Social Effects of Enterprise 2.0 in Organizational Practice

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ABSTRACT

Enterprise 2.0 is examined through the use of Bourdieusian theoretics in an effort to understand its social and organizational impacts.

Categories and Subject Descriptors

H.3.4 [**Web 2.0**]: Social Software

General Terms

Measurement, Theory

Keywords

Enterprise 2.0, social media, organizational communication, Bourdieu, cultural capital, habitus

1. INTRODUCTION

"Enterprise 2.0" (E2.0) refers to the use of Internet-enabled social software in organizational practice. It includes such Internet- and Web-based communication and community-building applications as wikis, social networking sites, blogs, RSS, social bookmarking, mashups, web conferencing, and a host of others. This definition also includes email and Voice over IP applications. Although some of these communication tools have been in use for decades, community-centric applications and their organizational implementations are recent developments, having achieved widespread use over the past five years. Network expansion, broad usage changes, technological advances, and socioeconomic events have attended this sociotechnical shift, as shown in Figure 1.

Since its recognition in 2005 as a distinct class of communication technology [1], E2.0 has grown into a global industry, primarily focused on the technology's business uses. This industry has generated thousands of software applications, intense competition for markets, international conferences, and heavy promotion by software
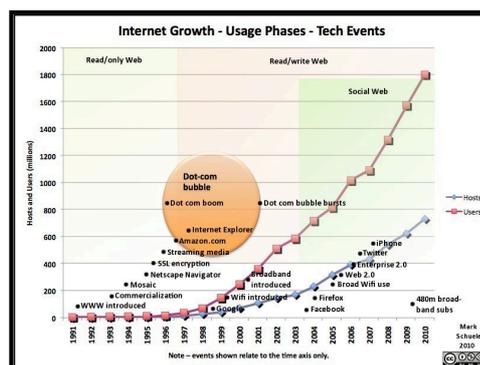
Figure 1. Growth of Internet demonstrating usage phases and technological events.

vendors and industry insiders, and has seen rapid adoption in organizations around the world [2]. E2.0 promoters make broad claims for benefits to be realized from uses of such tools—improvements in communication, collaboration, productivity, worker satisfaction, and so on—but seldom offer evidence to support their claims. Such unsubstantiated claims suggest simplistic assumptions about the complex, contingent environments in which the tools are used. Yet research in the domain has been narrowly focused around specific tools, uses, and, to a lesser degree, social effects.

In the past, significant technological trans-formations have been shown to contribute to broad social impacts [3,4]. Examples of technologies that have been strongly influential in modern society include the printing press, the light bulb, and the automobile. The Web has profoundly affected the way information is stored, used, and distributed in social groups and in organizations, in scopes both local and global. Its burgeoning use as a social and organizational tool may be expected to have social impacts, but what impacts exactly?

2. OBJECTIVES

This research seeks to investigate and explain broader social and organizational uses and effects of E2.0 technologies. Using a primarily social theoretic framework, which builds upon theories of information and organization, actors and networks, as well as Pierre Bourdieu's interrelated concepts of field, capital, and habitus, it attempts to interpret organizational behaviours and outcomes as actions and results of capital exchanges within

organizationally situated social networks. Such exchanges may take the form(s) of social, cultural, or economic capital, and are influenced by the organizational field-of-play and by the habitus of the group and its individuals. As these exchanges take place both within and without formal organizational structures and networks, unintended results may be anticipated.

3. METHODS

This research makes use of longitudinal mixed method approach to be used across three case studies, including surveys and semi-structured interviews, in addition to observation of E2.0 technologies in use. These methods explore users' awareness and practices with social media, as well as their reasons and meanings for such uses. Following a year of observation and optional E2.0 intervention (e.g. implementation of an organizational social network site, wiki, or blog), a second cycle of surveys and interviews will be conducted and analyzed with particular focus on uses of capital and changes in habitus. Figure 2 illustrates this study's mixed methods approach. Bourdieu's triad of field, capital, and habitus contribute design guidance for the quantitative and qualitative tools of choice, surveys and semi-structured interviews—questions for both approaches are designed to elicit information which characterize individual and/or group habitus and capital holdings, as well as providing clearer understanding of the organizational field in each case.
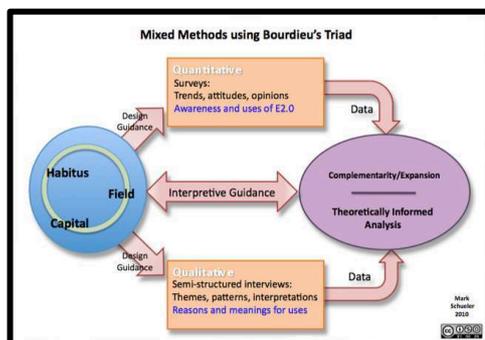

Figure 2. Bourdieu's concepts guide the methodology

The tools are then used in the study group(s), generating data that is later analyzed, again using the Bourdieusian concepts to provide interpretive guidance. The resulting analysis feeds back interpretive guidance to help update the design of follow-on longitudinal methods.

4. RESULTS

A pilot study undertaken in the University of Southampton's Digital Economy (DE) group has produced preliminary results from an initial round of surveys and interviews.

Survey responses revealed the group's:

o Solid awareness of social media—more than 50% usage rates and engagement for most applications, indicating both allowance within members' habitus (they "get" the value and usefulness of social media) as well as embodied cultural capital in the form of tool uptake (they have become skilled in its uses).
o Moderate engagement with respect to content creation in most applications (excepting virtual worlds), with rates ranging from 14.8% for podcasts to 46% for blogs.
o Significant work-related usage in most applications (again less virtual worlds), with all but social bookmarking achieving >50% usage between work-only and both work and leisure uses.

Demographic crosstabulations demonstrated:

o Content creation shows gender similarity in 14 of 22 categories; of the remaining eight categories, females are approximately twice as likely as males to create status updates, offer recommendations, vote in polls, sign petitions, create social bookmarks, create tags/folksonomies, and share or forward content; males are approximately twice as likely as females to contribute content to wikis.
o Uses of social media tend to be higher among younger members of the group (20-39) than older members (40+), indicating a habitus difference between the two groups.
o Members of Electronics and Computer Science (ECS) showed generally higher rates of frequency and engagement with social media than members of other faculties.

This pilot survey produced results that may have been anticipated from an academic population, including general engagement with contemporary communication and social technologies, as well as corresponding habitus and cultural capital. It further demonstrated that gender and age matter with respect to individual uses of these tools— hence with habitus—and merit further investigation in this research.

Generally speaking, habitus similarities are seen within role groups and age groups, while differences appear between such groups. We see from a combination of survey and interview data that academics uses of social media appear to be affected by school membership (broader, more-engaged users from ECS) and somewhat age-related. Senior academics that use social media tools appear more likely to engage and actively contribute than postgraduates or staff. Academics make more purposeful and productive use of social media tools than staff. Younger members of all groups display a greater tendency to adopt new tools.

It's worth noting that the survey produced evidence that suggests strong individual support for the idea of using social media to advance the goals of the DE community, but the group as a whole shows little interest in actually engaging with the tools on offer.

Sporadic use of Twitter, Facebook, and other tools have been described, but no one has undertaken any sort of bottom-up initiatives to advance their use among the wider group. So while the group has interest in and ability for using the tools of E2.0, they're not engaging with them as a group. All this suggests that: a) E2.0 tools are not being used because no one else is using them—there's not a critical mass, b) you don't lose out by not using them, c) there isn't capital to be acquired by using them, and d) people have the habitus, but there's no real gain. These observations suggest further avenues of inquiry in ongoing research, with particular focus on how these phenomena affect E2.0's normalization.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The evidence produced by the pilot study supports Bourdieusian interpretation, demonstrating the applicability of the inter-relationship of field, capital, and habitus to the understanding of E2.0's uses and suggesting that the deeper understanding sought by this thesis of its broader social and organizational effects may be illuminated through their use.

Although significant uses and exchanges of capital through E2.0 were not observed, the pilot study has served to draw attention to their presence and actions in later studies.

We can nonetheless see that habitus offers a way to understand the way people use E2.0 and that there is no such thing as a generic E2.0 user because everyone's habitus differs. This focuses interest and attention on how habitus shapes uses of E2.0 and how use shapes habitus. Finally, the evidence collected in this pilot study suggests that this research might also be improved by strategic sampling in future case studies focusing on habitus of user groups.

6. REFERENCES

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