Destination Social Business: Exploring an Organization's Journey with Social Media, Collaborative Community and Expressive Individuality

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Abstract

This paper delineates the main characteristics of the evolution of the organization as a social business in response to the socially networked marketplace. We advance the notion that the modern day firm is increasingly organized as a community according to the principle of collaboration. The main message is that the prominence of organizational structure is not redundant but needs to be complemented by collaborative community in response to market demands. In order to fulfill this complementary role, the concept of organization is profoundly changing. Based on recent theorizing, we review the role of collaborative community as a key characteristic of social business, provide an overview of its principles, show how social media can effectively facilitate and support collaborative community, and introduce the concept of expressive individuality. We provide illustrative examples that feature Dell. We conclude by identifying an agenda for further academic inquiry, and by specifying a large number of issues that researchers may address.

Introduction

Organizing effectively for social media excellence brings the promise of fundamentally transforming organizations by allowing them to harness the power of mass collaboration, to break the "silos," and to reap the benefits of more fluid configurations. Business leaders and scholars have recognized the penalties imposed by the increasing specialization and division of labor that inevitably takes place as organizations grow and become more complex (Wren and Bedeian 2009). Individual worker contributions are limited to the areas where they work. Different departments of the same corporation often evolve into "silos" that do not communicate and, at least occasionally, develop adversarial relationships. Customers are treated as outsiders and, in some cases, may not be heard from at all. In the end, many potentially great ideas and knowledge go wasted.

Social media, by their nature (n.b., or their construction when thought of as a technology rather than a principle), enable broad communication and collaboration (e.g., see Li and Bernoff 2009). They can facilitate organizations to tap into the collective intelligence, creativity and passion of employees, of customers, and of partners for practically every important business decision (Bradley and McDonald 2011); and they help improve organizational productivity throughout the value chain (Chui et al. 2012). Social media applications are transforming the ways that companies carry out many processes, such as product

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development, marketing, sales, customer service, staffing and change management. A recent Forrester Research report states that the majority of large firms (i.e., those with 1,000 or more employees) plan on deploying between three to seven collaboration technologies, while smaller firms (under 1,000 employees) plan to use one to three collaboration technologies (Lavenda 2011).

Although the number of companies using collaborative technologies is increasing, a recent survey by Gartner (2013) finds that 90% of collaborative-technology initiatives fail because they follow a worst practice approach of "provide and pray" (i.e., *provide* for use a social technology and *pray* that something good comes of it). The most common barrier to success is the lack of a compelling purpose for using a collaboration tool. At the present time, there are many more questions than answers with respect to the best ways in which an enterprise should integrate, or adapt to, the relatively new phenomenon of social media.

Consensus is yet to form on how responsibility for social media should be allocated within organizations, how social media activities should be funded and governed, and what broader changes with regard to structures, processes, leadership, training, and culture, are needed to effectively harness the potential of this transformative force. Organizations are calling out for guidance in developing an approach and a set of coordinated activities that will lead them down a path to becoming "social."

In this article, we provide initial guidance for leveraging social media and employing principles and processes of collaborative community with expressive individuality in order to help enterprises move farther down the road toward transforming into social businesses. We begin by introducing useful theory and principles. Next, we identify a part of this theory which has a unique element that can be leveraged well with social media, and we extend this theory based on processes enhanced by social media. Then, we present illustrative examples of principles put into practice by an organization that has immersed itself in social media and has transformed itself into a social business. We conclude with a section that discusses moving forward toward transforming into more of a social business, and directions for future research.

Foundational Theory and Principles

The concept of "social business" that is related to social/collaborative technologies – as opposed to that related to "social good" (Yunus 2007) – emerged recently (see Kim 2009). Its meaning is still evolving as practice itself evolves and informs. However, there does appear to be some convergence and overlap among respected sources in identifying important core principles of social business.

Deloitte highlights "social tools that drive collaboration and information sharing across the enterprise and integrate social data into operational processes" (see Kiron et al. 2013). Peter Kim (2009) declares that "We need to improve…the way we work and connect with co-workers, customers, suppliers, shareholders, and other system participants. Social technologies should change the world of work — applied to not just to marketing and IT, but also HR, finance, legal, and every other functional area. And potentially change the functions that exist at all." IBM (2013)

states that an important part of becoming a social business is recognizing that "social business technologies help people connect, communicate and share information." In their seminal article on social media, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) emphasize "It's all about participation, sharing, and collaboration." Common themes include collaboration, information sharing, engagement throughout the enterprise, and the use of social/collaborative technologies.

These perspectives suggest that a community process is beneficial for guiding a firm in becoming a social business. Thus, in the remainder of this section, we overview important aspects of community, such as collaboration and knowledge sharing. Then, after this, we identify a particular type of community, collaborative community, which has a distinct element that can be used to effectively leverage social media and guide an organization along a pathway to becoming a social business.

Community, Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft

The concept of community (e.g., McMillan and Chavis 1986; Sarason 1974; Tönnies 1887; Wellman 1979), such as communities of practice (e.g., Brown and Duguid 1991; Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998; Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder 2002) and virtual communities (e.g., Castells 1996; Rheingold 1993; Wellman et al. 1996), has been the subject of academic inquiry for quite some time. New insights are still emerging as the notion of community is evolving. Numerous studies have been dedicated to discussing definitional issues and outlining classification schemes. However, debate persists on reaching consensus.

A thought leader in community scholarship, the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies (1887) made a fundamental definitional distinction between two concepts that have traditionally marked two ends of a continuum. He introduced the concept of *Gemeinschaft*, denoting small, intimate and more exclusive communities, and contrasted this with the notion of *Gesellschaft*, denoting larger, more rational and individualistic collectives, which is commonly referred to as "civil society." In Gemeinschaft, people's behavior is regulated largely by social norms or beliefs about appropriateness and responsibility, and a sense that is felt towards the *collective*. Ties are based on personal relationships and status is thereby ascribed. Tönnies stated that Gemeinschaft can be based on a shared place and beliefs as well as family ties. Conversely, Gesellschaft pertains to associations in which *self-interest* is the prevalent modus operandi, and status is achieved on the basis of selective incentives. In addition to society as a whole, organizations are often mentioned as an example of Gesellschaft, as employees and managers are commonly tied together by rational or commercial motives. In Gesellschaft, social cohesion is primarily based on a fine-grained division of labor.

Social Media and Technologies

Contemporary scholars studying communities, whether offline or virtual, posit that the rapid growth in online community and social technologies can be attributed to people's sense of loss at both the personal and societal levels that started with the demise of Gemeinschaft. It is often argued that social media

technologies and platforms enjoy immense popularity because they enable people to anchor and express themselves, find support, and regain a sense of identity. Online, people are able to connect with similar others and provide social support by exchanging information and maintaining friendships (Bressler and Grantham 2000; Fernback and Thompson 1995). In this way, social media bring back a sense of Gemeinschaft.

Hierarchy, Knowledge, Silos, and Collaboration

It has been noted that the Gesellschaft-based notion of "organizations as units" is increasingly hampering our understanding of the modern firm (Davis and McAdam 2000, p 214). According to Clemens (2005, p 352), "the imagery of the centralized, rationalized bureaucracy is increasingly unable to capture the empirical world confronted by organizational analysts." With firms shifting from a production orientation to a networked structure where boundaries between company and market are increasingly porous (DiMaggio 2003), value is created increasingly through collaboration and the generation and sharing of knowledge, and decreasingly through material products (e.g., see Vargo and Lusch 2004). However, the majority of medium to large-sized firms are divided by function, organizational unit and geographic location. Top down, hierarchical structures often challenge the flow of information and the sharing of knowledge within the firm, and, thus, can make it relatively complicated for employees to connect, share and support each other through collaboration (e.g., Tsai 2001, 2002).

The contemporary notion of markets as conversations, as voiced in Cluetrain Manifesto (Levine et al. 2000) where social networks play a pivotal role, has fueled the need to pay renewed attention to issues of cross-silo collaboration. An effect of silos or stovepipes is that information tends to be exchanged vertically within a particular department or business unit, in the interest of task interdependence and functional efficiency. This challenges lateral, company-wide interaction, communication and information/knowledge sharing (e.g., Goh 2002). Organizational silos can duplicate functions, as departments maintain their own systems and data, and silos can make it challenging to obtain an enterprise-wide view of operations. In addition, they can hinder innovation and diminish organizational responsiveness (e.g., Cooper 1999). Further, it is not uncommon for functional units in the firm to guard information and treat other departments as out-groups.

Knowledge Sharing and Customer Centricity

Two fundamental developments in modern society have reduced the effectiveness of silo-based organizational structures: the importance of knowledge, and the increased sophistication of consumers (e.g., see Gulati 2007). Increasingly, firms compete on value that can be derived from knowledge. For firms that depend on their capabilities to listen to the demands of their stakeholders, it is important to have a culture that supports open access to relevant knowledge and expertise within the firm. And, correspondingly, it is important to enable platforms that allow employees from different disciplines to work together. These platforms can be used to support the exchange of both formal and informal knowledge (e.g., Zack 1999). A second development, facilitated by social media, is the increased sophistication of business and consumer market places. This has increased the power of the customer to a substantial degree (e.g., Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004; Labrecque et al. 2013), and the need for firms to develop a more flexible customer-centric approach (e.g., Sheth, Sisodia, and Sharma 2000) where the needs of customers should be the ultimate driver in creating value. Enterprise 2.0 technologies help firms stimulate cross-silo collaboration and improve responsiveness to networked markets.

Collaborative Community

As discussed above, many scholars identify the importance of developing a community, or community of practice, that emphasizes collaboration, knowledge sharing, and customer centricity/focus. A compelling perspective, which is consistent with these elements and offers a unique element which can be leveraged well through social media/technologies, is that of collaborative community (e.g., Adler, Heckscher, and Prusak 2011; Heckscher and Adler 2006). A unique aspect in collaborative community is that high levels of both Gemeinschaft (i.e., collectivism) and Gesellschaft (i.e., individualism) can be obtained, rather than assuming that workers' behaviors fall somewhere along a continuum from selflessness/collectivism to self-centeredness/individualism. It is this unique element that leads us to use collaborative community for exhibiting a passage to transforming into a social business. Further, it is this element upon which we build to propose an extension based on capabilities of social technologies, the concept of expressive individuality.

Key Principles of Collaborative Community

Before detailing the principles, we want to clarify a distinction between two terms that are often used interchangeably when describing communities. *Cooperation* and *collaboration* both involve individuals/members/employees working together or sharing information to, ultimately, resolve problems and achieve goals. However, cooperation assumes individual interests among each party (i.e., one cooperates with another to solve his or her problem), and collaboration assumes a shared interest/focus among all participants (i.e., community members work together on a shared problem). In addition, cooperation tends to occur in a context of pre-established or existing problems, and collaboration tends to involve creating something new in support of a shared goal. Hence, a community is not necessarily collaborative.

Adler, Heckscher, and Prusak (2011) identify four main principles of a collaborative community: 1) define and build a shared purpose, 2) cultivate an ethic of contribution, 3) develop scalable processes for coordination, and 4) create an infrastructure that values and incentivizes collaboration.

Shared Purpose

Shared purpose is central to the so-called power of balance paradigm, in which the development of the self is shaped relative to the development of collective entities (Torbert 2010). According to Torbert (2010), a sense of shared purpose reflects

the evolutionary process by which members of the organization develop towards a conscious appropriation of the possibility of collaboration in the interest of organizational performance.

Collaborative communities combine the talents of the individual with the strength and supportive benefits of the community. The uniting principle is to achieve a balance between pure self-interest and altruism. The balance is achieved through developing a mutual and social sense of purpose and trust. Departing from an "organizational" vision, this united sense of purpose draws its strength from defining the responsibilities (and challenges) of all employees in delivering the key elements that define the success of the group/organization. That is, "a description of what everyone in the organization is trying to do" (Adler, Heckscher, and Prusak 2011, p 5).

A shared purpose does not emphasize business goals or platitudes (e.g., grow 10% each year). It reflects a shared understanding of what everyone is trying to do. This, in turn, becomes part of the organizational culture and language, and helps define at an operational level how the group will achieve success. For example, everyone at Zappos is aligned to provide the best customer service possible, and follows a set of core values engrained in its culture (e.g., deliver WOW through service, create fun and a little weirdness, build open and honest relationships through communication — see the entire list online at http://about.zappos.com/our-unique-culture/zappos-core-values). This has led to operational decisions, such as allowing customer service agents to talk with customers for any amount of time (n.b., the record length of call is over 10 hours) and about any appropriate topic, including those that exclude the products sold by Zappos!

A shared purpose of this nature is not necessarily a short term aim that is easy to achieve. Indeed, it can take years to realize (n.b., part of this may be due to the processes themselves related to becoming a collaborative community) and careful hiring. Finding a shared purpose is challenging, organic, and subject to change as part of an ongoing debate among organizational members who need to be committed to participation.

Contribution Focus

An ethic of contribution encapsulates a set of core values that prioritizes making a contribution to and working within the team, higher than individual control, results, and responsibility (n.b., although, certainly, they are not necessarily in discord at all times). In addition, this ethic includes eliciting the best contributions from everyone based on their strengths/weaknesses, rather than relying on a few "most-capable" individuals or stars. For example, professional basketball legend Wilt Chamberlain, a prolific offensive scorer and defensive force, who had some of the most notable individual statistical performances in NBA history (e.g., scored 100 points in a game, averaged more than 50 points per game in one season, led the league in rebounding 11 times), was asked to place more emphasis on his passing and defensive skills for the good of the 1971–1972 Los Angeles Lakers team (given their makeup and strategy). He did so, averaging less than 20 points per game for the first time in his career, and it yielded the team an NBA championship, which had alluded them during his previous years on the Lakers.

In addition, the type of trust necessary to support this principle is different from that in other types of contexts. In traditional contexts, trust may be based on one's following of the (cultural) rules (e.g., wearing the "right" type of outfit, arrive by nine and leave no earlier than the boss). Trust in collaborative communities is based more on the extent to which employees believe that others are able and willing to contribute to the shared purpose.

Process Management and Coordination

In order for people to contribute to the shared purpose, and each other, it is crucial to implement a process that aligns the shared purpose among and within projects, teams and tasks. To achieve this requires "interdependent process management" mechanisms, which are comprised of a family of process management techniques, such as kaizan and process mapping. In essence, these mechanisms facilitate members coming together and engaging collectively, and they account for the effects of each task, act or input by a member or other relevant element on a project and other members or tasks. In the end, there is a maintained living record of every key process in the organization, including relationships/interdependencies among processes. Formal processes communicated through written protocols create a supportive structure for collaborative engagement.

All community members/employees play an important role in developing and updating these processes as they are not dictated from above. The powers-that-be, if you will, are the actual members of the organization who employ the processes! Processes gain credibility and ownership through member input, discussion, and buy-in; and they become more easily scalable and responsive to changes in the organization as it grows because they are developed collaboratively using interdependent process management mechanism design.

Infrastructure/Structuring for Collaborative Teamwork

In a collaborative community, it is not unusual for members to be on multiple teams. When the community is small, coordination is relatively easy. However, when the community is large, an infrastructure that enables employees to work on multiple teams, and jump from one team to another without bogging down the system is critical. The keys are centralizing and mobilizing knowledge; the former facilitates applying the knowledge at scale, and the latter allows for "overlapping spheres of influence" (i.e., among various teams). Adler, Heckscher, and Prusak (2011) call this "participative centralization."

Perhaps not surprisingly, this calls for a matrix structure. This may raise concerns as the failure rate of matrix-based organizations is high. However, Adler, Heckscher, and Prusak (2011) assert that matrix structures support, and are buttressed by, the other principles of collaborative community. In the end, functional barriers are reduced through constant integration of employees within mixed teams across the matrix.

Social Media and Collaborative Community

Social media can effectively facilitate and support collaborative community. To help the organization develop and advance its shared purpose, social media could be used for a variety of

relevant purposes, such as creating conversations and access to information and knowledge (e.g., online communities, blogs), managing content that reflects organizational beliefs and values (e.g., wiki), and sharing market information (e.g., social media command centers). It can break down hierarchies and create opportunities for people, who might be reluctant in offline settings, to contribute (Qureshi and Zigurs 2001).

Social media may also be used to bolster an ethic of contribution by helping everyone become aware of their interdependence. It can not only enhance communication between members, but also make the impact of contributions more transparent to a wider audience. For example, internal crowdsourcing can effectively harness shared collaboration and promote a type of trust associated with an ethic of contribution (Simula and Vuori 2012). Such collaborations or conversations facilitate a shared consciousness and environment of trust (Dubé, Bourhis, and Jacob 2006; Tambyah 1996).

Social media readily support processes of coordination and the scalability of it, as well as the ownership and involvement called for in collaborative community. Processes can easily be maintained, refined and updated through social media; and emerging teams can more readily be incorporated into the structure as they develop. For example, wikis can effectively support the ongoing development of process documents, and its inherent dynamic linking would promote transparency, connection and navigation between processes. Further, social media allow discussions of change and impact throughout an organization, rather than in isolation. For example, Pinterest-style (i.e., image sharing) or youtube-like (i.e., video sharing) social media can be effective means for presenting stories about change. Social media also support both horizontal and vertical contributions required on a large scale for such interdependent collaborations. Inherently, these online exchanges are scalable, and can develop, essentially, a social capital store (Mathwick, Wiertz, and de Ruyter 2008; Nambisan and Watt 2011) that can be considered more powerful than offline word-of-mouth (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004).

In addition, social media can facilitate a flat, open organizational structure. They enable transparency, and can break down hierarchies and walls between departments, making it relatively easy for employees to find and collaborate with each other.

Expressive Individuality

Again, a unique element of collaborative community is that high levels of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft can be obtained. However, Adler, Heckscher, and Prusak (2011) perspectives and illustrations appear to suggest a significantly greater degree of collectivism than of individualism in collaborative community. Through social media, which indeed allow for a high degree of individuality and expression of this individuality (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram), we propose that there is an opportunity for a high – or certainly higher than suggested by Adler, Heckscher, and Prusak (2011) – degree of individuality, that is beneficial to *both* the firm *and* the individual, to obtain in a collaborative community.

Expressive individuality through social media is a type of individuality that we propose can be effective in collaborative communities. Its essence is expressing or sharing personal information about oneself, including thoughts, feelings, behaviors, as well as information that may reveal beliefs, attitudes, preferences, etc. This information can help create a more personal connection between a consumer and a firm (or a brand), or can internally enable, for example, a more realistic positioning of the individual against fellow employees (Keeling, Khan, and Newholm 2013). The effect of sharing this information may be analogous to that where people feel like they know television and radio personalities (e.g., news anchors) as they see or "hear" from them regularly. In addition, with consumers holding more control and power in social media spaces, and seeing these vehicles as repositories of personal information and conversation, they may expect a firm and its employees to show a more "human"/personal side. We propose that it would be beneficial.

Of course, we do not suggest that expressions be unfiltered/uncensored. Good judgment should be used, and it should be kept in mind that expressed information will reflect on the firm as it will clue in customers (Berry and Bendapudi 2003). It has been traditional for employees to put forth a "professional," corporate persona and face. However, it is not unusual today to find employees using social media (e.g., blogging by Chuck Hollis of EMC), and sharing personal information as part of their process in using an organization's social media account. For example, Charlene Li, founder of the Altimeter Group, tweeted "Very excited to see the actual #AmericasCup up close, so much history inscribed on it" (and included a photo of herself).

Expressive individuality can create internal and external opportunities. For example, internally, sharing personal information may strengthen relationships (e.g., awareness of common backgrounds or interests) and lead one to collaborate on an interesting project or team. In an external context, sharing personal information could help convert a consumer into a customer. Expressive individuality allows others to "get to know you," and, in turn, this can enhance relationships and engagement, which, ultimately, one hopes will contribute to the shared purpose.

In addition, expressive individuality can be used, without direct intent, to build one's personal brand (e.g., Labrecque, Markos, and Milne, 2011). Customers of "your" firm are not the only ones who will see your social media content. Professionals in other organizations, recruiters, reporters and others may see it. This, in turn, can broaden one's network. For example, Frank Eliason created @ComcastCares on Twitter, where he personally responded to Comcast complaints or questions within minutes, to the pleasant surprise of customers. Long story short, Frank and @ComcastCares became one of the most cited best-practice examples for delivering great customer service with social media (e.g., in *Wall Street Journal*, *BusinessWeek* and *The New York Times*). Frank was eventually hired away by Citibank to serve as its Senior Vice President of Social Media, and he published a book about customer service (Eliason 2012).

In a collaborative community, one would expect that social media efforts would be for the shared purpose of the collective. However, even with that intent and performance, individual benefits can easily be realized. One may show a work ethic and expertise, or other characteristics or skills that would be of value to others. And, in turn, an opportunity for an individual to

personally realize this value could obtain. This provides an interesting contrast to corporate burnout or being "sucked dry" by the company, where employees may feel like they've given their entire soul to the company and have nothing to show for themselves in the end. Through expressive individuality, they can contribute faithfully to the collective; but, as part of this process when using social media, they may also be making a contribution to their personal brand.

Illustrative Examples from Dell's Journey to Date

In the end, employing collaborative community principles can increase productivity and value across the value chain (Chui et al. 2012). However, it should be understood that realizing meaningful returns may involve encountering a few bumps in the road, could require significant organizational transformation, and may take years. Illustrative examples from Dell, an organization that effectively uses social media to a great extent and has substantially transformed itself into a social business, are presented to provide more concrete understanding and guidance.

The severe rough patch in the economy that hit in 2007 and the decline in the PC market have made it a challenging go for Dell (n.b., since the Great Recession in the US, Dell's earnings per share have been positive in all quarters, although, revenues have been flat or in decline on average). However, noteworthy is Dell's acknowledgement of key weaknesses, a focus on a long term plan for transforming itself into a broader solutions provider and social business, and the praise it has received from a variety of industry experts on its approach in doing this. For example, Kiron et al. (2013), in a report based on a Deloitte and Sloan Management Review, *collaboration* highlights Dell as "a prime example of how companies can capitalize on social business opportunities and reach social business maturity over time;" and Balwani (2009) notes Dell's enthusiastic embrace and effective use of social media. How things will turn out in the end for Dell remains uncertain; however, Dell's situation reminds us of IBM in the 1990s. IBM's transformation from big iron provider to a customer solutions organization worked out well for them, and we believe that Dell has the potential to transform itself back into a high performing state as did IBM.

Dell has engaged a wide variety of tools and has a strong presence with multiple accounts in every leading social media platform (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, YouTube), having employed/ integrated social media in a broad variety of organizational processes (e.g., listening, engagement, sales). In fact, after investing several years in learning about and developing a process to help itself better organize for effectively leveraging social media (n.b., a learning and experimentation process that persists), it assessed the robustness of its approach by testing it out with a diverse set of customers, such as the American Red Cross, Caterpillar, Aetna, and Kraft Foods. The test results gave Dell confidence to launch its own social media consulting service to help organizations enhance their social-media planning and practice, such as listening, and engagement (Delo 2012).

In this section, we detail experiences and perspectives that have helped Dell become more of a collaborative community and transform into a relatively mature social business.

Leadership, Developing Shared Purpose, and Customer Centricity

Founder and CEO Michael Dell saw social media as a stimulant and vehicle to transform from a customer-focused computer manufacturer that sells computers, to a customer-centric service organization that provides technology-related solutions to customer problems. He acknowledged the critical need to change, and he empowered and encouraged Dell employees to bring about effective change. Everyone in Dell had to work together to make it work. A key focus was increasing conversations and deepening relationships with customers and among employees; and getting everyone in the organization on the same page of focusing on the customer, and participating and working together on the common purpose of solving customers' problems.

An early act that Dell instituted to develop a sense of shared values and purpose, and to motivate behavior that was consistent with its philosophical transformation, was employing the Net-promoter score (NPS) process and metric (Reicheld 2003). The metric is based on the likelihood that one would recommend a company to a friend or colleague, and equals the difference between the percentage of "promoters" (i.e., those indicating a score of 9 or 10 on a 0/not-at-all-likely to 10/ extremely-likely scale) minus the percentage of "detractors" (i.e., those indicating a score of 6 or less). Dell found the process of utilizing the NPS extremely valuable for getting everyone in the company focused on, and thinking about, the customer experience, delighting customers, and strengthening customer relationships and loyalty.

Using the loyalty and customer-satisfaction related Net-promoter score was vital for Dell in kicking change into gear company-wide – the score was promoted side by side with its share price – as it was tied to customer satisfaction, financial performance, and rewards. It was top of mind for everyone in the organization. Employee compensation and reward were based partly on the NPS. Increasing the number of promoters and decreasing the number of detractors became important throughout the organization (e.g., product and support, service and support, planning and pricing, purchase and delivery, design). Employees were motivated to enhance the NPS. Indeed, as an executive director of online marketing stated, "My bonus is directly impacted by the NPS. I am motivated to listen to consumers and to take actions that improve our marketing and the customer experience." This included sharing information with managers who controlled processes that were outside the realm of this executive director and could improve Dell's overall performance

Learning, Building Relationships, and Earning Trust

An important part of, or antecedent to, collaboration is for the community to engage and learn about each other. This supports trust development, a vital ingredient in an effectively functioning collaborative community. Dell listened to customers through a wide variety of mechanisms, such as social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, IdeaStorm), customer ratings

and reviews (e.g., on Dell.com), and customer advisory panel days in which Dell hears firsthand in person what customers think of its brand, products, website, and customer service. In addition, Dell has a Think Tank Program, that "brings together industry leaders, who are particularly vocal in social media, to discuss trending topics impacted by technology, such as education, healthcare, entrepreneurship and the changing mobile workforce." The goal is to create an open and honest forum that fosters relationship building, collaboration and reveals unique community needs and opportunities for technology to play a larger role (Dell 2013).

Dell looks to get as many members of the broad community (i.e., stakeholders) to participate and provide input when formulating its strategies and offerings for solving customer problems. And, a variety of Dell employees participate in both social (e.g., Twitter, Facebook and YouTube) and traditional/other media vehicles. For example, Dell uses social media to sense and respond to, and communicate and coordinate with, a variety of "societal" stakeholders/communities in making a positive difference through its "Powering the Possible" corporate responsibility platform by engaging important social issues, such as children's cancer care, youth learning, disaster relief, and social entrepreneurship. In addition, social media plays an important role in Dell World, which brings together IT visionaries, leaders, and experts from around the globe to better understand how to uncover efficiencies and drive innovation.

Empowerment, Ownership, and Coordination

Employees at Dell are empowered to listen, learn, and act. Dell has a systematic command center in place for larger scale listening and sharing of information. Dell's Social Media & Communities University empowers team members to listen, learn and act, such as engaging and helping consumers. More than 24,000 employees have received training and about three thousand have been "certified." In addition, Dell created EmployeeStorm, a community where Dell employees can discuss products, company initiatives, and other relevant aspects and processes of the organization (e.g., retirement plans).

An example of empowerment in a customer service context involves a member of Dell's Social Outreach Services team (in essence, @DellCares and @DellCaresPro on Twitter) listening to a customer ordering a product online from its outlet and then acting to help this customer. There was one unit remaining when the customer placed his order. The customer went through the proper steps, but, at the end, was unable to order it and experienced the system stalling. Unbeknownst to this customer, another customer had just beaten him to the punch in purchasing it, and, due to a system glitch of which Dell was unaware, it left him waiting.

Once the customer discerned that something was not quite right, he tweeted to @DellCares, "I'm having some issues with my order that I'm really not happy about and am not getting any answers from the right channels." Amy Marquez Bivin, @AmyatDell on Twitter, a team manager and member of the Social Media Outreach team at Dell, saw the tweet, responded, coordinated special back/internal channel processes, and helped him order the product that he wanted. The customer was extremely satisfied and let Dell know: "@DellCares, thanks team for helping with my order as well! Very happy to see Dell customer service taking this media front head-on!"

Infrastructure to Collaborate

Teamwork, Knowledge, and Information Flow

Dell implemented a flatter, more open organizational infrastructure that facilitates employees sharing and having access to information across the organization, and succeeded in their use of social media. As Rishi Dave (2011), Executive Director of Online Marketing at Dell indicates, "Social media effectively collapses organizational hierarchies by democratizing influence. The most powerful customer-facing evangelist in your company could be someone you haven't heard of yet: a product engineer with an engaging online personality and a ton of valuable information; a marketer with a bead on the latest, breaking competitive product analysis; an empathetic support guy who always seems to locate needy customers before they have time to flounder."

Coordinating and Scaling Globally

Dell created a vice-president of social media and community position and a Social Media and Communities (SMaC) team that served as a social media center of excellence, setting policies, providing guidelines and training (e.g., content development, metrics and governance), sharing best practices, facilitating social media roadmaps, and coordinating social efforts/processes across the organization. A hub-and-spoke model was used, where the hub/center-of-excellence, the SMaC team, would work with business units and groups. While the business units would implement their own social media, they were accountable to SMaC, sharing strategy, performance, and metrics.

The SMaC hub was so effective in inculcating Dell with social media excellence that existing teams became facile in using social media for internal collaboration and solutions, and new shadow-organizations were created (e.g., communities) when issues or the need arose. Generally, when the skill set of a particular group had evolved to a capable level, SMaC did not necessarily need to be involved. For example, one of Dell's business intelligence teams was able to use social media, community development, and collaboration to enhance its service and influence throughout the organization worldwide.

This business intelligence team served stakeholders operating in different countries and functional areas (e.g., marketing, product development, sales). In addition, team members were located across several countries and time zones, and included many members who had never met. The team's use of social media evolved from a mechanism that connected stakeholders with content, to one that facilitated team and cross-functional collaboration. The tools enabled participants to communicate on a regular basis, follow each others' activity (e..g, project involvement), get to know each other, and build rapport, in addition to collaborating together to address problems that were better solved with cross-functional input and effort.

This business intelligence organization also recognized and managed other key factors for effectively using social media and community. There were different types of participant profiles: "facilitator," "power poster," "popular poster," "texter," and "sharer," who played different roles, including activating conversations, attracting attention, and stimulating information sharing and collaboration. And there were different stages of community development, where the initial stage involved little participation and activity to a mature stage which involved full participation and engagement. Understanding the profiles and roles of community members, and the state of the community helped the team meets its own goals and to help cross-functional teams effectively use communities and meet their goals.

Training and Expertise

To support and motivate employees to participate in social media and communities, Dell provides extensive training and flexible guidelines, and has in place an organizational design that would support distributed communication. For example, Dell trains employees at its Social Media and Communities University, and runs conferences for sharing best practices. It maintains a global social media policy. Dell's Social Media and Community embeds best practices, tools and processes organization-wide. In addition, this team, as well as others, encourages participation through metrics and other vehicles, such as competitions and leading by example (or getting executives, such as Michael Dell, to lead by example). Indeed, Michael Dell has used Twitter and participated on forums, and human resources uses social media services like LinkedIn for recruiting.

Centralized Talent Coordination

Dell facilitated talent coordination by creating, as noted earlier, a vice-president of social media and community and the SMaC team that educated and enabled Dell employees on social media and community, and that, in the end, facilitated finding people of interest, sharing information, and collaborating through online communities. This team served as a social media center of excellence, which Owyang (2011) describes as a "centralized program that provides resources, training, and strategy to a variety of business units that are deploying social media in order to reduce costs, increase efficiency, and provide standardization."

Employees could take important information acquired through listening, use internal social media and communities to find those in the company who could act on this information to improve the customer experience, share this information, and, if appropriate, form communities to collaborate. For example, customer service listened to conversations about a USB-port problem on laptops; it shared this information with engineering; and engineering, with greater awareness of the customer experience, enhanced the design, which, in the end, increased customer satisfaction.

Centralized Customer Information and Knowledge Through a Listening Organization

Listening is an important first step in a process which Dell says involves listening, learning, and acting. Indeed, listening is so critical to Dell that it has developed a listening infrastructure of people and systems, including the positions of Listening Czar and Chief Listening Officer. Lionel Menchaca, Dell's Chief Blogger, says that the Listening Czar's role includes "connect[ing] the dots — to figure out when a seemingly unique product issue becomes a trend. He looks for technical support, customer service or sales-related issues in the Dell Community Forum, on Direct2Dell comments and comments in our other blogs and compares it to activity that's happening in a variety of places around the Web" (Menchaca 2010). Richard Binhammer, a Dell communications executive, says that "Our chief listener is critical to making sure the right people in the organization are aware of what the conversations on the web are saying about us, so that relevant people in the business can connect with customers" (*Advertising Age*).

Customer Insights in Collaborative Spaces

Dell believes that when it listens, the customer wins. Kerry Bridge, head of Dell's digital media communications, EMEA and global public sector, says that "[l]istening to our customers has always been at the heart of what we do; Dell's heritage of direct customer connections and online leadership are the seeds of our drive to be a social media success. The online conversations offer great opportunities for us to listen, learn and engage — we use what we learn to innovate and integrate technology that provides solutions our customers want" (qtd. in Elliott 2010).

Dell employs a variety of social media mechanisms to enhance customer insights. In 2006, it enabled ratings and reviews on Dell.com, and launched its first blog, Direct2Dell, headed up by chief blogger Lionel Menchaca; it was designed to connect with the blogging community. In the following year, Dell launched several social media initiatives, such as StudioDell, a video channel, and IdeaStorm, which "can help take your idea and turn it into reality" and is an idea-market (e.g., see Soukhoroukova, Spann, and Skiera 2012) type of community focused on developing and improving products, and enhancing service through voting, comments and interaction (n.b., without bidding/"investing"/trading). It facilitates bringing together Dell and its customers and enabling them to cocreate/ coproduce. More than 18,000 ideas have been submitted, more than seven-hundred-thousand votes on these ideas have been submitted, and more than 500 ideas have been implemented (e.g., backlit keyboard on laptops). In addition, Dell started using Twitter early on, with several accounts that focused on different objectives (e.g. Dell Outlet, Dell blogs, individual Dell employees).

Expressive Individuality

Many Dell employees have social media accounts. They typically use them to connect and build relationships with consumers in a professional way through listening and showing interest — as opposed to the old mass-marketing constant bombardment of company centric information (e.g., about a product, promotion, firm activities) and directives (e.g., buy, buy, and buy more). Although, they do share some personal/ "human-side" information. Indeed, Lionel Manchaca's list of blogging best-practice principles included: write about topics that matter to your customers, provide context for a range of

customers, write to educate and serve, be authentic, be human, and let your passion and personality show through (Odden 2011). An example of expressive individuality at Dell is from Sarah Locke, @SarahLatDell on Twitter, who, among others, tweeted "Love this! RT @alexgormonster Focus on your passions and create conversations around them. #smtlive" and "This is pretty interesting. Thoughts? MIT Students Design 'Sesame Ring' to Replace Boston Transit Cards http://bit.ly/15eMbUj." These tweets are not about Dell goods and services. The first one is relationship building in that it is supportive of another person, and the second one is a conversation starter about a non-Dell topic that may be of interest to those with or without an interest in Dell.

Dell employees are able to make contributions to the collective and themselves through expressive individuality. For example, Lionel Manchaca's Dell blog was heralded by many. He is viewed as an inspirational and insightful social media pioneer. The content of his blog posts and his reputation made positive contributions to Dell. In addition, it supported the development of his personal brand and created professional opportunities. After 18 years at Dell, seven as its chief blogger, Lionel recently moved on to the W2O group as its director of content engagement. It is interesting to note that he appears to have 'taken' his Twitter followers with him as he changed his Twitter account name to "LionelGeek" from "LionelAtDell" while managing to maintain his following of several thousand members.

Lessons

We believe that there are several important lessons to be learned from Dell's experience in effectively adopting social media, operating as a collaborative community, and transforming into a social business. Rather than rehash the principles of collaborative community, which we believe holds for Dell, we point out other lessons, some that result from effective implementation of collaborative community, and some that could result from other influences.

- *Be more customer centric than product centric* — This is not a new notion. Presidential candidates might campaign with the statement "it's the economy, stupid." Social businesses should keep in mind that "it's the customer" who is central to the ringing of the cash register.
- *A united focus is a united company* — A key principle to a coordinated, collaborative effort is having a shared purpose and focus.
- *Interdependency and being all in it together* — This lesson is different from having a united focus. It calls for recognizing the connection among each employee and that each action taken or decision made has an impact on others; and, it applies to all stakeholders, not just the company.
- *Participation, empowerment, and contribution* — Social media have created an awareness and power among consumers and workers. Organizations should adjust their habit to assert control, and construct open and participatory environments where everyone can make some type of meaningful contribution.

- *Openness and sharing can set you free* — Indeed, at the heart of collaborative community; think of this as opposite to a "I have all of the answers and can do it all myself" perspective.
- *Being social is a human, philosophical state-of-mind* — Collaborative community does call for maintaining, coordinating, and carrying out processes. However, at the end, or somewhere along the line, of each of those processes is a human being with a soul. Having a soul will enhance your effectiveness as a social business.
- *Social technologies facilitate real collaboration among real people* — Technologies, even those that are "social," blindly operate with consistency according to a set of prescribed rules. However, collaboration can call for nuances or "audibles at the line," people have variance, and people are varied. Engage and drive the social technology when collaborating with people; don't assume that it will automatically take care of everything perfectly.
- *It's always a work in progress* — Perfection is never acheived and the job is never done.

Being collaborative and social is dynamic and a never-ending process.

Moving Forward and Future Research

Employing collaborative community and expressive individuality in concert with social media can help guide an organization down the path of transforming into a social business. A series of illustrative examples from an organization, Dell, that has walked the walk, talked the talk, and transformed itself from a computer manufacturer/seller to a solutions provider, and more social business identifies important practices and lessons in its journey to date. The groundwork is here for an organization to move forward to becoming "social."

However, issues, considerations and questions remain. Indeed, organizations have to assess important issues that come into play when using social media, such as control, openness, engagement, co-creation, and return on social-media investment (e.g., see Weinberg and Pehlivan 2011) among others. For example, some, perhaps many, organizations may find it frightening or concerning to cede some control, be more open, allow employees to devote more time for engaging with consumers, other employees and value-chain partners, and to invite consumers to more closely participate in, and perhaps drive, some critical value-creation processes, such as product development and customer service.

Further, organizations vary on many dimensions, such as leadership, culture, resources, capabilities; and, the nature of industries in which a firm competes varies as well. Accordingly, the optimal degree to which an organization should adopt and integrate social media and transform itself will vary. In addition, related to these factors is the issue of time, such as length of time for an organization to learn and transform, and timing, such as when to invest in, or place a bet on, a particular social media technology or process. With technology and forces such as disruptive innovation, standards and leading brands/

products can change rapidly. Nevertheless, social media need to become institutionalized in organizations, just as has been the case for some other Internet and Web related phenomenon, such as websites and email. However, as has been observed with these vehicles, the purpose and extent of use of social media by an organization will not be one-size-fits-all. Finer grain research to consider these factors and provide more tailored guidance is recommended.

Future Research

Three logical areas for future research are: social business, expressive individuality, and collaboration and community.

Social Business

We believe that this is one of the first marketing academic articles on social business (n.b., again, that of a technological nature), and, we hope it spurs on research in this domain. Practice in, and attention to, this area is accelerating. For example, many industries have reported increased importance in social business (Kiron et al. 2013), and the Dachis Group maintains a social business index. As Kiron et al. (2013) suggest, social business is "shifting out of first gear." It is a challenging and stimulating topic to explore, and offers great potential to make meaningful contributions and discoveries.

Some broad research issues include:

- Exploring the impact of social business on marketing, and the influence of marketing on social business.
- Investigating the impact of social business on consumers, and the influence of consumers on social business.
- Distinguishing the roles that marketing will play in social business. Will it be a hub? A peripheral player?
- Determining the extent to which becoming a social business is a certainty, or the pace at which social business will evolve in an industry, and in an organization.
- Identifying social business elements that are more likely than others to be in common practice over time.
- Determining whether there are particular applications or contexts where social business will be more prominent or likely to obtain,
- Assessing whether there is something special about social media and technologies which can improve the odds for success of a matrix-structured organization.
- Identifying new metrics for assessing social business performance.

Expressive Individuality

Further research on expressive individuality would also be valuable. Topics include:

- Amplifying a full variety of ways in which an organization can benefit from expressive individuality, and, similarly, understand the variety of ways in which an individual can benefit from it.
- Clarifying issues with respect to ownership that might arise with expressive individuality. Social media platforms,

such as Twitter, are not bound to an organization. Does the person who creates an account own it? Does the computer (e.g., personal or company) used to create it, determine ownership?

- Identifying actions that organizations can take to retain value associated with an employee's expressive individuality.
- Detecting other types of individuality that can benefit both the organization and the individual.
- Exploring the timing of when an organization and an individual realize benefits associated with expressive individuality. Do organizations always realize the benefits before the individual?

Collaboration and Community

Implementing off-the-shelf technologies, such as Yammer or social tools that are developed in-house is relatively easy. Making people connect and cooperate using the technology is a challenge to the majority of companies. Most internal communities form around topics, themes and sometimes local issues. In this manner, collectives have a manageable size and a common sense of purpose that enables collaboration. However, this may run the paradoxical risk of creating yet another informational silo, as primarily those employees with expertise and/or interest in a certain topic will participate; in time, this runs the risk of groupthink based on a narrow set of viewpoints and experiences all over again.

In particular, being focused on a given domain of knowledge, does not lead naturally to diversity. Diversity in organizations can be obtained by the interaction between different communities. In addition, and at a more aggregate level, firms could also be considered silos. Frequently, required knowledge is available outside this silo. Therefore, virtual platforms sometimes need to extend beyond organizational boundaries to connect with the market also. Research, therefore, needs to address issues that center around the management of organizational communities and focus on such questions as:

- How inclusive/exclusive will the community be?
- How representative is the array of voices with respect to the company's mission, values and market challenges?
- How is consensus or common ground reached?
- How are the results of discussions codified and archived for later reference?
- What is the optimal size and level of heterogeneity and does this depend on the topic of interest?
- What governance structures should be deployed to stimulate community thriving?

In addition to these operational and perhaps tactical issues, there is also a need for identifying the underlying mechanisms or implicit forces of enterprise-wide social media that shape community success. In relation to external communities, or platforms on the boundaries between organization and market, there is emerging research that identifies the notion of social capital as a key metric in assessing the viability of virtual communities. Social capital has been defined as an intangible resource that is part of and accumulated within the community's social structure and is

governed by relational norms of voluntarism, reciprocity and social trust (Mathwick, Wiertz, and de Ruyter 2008). As argued above, the benefits derived from social platforms can be instrumental (generation of knowledge, ideas, solutions) and social (through support, guidance and a sense of belonging) (Adler and Kwon 2002). As a result, the value propositions of social platforms are informational and social. Research by Mathwick, Wiertz, and de Ruyter (2008) shows that social capital impacts a platform's informational and social value and in turn member commitment towards the community.

Specifically in relation to internal social media, it has been argued that the development of emotional capital, described as 'the aggregate feelings of goodwill toward a company and the way it operates,' is a key success factor (Huy and Shipilov 2012, p 74). Similar to social capital, emotional capital is an intangible reserve that represents an asset in which a company can invest to reap future benefits. Huy and Shipilov (2012) identify four underlying dimensions, including feelings of authenticity, pride, attachment and fun. Authenticity refers to the perception of employees that company management aligns what they say/promise and do. Pride denotes whether the company values and publicly rewards their contributions, while attachment is the degree of affect derived from a sense of belonging that employees experience. Fun, finally, refers to elements of playfulness when experimenting with new routines in their jobs. The way in which top managers in companies actively are involved in promoting these elements will determine internal social media success, as opposed to large investments in technology tools (Huy and Shipilov 2012). This means that internal social media initiatives should be supported by authentic and trusted leaders who should be trained in developing social media skills.

Finally, a recent study by Vock, van Dolen and de Ruyter (2013) argues that viewing a community as a meaningful entity may add additional explanation of community value propositions. This is based on research on the notion of entitativity, which refers to "the degree to which a collection of persons are perceived as being bonded together in a coherent unit" (Lickel et al. 2000, p 224), or simply the "groupness" of a group (Hamilton, Sherman, and Castelli 2002, p 140). A focus on this construct may help to explore some of the aforementioned issues related to size and composition of internal social platforms, as these elements will determine whether internal communities are viewed as tight-knit entities or loose aggregates of anonymous employee members. Previous research in social psychology provides evidence of the fact that when members perceive that they are a part of an entitative group they feel more committed and are willing to invest more in the contributing to the success of the collective (Sherman, Hamilton, and Lewis, 1999).

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