

DOES AN INTERNAL WEB-LOG OR INTERNAL SNS BECOME AN AGENT OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING?

Hisako Chujo

The 21st Century COE Program
Tokyo Institute of Technology
2-12-1 (W9-39) Ookayama, Meguro-ku,
Tokyo 152-8552, Japan

ABSTRACT

Today, some new digital communication tool, for example web-log and SNS (Social Network Service) becomes popular in the world. Japan is not also the exception. Web-log has become popular in 2005 and SNS has become popular in 2006. Furthermore, in recent years, web-log and SNS are also used for the business purposes internally in various companies. Since there is not enough know-how to succeed in utilization of these new digital communication tools, most these companies are in the process of trial and error. The approach for the introduction seems so similar as the one of groupware. We have a lot of fear that many companies will fail to operate new communication tool without suitable approach. Everybody understands that it is hard to control people's emergent process in a company completely, but we certainly need to manage the process as well as introducing a new communication tool. We believe that we can create better conditions for the process by using new communication tools. The purpose of this thesis is to propose and discuss some ideas of agent function of internal web-log or SNS in Japanese companies. We refer some case studies in Japan and try to extract principles of successful utilizing these new tools. We also discuss the facilitation approach to facilitate people's emergent process for their organizational learning.

Keywords: agent, web-log, SNS, learning organization,

WIDESPREAD USE OF THE WEB-LOG AND SNS

In Japan, web-log has become popular in 2005 and SNS has become popular in 2006. The top SNS service company, mixi, Inc., has listed in the mothers market and the numbers of mixi member is over 10 million at May 20. , 2007. Various kinds of people in Japan are just using these services and they can become friendly with these operations in short time.

Furthermore, in recent years, web-log and SNS are also used for the business purposes in various companies. Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications makes public a case number of business web-log and business SNS in Japan as of Dec. 22. , 2005 (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2005). The number of company what has been utilizing an internal web-log or SNS was 14 and the percentage per total case number was 11%. The data showed the main purpose of other case companies were not an internal communication but an external communication. Additionally, the case number of internal SNS was only 3 per total case number of 14. From this data, we can know a trend that business web-log becomes popular faster than that of SNS in Japan. It is now over seventeen months since the publication, the case number may increase and the trend may change. For example, UNIQLO, CASIO and Oracle, many famous company construct each internal web-log system by using "Movable Type Enterprise" that is one of major software developed by six apart corporation (Six Apart KK. ,2007). Recent years, lots of software companies start a various software services for constructing an internal web-log or internal SNS. It may increase the number of companies which introduce an internal SNS now.

Does an internal web-log or SNS become an agent of the organizational learning?

FUNCTION OF THE INTERNAL WEB-LOG AND SNS

Now, there isn't so much of a difference of software functions between internal web-log and internal SNS. "Footmark" function and "Friend" function that are one of standard functions of SNS are added to some software for the internal web-log. The user of these new tools can know who visited own web-page by using "Footmark" function and know the profile of every users by using "friend" function. These functions facilitate users to contact other users and to expand each human network. If many users input each "know-who" information by using these functions, it enables companies to use "know-who" information that is stored in the internal web-log or internal SNS. "Track back" function and "RSS" function that are one of standard functions of web-log are also added to the software for the internal SNS. The user of these new tools can connect one article to other articles by using "Track back" function and notice some new interested articles by using "RSS" function. These functions facilitate users to read new articles and referential articles. Some users may interact with other users not only read the articles and gets tips through interaction. Footmark, Friend, Truck-back and RSS are new functions that are not implemented into the conventional groupware tools. We define "agent function" as the function that enables users to access some appropriate information and people depends on user's need. Agent functions help user to use internal web-log and internal SNS efficiently. We show key agent functions and the relevant notification function in Table 1. Notification function notices new articles and comments to users, and leads user to new articles, comments, and profile. Search function enable user to find what one is looking for.

Table 1. Agent function and relevant notification function

Agent Function	Notification function
Article with Good Button, Comment, Truck back, RSS	What's New, Access Ranking
Friend with Profile, Footmark	Footmark, Human Network Diagram
Community and Q&A with topic, comment	What's New
Search	Hot Keywords (or Tag)

In addition, the linkage with groupware, knowledge management tool, instant messenger and knowledge search system is also implemented into internal web-log and internal SNS. Pioneering companies integrate necessary internal/external systems and tools for their business into one portal site. Retrieval performance has improved considerably by new search technologies. For example, Drecom Co.,Ltd commercializes an internal web-log system with knowledge search engine. Technically, it is possible to search information across multiple databases and articles of internal web-log or internal SNS in one company. It's not an overstatement to say that many technical problems for utilizing information in a company are solved by these new tools. However, we worry about that a simple system introduction does not dramatically improve the quantity and quality of information sharing in a company. The internal web-log and internal SNS may follow the unsuccessful path of groupware without any good approaches to facilitate users of the internal web-log and internal SNS.

INSTITUTIONAL APPROACH TO THE USERS

We can learn some useful tips for the institutional approach to the users from the case studies of the pioneering companies. They try to facilitate the user's access to their internal web-log or SNS and cross-functional communication using the new tools.

Does an internal web-log or SNS become an agent of the organizational learning?

Statement of user rules

IT Frontier Corporation that uses an internal web-log for the activation of the internal communication creates a guideline what states user rules of the internal web-log (Six Apart KK., 2007). The manager said that a company should not define a strict guideline, but a loose guideline is necessary for the beginners to understand more about an internal web-log system. IT Frontier Corporation let all users use each real name and disclose all articles and comments to everyone. It is divided over the access control of information.

Appointment of the facilitators

MACROMILL, Inc that starts an internal web-log for the knowledge transmission from the researcher to salespersons (Six Apart KK., 2007). It is a grass-roots project. One person becomes a half-time facilitator and she continues to write articles and frankly exchange views with other users. Through the experience, many users learn how to use the internal web-log and understand the merits of the system. The number of facilitators depends on the number of user and the number of department. Full-time facilitator is preferable to half-time facilitator. If an internal web-log or internal SNS is carried out company-wide, the company should create a promotion department for the smooth operation.

Institutional operation

Many successful cases of internal web-log and internal SNS may adopt an institutional operation based on the top-down approach. The participation of top managers motivates every user to log-in the internal web-log or internal SNS. Top managers can use the internal web-log or internal SNS in order to spread company's message and new culture.

Facilitation of mutual learning process

Comment, Article rating, Access ranking and visualization of human network are the functions which facilitate interactions among users. The interaction may trigger the mutual learning of users. Therefore, linkage with some direct communication tools (i.e. Instant message, e-mail) is also important. Most internal web-log and internal SNS are customised and implemented these functions. We understand that user's personal learning triggers the organizational learning. Tsuchiya, et al. (2006) indicates a possibility of an internal web-log or internal SNS for promoting people's emergent process.

As mentioned above, the facilitation approach by staffs and top-managers is prerequisite for success of internal web-log and internal SNS. The physical support is backed by appropriate technical functions of the system.

Agent of the organizational learning

Now we discuss about an agent of the organizational learning. Figure 1 shows the widening of the scope of the internal digital communication system. Internal web-log and SNS enable individuals to treat atypical information and they can put out the atypical information easily than the conventional communication system like groupware.

Does an internal web-log or SNS become an agent of the organizational learning?

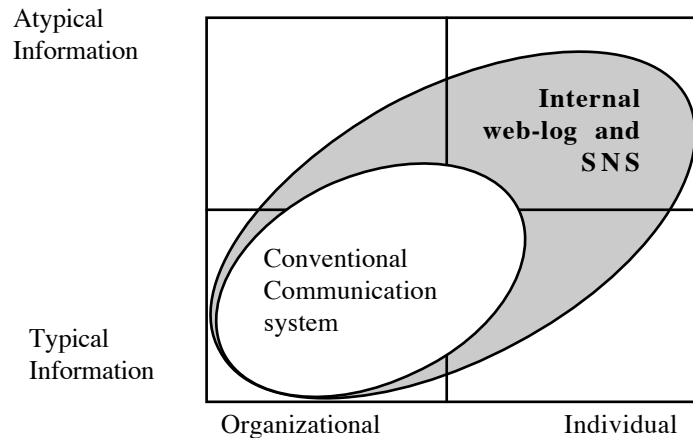


Figure 1. Scope of internal digital communication system

Itami (1999) proposed a concept of management of “BA” and said a possibility of IT tools for knowledge management in a company. “BA” is a place where cross-functional members get together in a company, learn from each other in the emergent process and create new ideas for their business. Unfortunately, there were not any suitable IT tools at that time, e.g. groupware did not meet people's expectations. Currently it is possible to create better conditions for people's emergent process in a company by using internal web-log or SNS. Technology of internal web-log and SNS enable users to create a digital BA in the system.

CONCLUSION

From the above discussion, we confirm that internal web-log or SNS what has some agent functions has a possibility to become an agent of the organizational learning. Today's internal web-log and SNS are high-quality finished form technically. However we have to study more about the institutional approach to the users in order to facilitate their internal communication effectively. User range and access control of internal web-log or SNS may depend on the corporate culture and leadership of the top management. We will consider the issue of the institutional approach by human in the context of information security.

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