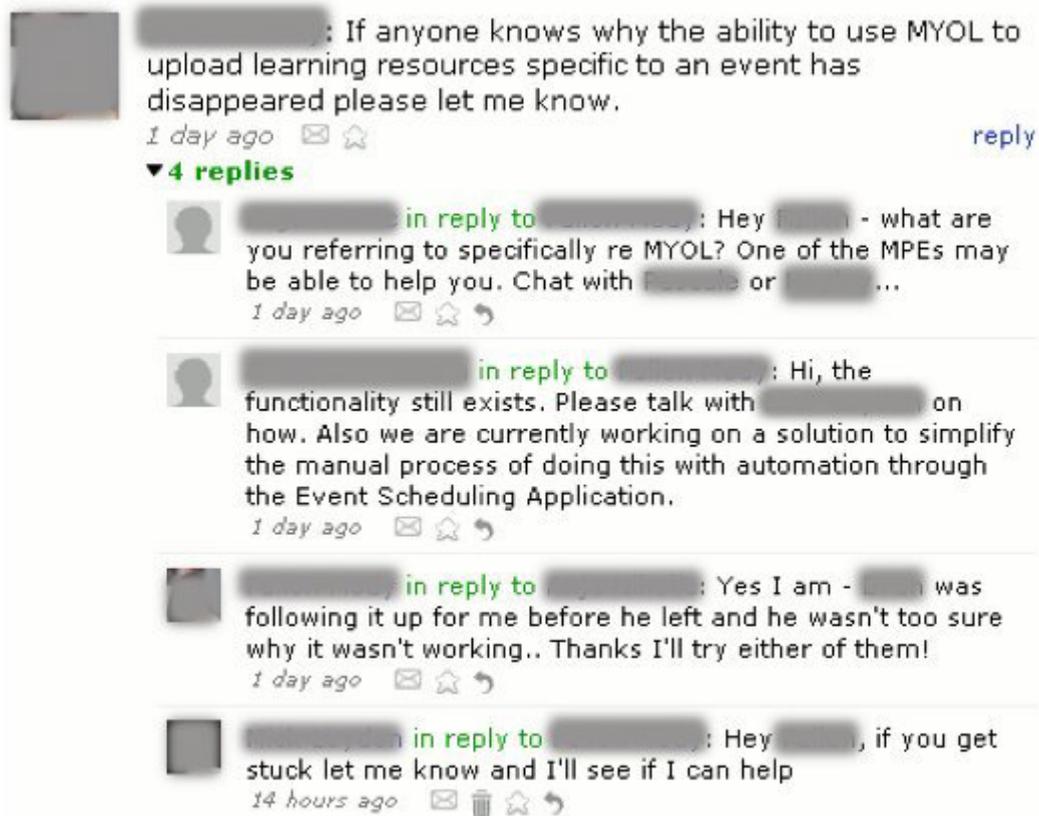


Figure 3: Technical question regarding an internal system



Figure 4: Announcing new products or services

Enterprise microblogging was introduced and intended to continue as a pilot involving a small group of users from various business units, however usage went 'viral'. This means that users invited other staff members who in turn invited other groups of staff members. This did not provide Knowledge Networks with the opportunity to follow regular procedures to formalise enterprise microblogging as a business system. However, the team embraced the opportunity to invite all staff members to participate in the Yammer community via messaging on CPA Australia's intranet. The invitation was voluntary, and with the exception of behavioural guidelines no boundaries drawn for usage of the platform. In addition, Knowledge Networks offered support and coaching to those who wished to participate but wanted some guidance in how to join and where to start.

After the invitation was published, users jumped to 268 members, inclusive of 19 groups, representing more than 50% of CPA Australia employees. This spike in both messages and new users can be seen in month 5 in Figure 5 below.

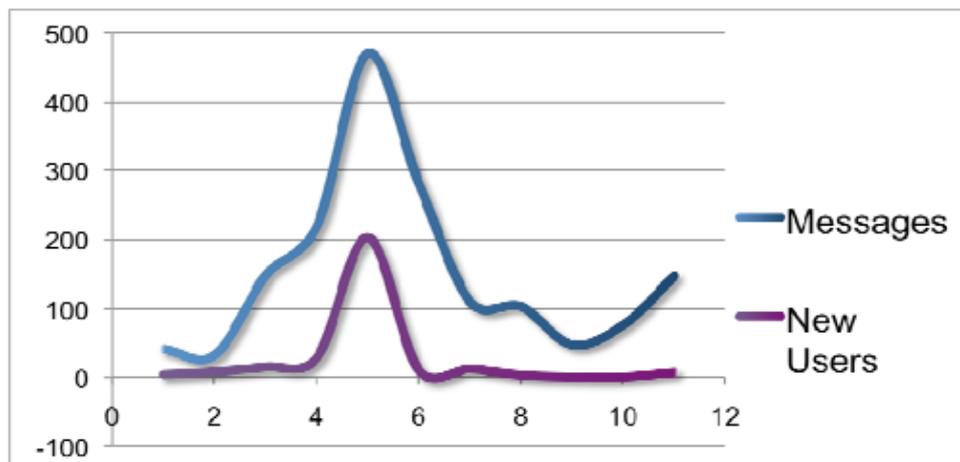


Figure 5: Number of messages and new users per month since Yammer implementation

Neilson (2006) introduced the following participation inequality rule in regard to social networks and online communities:

- 90% of users are lurkers (those who read or observe but do not contribute)
- 9% of users contribute from time to time
- 1% of users participate a lot and account for most contributions.

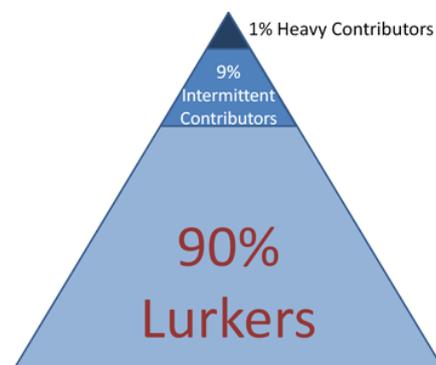


Figure 6: Community participation pyramid (Neilson, 2006)

However, CPA Australia's experience in regard to enterprise microblogging yields the following participation:

- 65% of users are lurkers, and have not contributed at all
- 28% of users are intermittent, contributing under 20 times since implementation of Yammer
- 7% of users are heavy or active contributors where active is defined as one who has posted more than 20 times.

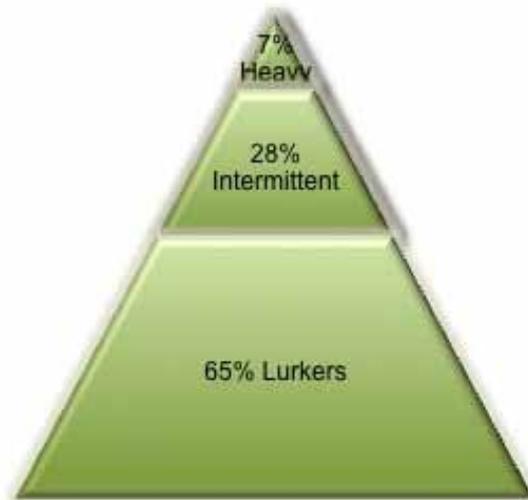


Figure 7: CPA Australia's enterprise microblogging participation pyramid

The notional concept is similar between Nielsen's rule and CPA Australia's experiential results, where the majority of people, in the case of CPA Australia, two thirds, observe proceedings but do not participate and the smallest percentage provide the greatest contribution.

No further promotion or prompting of Yammer has occurred since the initial intranet invitation in March 2009, nor has Yammer been formalised as a business system or integrated into everyday work practices. Although Knowledge Networks maintains ownership over the platform, the business unit is not responsible for raising organisational support for the application. In addition, appropriate potential owners do not have the capacity and are not willing to adopt, raise awareness and drive enterprise microblogging forward for the benefit of the organisation. As a result, Yammer is still in place as a viral under-the-radar initiative within the organisation, despite growing usage by senior managers and obvious potential for development. As Figure 5 demonstrates, the number of total users continues to grow, albeit at a slower pace, with 297 users as of January 2010. Of note is that although usage and user growth dropped off significantly after the initial adoption spike, after the 9th month participation once again has commenced rising.

Outcomes

When respondents to a recent McKinsey (2009) survey were asked about the business benefits their companies have gained as a result of using Web 2.0 technologies, they most often report greater ability to share ideas; improved access to knowledge experts; and reduced costs of communications, travel, and operations. CPA Australia's experience resonates with the McKinsey survey, with the introduction of enterprise microblogging resulting in several organisational benefits.

Organisational learning

All the benefits of enterprise microblogging further organisational learning. This is supported through staff achieving ambient awareness of organisational activities, increased access to and collaboration with other workers, and the provision of a forum for listening and observing coworkers within an informal environment. This in turn, has led to greater workplace engagement for some and added to organisational efficiency and performance. In particular this is significant for newly recruited staff members attempting to understand the complexities of CPA Australia, and achieved increased engagement and more proficient understanding of business activities within their first three months.

Knowledge sharing

As an enterprise microblog is a one-to-many or many-to-many communications medium, every message posted is visible to the CPA Australia network. The benefits of this visibility are three fold: firstly, information posted is available to everyone and thus all benefit from the knowledge communicated rather than a limited audience, as would occur with an email or water cooler conversation. Secondly, the microblog keeps key information in a readily accessible place and is searchable, and as a result augments corporate memory and acts as a repository of resources and organisational information, as shown in Figure 8. Lastly, the visibility reduces the risk of inappropriate content being posted.

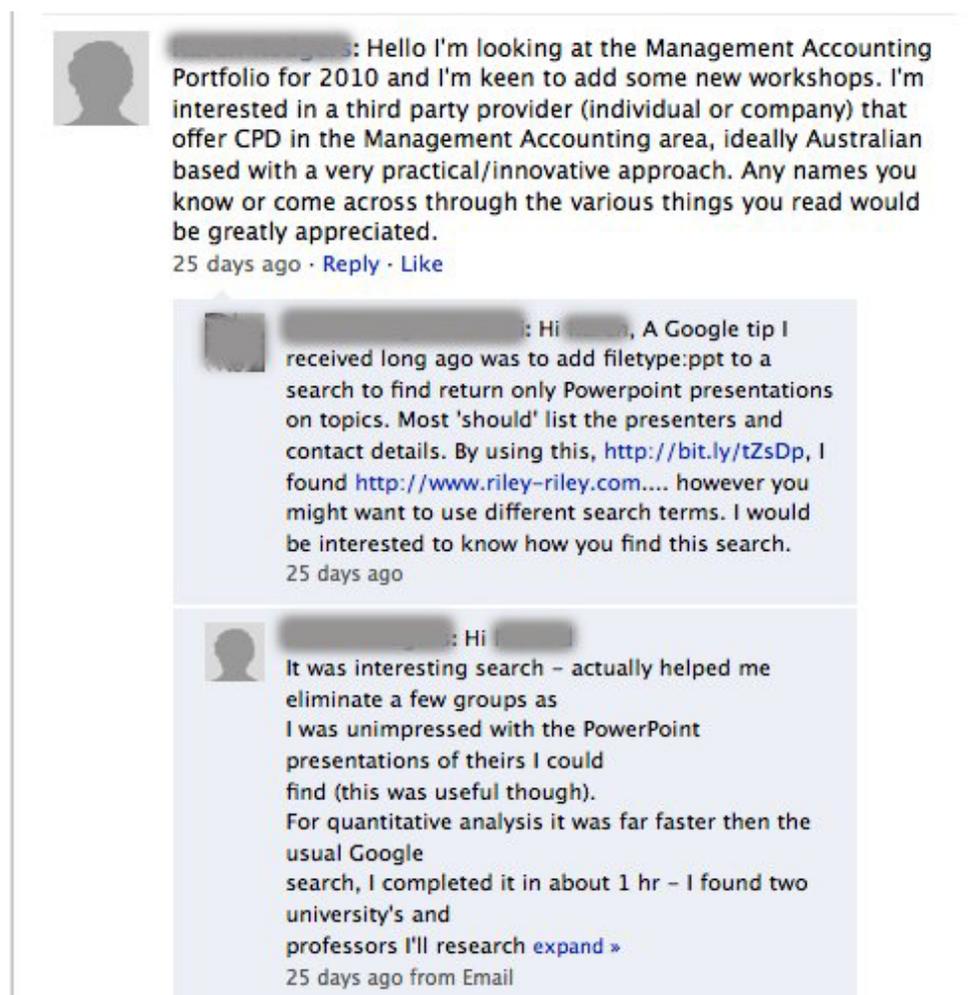
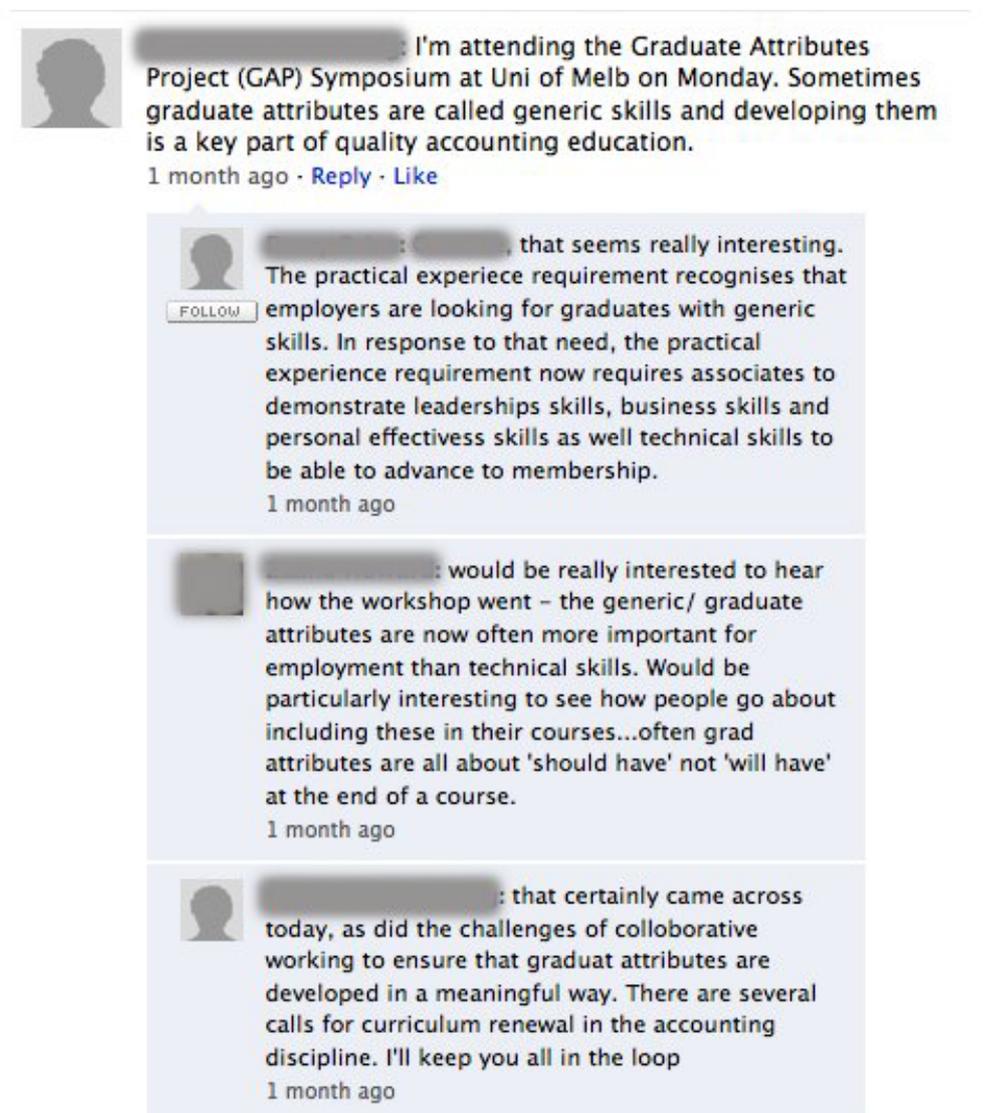


Figure 8: Example of knowledge sharing

Flattened communication

As mentioned previously, CPA Australia suffers from the silo effect of business units, which can be extremely detrimental in an organisation that operates across the globe. In McKinsey's (2009) recent survey on how companies are benefiting from Web 2.0, half of respondents reported that 'Web 2.0 technologies have fostered in-company interactions across geographic borders; 45 percent cite interactions across functions, and 39 percent across business units.'

This is true for CPA Australia in all accounts. Enterprise microblogging has contributed to relationship building across business units, within shared office buildings, across states and countries. The example in Figure 9 demonstrates this, where a discussion occurred between three staff members across three separate business units and two states that would rarely if ever have neither the need nor opportunity to converse. Employees are now less reliant on supervisors and managers to establish communications, and in turn collaboration, between business units. It has enabled staff to have a broader reach and communicate with and learn from others whom they previously would not even think of or know to connect with.



The screenshot shows a social media thread with four posts. The first post is from a user with a grey silhouette profile picture, stating they are attending the Graduate Attributes Project (GAP) Symposium at Uni of Melb on Monday and discussing the importance of generic skills in accounting education. The second post is a reply from another user, also with a grey silhouette profile picture, discussing the practical experience requirement and the need for graduates to have leadership, business, and personal effectiveness skills. The third post is a reply from a third user, with a grey silhouette profile picture, expressing interest in hearing about the workshop and the importance of generic attributes for employment. The fourth post is a reply from a fourth user, with a grey silhouette profile picture, discussing the challenges of developing graduate attributes in a meaningful way and the need for curriculum renewal in accounting.

[Profile Picture] : I'm attending the Graduate Attributes Project (GAP) Symposium at Uni of Melb on Monday. Sometimes graduate attributes are called generic skills and developing them is a key part of quality accounting education.
1 month ago · Reply · Like

[Profile Picture] : [Redacted], that seems really interesting. The practical experience requirement recognises that employers are looking for graduates with generic skills. In response to that need, the practical experience requirement now requires associates to demonstrate leadership skills, business skills and personal effectiveness skills as well technical skills to be able to advance to membership.
1 month ago

[Profile Picture] : [Redacted] would be really interested to hear how the workshop went – the generic/ graduate attributes are now often more important for employment than technical skills. Would be particularly interesting to see how people go about including these in their courses...often grad attributes are all about 'should have' not 'will have' at the end of a course.
1 month ago

[Profile Picture] : [Redacted] that certainly came across today, as did the challenges of collaborative working to ensure that graduate attributes are developed in a meaningful way. There are several calls for curriculum renewal in the accounting discipline. I'll keep you all in the loop
1 month ago

Figure 9: Example of flattened communication

Questions and answers

In a complex organisation like CPA Australia, it can often be difficult to know who the right person is to talk to about a particular issue, where the resource you require is located, etc. As the example in Figure 10 demonstrates, it is not always feasible, nor appropriate, to send an email to all staff or telephone multiple people for assistance in problem solving or to share a useful resource. One of the greatest benefits of enterprise microblogging has been the opportunity to ask a question to a broad audience to receive quick responses, locate expertise and unlock organisational knowledge silos without requiring previous social connection (Dawson, 2009).



The screenshot shows a social media thread with the following content:

- Question:** [Redacted] : One of our NSW members is interested in seeing how CPA can support indigenous Australians who would like to/are in the accounting profession. Does anyone know who would be the best contact?
2 months ago · Reply · Like
- Answer 1:** [Redacted] : Hi [Redacted],
2 months ago from Email
- Answer 2:** [Redacted] : Hi [Redacted], Did you know CPA Australia offers scholarships to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders? You can find out more information here: <https://www.cpaaustralia.co...> If you need to speak to someone about the scholarships then [Redacted] would be the best person to speak to.
2 months ago from Email
- Answer 3:** [Redacted] : CPA Australia sponsors up to five scholarships for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. These scholarship assist Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders to meet the educational requirements for CPA status. The scholarship entitles recipients to exemption from all CPA Program segment fees and first year's free membership of CPA Australia at Associate level. See our website: <https://www.cpaaustralia.co ...>
2 months ago
- Answer 4:** [Redacted] : Hi [Redacted], have you contacted someone from CSR BU eg [Redacted]? I'd go there 1st Cheers
2 months ago from Email
- Answer 5:** [Redacted] : [Redacted], Another way would be to investigate a possibility of forming a discussion group. Simple to start up, inexpensive and where members speak to members and help one another. Could be difficult to locate on IMIS but could put expression of interest in CPA Update.
2 months ago
- Answer 6:** [Redacted] : Hi [Redacted], Thanks for that great suggestion – I really want to help the member because it's such an important area. Best wishes
2 months ago from Email

Figure 10: Example of a question and answer

The overall effect of being connected, despite the small population of participants, is an increased sense of community across the organisation, particularly felt by those

not based in the Melbourne Head Office. Knowledge sharing has proliferated, and people providing information about their various job roles and tasks has resulted in greater understanding of organisational complexities. Groups in particular flourished, whether or not purposed for a team or project, resulting in a reduction in email, enhanced communication, increased efficiencies, and a higher level of transparency and visibility of work.

Lessons learned

Discussing lessons learned by CPA Australia will provide a broad framework of consideration for other organisations looking to implement similar initiatives. This includes practices for purposing, creating and maintaining a flourishing and self sustaining enterprise microblogging service.

When implementing any social media or Enterprise 2.0 initiative the Knowledge Networks team uses Li and Bernoff's (2008) POST strategy. This is a systematic process of consideration:

- **People:** What is your organisation ready for? How will they engage? What are they already doing?
- **Objectives:** What are your goals? What are you trying to achieve? What issue are you attempting to address?
- **Strategy:** What is your plan – for immediate implementation and for the future? How will you measure success?
- **Technology:** What applications do you need to build? Taking into consideration the other three points, what technology best suits the outcome required?

In this initiative for introducing enterprise microblogging, Knowledge Networks had sufficiently considered the people of CPA Australia, the project objectives and required technology; however, they had failed to develop a strategy past implementation. The following lessons all originate from the strategy step of the POST process.

Lesson 1: Determine ownership

Ensure when you commence a project that there is an owner post project end. Knowledge Networks commenced and implemented the project, and continue to maintain ownership over the platform; however, there is no ongoing owner to gain high level organisational support to move forward and for Yammer to be adopted as a business system. It is imperative to determine an owner, and further to this, consider who that person should be according to the outcome (Li & Bernoff, 2008).

Lesson 2: Think about measurement and ROI up front

At some point you will be required to justify the project, even if there are no associated costs. Quantitative measures can be considerably easy to determine; however, the true value in Enterprise 2.0 initiatives is in the qualitative value. This may be as simple as capturing success stories, or as complex as determining sentiment, influence and the like. It is critical to build in measurements from the commencement of the project, even if they are a guesstimate or broad expectation of use. This can then be adjusted and evolved over time as the project continues and the real measurements become apparent.

Lesson 3: Be ready for what may happen

When planning it is acceptable to commence small, but ensure your plan is scalable and has sufficient room to grow. In other words, think through the consequences of your strategy. CPA Australia did not expect nor plan for the success of Yammer, and as a result its ongoing potential has for the time being been curbed whilst issues of ownership, resourcing and future plans are decided to sustain the ongoing growth. Planning should not hamper the implementation or project energy; however, it is important all elements are considered to ensure ongoing longevity.

Lesson 4: Integrate initiatives into work practices

Integrating initiatives into work practices also assists in increasing adoption. McKinsey's (2009) Web 2.0 survey confirmed that successful adoption requires that use of tools, such as enterprise microblogging, be integrated into user's workflow. At present, Yammer is not integrated with any of CPA Australia's other systems. As a result, it requires staff to remember to visit the site rather than be prompted. Ideally, it would be visible amongst other organisational systems, with at a minimum a link from the intranet. In addition, greater role modelling from senior managers would aid adoption (McKinsey, 2009), as this implies permission for employees to participate.

Lesson 5: Make participation as simple as possible

Adoption will be aided if you ensure the process for participation is easy. To start with, when choosing a technology solution, ensure the joining process is effortless. In addition to Yammer not being linked to from any other CPA Australia resource or system, once people get there it must be simple to join, simple to get started and simple to work out what it's all about.

Secondly, before opening the application to the masses it is worth piloting it amongst a few, even if for a short amount of time. Amongst other things, this will provide an example for others in how people are using it and assist them in getting started. As McAfee (2006, p.27) states 'You have to give people a starting point that they can react to and modify; you can't just give them a blank workspace and say, 'Use this now''.

Thirdly, establish users with guidelines for what constitutes appropriate posting. This provides staff with clear boundaries and counter intuitively increases the chance of participation as people are immediately clear and comfortable with what is acceptable and expected of them within the space.

Lastly, create reasons for people to use new systems, for example team communication or project updates. Once they have the opportunity to experience the value, there is more likelihood for ongoing adoption.

Conclusion

The CPA Australia experience supports and synthesises existing evidence rather than creating new insights. It is a story of starting an initiative, observing what happens and then determining the next action. Dawson (2009, p.112) states, '...Enterprise 2.0 implementation cannot be mandated, and must emerge from users...Staff will discover for themselves tools in ways that help them do their jobs well. They will inform others of their successes, and the use of the tools will spread as they are found to be useful'. This is certainly the case for CPA Australia's story of implementing enterprise microblogging. As an under the radar system, it is solely sustained and maintained by those users who find the value in it for their own work practices and champion its use with others.

Enterprise microblogging has not replaced the water cooler at CPA Australia but instead extended it, providing staff the opportunity to connect beyond the geographic, synchronous and often one-to-one constraints of the water cooler encounter. Staff are now able to exchange easily with others across CPA Australia's 16 offices and 11 countries, broadcasting and conversing on a one-to-many basis enabling ongoing knowledge sharing, creation and transferral. The findings in this paper are adaptable and scalable to any institution looking to implement enterprise microblogging or other Enterprise 2.0 initiatives internally within their organisation to extend conversation beyond the water cooler.

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