46.1 Introduction

Social media (hereinafter SM) use within the workplace has increased 50% since 2008. Forrester Research predicts that the sales of software to run corporate social networks will grow 61% a year, becoming a $6.4 billion dollar business by 2016 (Mullaney 2012). This growth is fueled by practitioners who feel they “have to do something with social media” (Pettit 2010), but are unsure about SM’s capabilities (Deans 2011). Scholarship in this area can provide practitioners guidance on how to deploy SM strategically.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a starting point for scholarship on SM within the workplace by discussing the current state of research in this area. Workplace SM research deals with how organizations implement SM to manage their internal operations such as employee relationships, communication, knowledge management, and innovation. This differs from external SM implementations, which deal with organizations using SM to manage customers, suppliers, and business partners. Both are a part of Enterprise 2.0, a term coined by McAfee in 2006, to describe organizational implementations of Web 2.0 technologies (McAfee 2006).

The term, Web 2.0, first appeared in 2004. It refers to technological capabilities that enable users to easily create and exchange web-based content (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010). High-speed Internet, cloud computing, clients, servers, application programming interfaces, open source software development, and increasingly mobile applications provide the infrastructure supporting SM (Falls 2010). Web 2.0 is the platform that spurred SM’s popularization. College students began using MySpace and Facebook in 2004, and as of March 2012, more than 900 million people actively use Facebook (Facebook 2012). In addition to social networking sites like Facebook and LinkedIn, SM applications include collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia), blogs (e.g., Twitter), content communities (e.g., YouTube), virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft), and virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life) (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010).
Given that college students initially adopted SM for recreational purposes, the initial SM research (Boyd and Ellison 2007; Ellison et al. 2007; Valenzuela et al. 2009) investigated the characteristics of students most likely to use SM, how students use SM, and the benefits they garner from its use. Given SM’s proliferation in people’s personal lives and desires to attract millennial generation new hires who expect to use these technologies in their working environment (Koch et al. 2012a; Majchrzak et al. 2009; Smith 2011), businesses began experimenting with SM in 2006.

The majority of research focuses on *external* SM use, describing how organizations like Wal-Mart, Dell, Starbucks, Ford, Burger King, and Zappos use online forums like Twitter, Facebook, blogs, and company-hosted forums (Culnan et al. 2010; Di Gangi et al. 2010). Primary SM uses include marketing, branding, customer service, and recruiting (Culnan et al. 2010; Gallaugher and Ransbotham 2010).

External SM research identified two key issues facing organizations: managing customer dialog and managing online communities. SM changes how organizations advertise their products from the historical megaphone strategy where companies broadcast what they want customers to know to strategies that incorporate customer-to-company and customer-to-customer communication (Gallaugher and Ransbotham 2010). Online community research identified four issues facing businesses: understanding the ideas posted in online communities, choosing the best ideas, balancing openness with competitiveness, and sustaining the community (Di Gangi et al. 2010).

Research on SM use *within the workplace* is more sparse but needed (Huysman 2011). Whereas workplace SM implementations were mostly experimental until 2011 (Rozwell 2011), in 2012, organizations began embracing SM applications to try and connect employees and increase their satisfaction and commitment despite geographic dispersion (Mullaney 2012). Organizations like Best Buy, IBM, and Kaiser Permanente are replacing their intranets with workplace SM sites (Bennett 2009). The most common software used to build these sites is Microsoft SharePoint. In fact, a survey of 1400 small, medium, and large organizations worldwide indicated that 70% of medium and large organizations build their workplace SM sites with Microsoft SharePoint (Ward 2012), which they customize to meet organizational needs (Koplowitz et al. 2011).

### 46.2 Underlying Principles

SM use within the workplace is based on three underlying principles: contribution, communication and collaboration, and social–work life integration. Table 46.1 highlights the theories that have guided research in this area.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Use in SM Workplace Research</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boundary theory (Ashforth et al. 2000; Sundaramurthy and Kreiner 2008)</td>
<td>Used to investigate SM’s role integrating social life into the workplace (Koch et al. 2012a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social capital theory (Coleman 1988)</td>
<td>Used to investigate how workplace SM can help employees build capital to improve their working relationships (DiMicco et al. 2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural holes theory (Burt 1992; Granovetter 1973)</td>
<td>Used to investigate how SM promotes innovation and relationships by bringing together weak ties (Gray et al. 2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory of IT-culture conflict (Leidner and Kayworth 2006)</td>
<td>Used to investigate how organizations can resolve the conflict associated with implementing SM in the workplace (Koch et al. 2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory of positive emotions (Fredrickson 2000; Fredrickson and Branigan 2005)</td>
<td>Used to investigate why new hires used workplace SM and the benefits the SM initiative provided the new hires (Koch et al. 2012a; Leidner et al. 2010)</td>
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</table>
46.2.1 Contribution

Workplace SM value depends on employees frequently contributing small pieces of valuable knowledge that are easy to acquire, share, and use (Yates and Paquette 2011). A common misconception is that the crowd-sourcing capabilities of workplace SM will draw employees to adopt SM tools (Bradley and McDonald 2011). Unfortunately, organizations often struggle with employee adoption (Jackson et al. 2007; Koch et al. 2013). These struggles spawn from an interrelationship between the technology and the employees’ workload. Some employees feel SM is a waste of time or that they are too busy to contribute, while others may not fully understand how their SM use may benefit the organization (Kiron 2012a; Koch et al. 2013). Many employees believe that if their coworkers see them contribute, they will think that they do not have enough work to do—a negative stigma (Koch et al. 2011).

To encourage employee participation in workplace SM, organizations have provided effort-investment and financial and reputational incentives. Effort-investment incentives allow employees to contribute to the SM with no extra effort. For example, corporate bookmarking applications allow employees to share the resources they consider valuable with coworkers simply by bookmarking resources in their own browser. Financial incentives include funding to develop popular ideas submitted over the SM, giving monetary awards to people and teams with the best ideas as well as incorporating workplace SM participation into performance reviews. For instance, Threadless t-shirt design system pays royalties to employees whose ideas are put into production (Malone et al. 2010). Reputational incentives include peer recognition, management recognition, and leadership opportunities. Tata consultants’ leader board tracks the most prolific and highest-rated discussion board contributors (Kiron 2012c). Peer recognition and being on top of the leader board have led employees to respond to questions outside of their work group and helped Tata identify skills they did not know these employees possessed.

Even though organizations have adopted strategies to encourage employee contributions, the SM initiative’s purpose and the organization’s culture affect the success of workplace SM initiatives. Clearly, showing the purpose of the workplace SM by linking it to solving employee problems (Bradley and McDonald 2011) and monitoring outcomes rather than behaviors facilitate workplace SM success (Majchrzak et al. 2009). In addition, cultures characterized by youth, technical prowess, and enlightened leadership tend to successfully utilize workplace SM (Kiron 2012c). Employees want to understand why they should use the SM and feel confident that top management supports their SM use.

46.2.2 Communication and Collaboration

Both employees and managers adopt SM because SM encourages open communication and collaboration by providing forums where all employees can reach across time, space, interest, function, and hierarchy to seek and contribute information throughout the organization (Majchrzak et al. 2009). Using SM tools (e.g., wikis, blogs, and discussion boards), employees can see, use, reuse, augment, validate, critique, and rate one another’s ideas (Bradley and McDonald 2011). This type of information sharing encourages transparency, informality, and democracy.

46.2.2.1 Employee Empowerment

SM’s communication and collaboration principles have freed and empowered employees. Instead of responding to the same question repeatedly using private channels such as e-mail or phone calls, SM allows knowledge workers to publicly respond to questions (McAfee 2009). For example, a Kaiser Permanente team leader capitalized on SM’s collaborative capabilities by posting employees’ public relations plans on its SM site. This enabled all team members to comment on the proposals, without losing information in e-mails or offline conversations and documents (Kiron 2012b).

Empowered employees use SM to promote projects, advance their careers, and offer insight. Employees promote projects by driving traffic to project web pages and collecting comments that both shape the project and document support (DiMicco et al. 2008a,b; Majchrzak et al. 2009). SM supports...
career advancement by allowing employees to highlight their skills and interests to management and coworkers (DiMicco et al. 2008; Koch et al. 2012a). The openness embedded in SM applications allows employees to offer insights to problems outside their job responsibilities. USA’s new hires use the SM site to volunteer for projects that demonstrate their web development, graphic development, and project management skills to management (Leidner et al. 2010).

Management generally implements workplace SM to help employees address organizational problems including knowledge preservation, solution generation, and strategic insight. For example, IBM’s Innovation Jam brings employees, clients, and partners together to discuss new business opportunities, whereas Scotland’s Royal Bank uses a virtual world to gather employees’ feedback on new banking environments (Birkinshaw et al. 2011).

46.2.2.2 Loss of Managerial Control

Given that SM promotes open communication, at times, employees may use SM to address problems that management would prefer employees ignore. In a notable example (da Cunha and Orlikowski 2008), petroleum company employees used an online discussion board to cope with organizational changes that were threatening their identity and livelihood. In SM postings, employees vented their anger and increased their solidarity by sharing painful and humiliating experiences. Their postings portrayed management as incompetent, insensitive, and unskilled while employees were portrayed as committed, competent, and willing to change. In another example, Telco’s employees “hid behind the technology” to anonymously air grievances that they would not discuss when people knew their identity (Denyer et al. 2011).

As such, it is no wonder that management is still grappling with SM’s empowerment capabilities. Organizational crowd-sourcing innovations often threaten innovation managers who feel a loss of control and protest about “having to spend their time sorting through the junk employees submit” (Kiron 2012c, p. 3). Middle managers have the most difficulty accepting workplace SM, possibly because SM threatens their role conveying information up and down the hierarchy (Kiron 2012c; Koch et al. 2012a; Leidner et al. 2010).

Many organizations have implemented workplace SM guidelines to address organizational fears about SM and help employees understand organizational-appropriate SM use (Bradley and McDonald 2011). These guidelines indicate what users can and cannot do with SM (Kaganer and Vaast 2010). However, most of the guidelines reflect a lack of understanding of SM’s potential and instead see it as a risk or a way to convey management’s message. The organizational policies address the risks by telling employees to consult authority if they are uncertain and that improper SM use could result in disciplinary actions. In more than one case (da Cunha and Orlikowski 2008; Denyer et al. 2011; Kiron 2012c), management has controlled information flow by disabling employees’ ability to comment and instead appropriating SM as a megaphone to inform employees about policies and procedures.

46.2.3 Social and Work Life Integration

In addition to loss of managerial control, some organizations are concerned about the social aspect of workplace SM. In fact, organizations that implement workplace SM to encourage employees to make and maintain friends at work simultaneously struggle with whether the benefits of socializing outweigh potential productivity losses (Koch et al. 2012a).

Researchers have used boundary theory and the theory of positive emotions to investigate the SM principle of social and work life integration. Boundary theory (Ashforth et al. 2000) explains how people assume various roles (e.g., friend, coworker, supervisor, and family) that are determined by their task and social system (Katz and Kahn 1978; Perrone et al. 2003). When competing roles (e.g., supervisor and friend) interrupt each other, conflict occurs.

Contrary to boundary theory, an investigation of workplace SM use found that blurred work-social boundaries can create positive emotions (e.g., joy, contentment, and happiness) (Koch et al. 2012a).
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46.3 Impact on Practice

Most managers who champion workplace SM believe that better communication characterized by personal relationships, openness, and collaboration leads to positive outcomes for employees that transfer to the organization. Employees who use workplace SM may experience intrinsic motivations like job satisfaction, freedom, and fun (Tan et al. 2009) and engage in corporate citizenship behaviors (DiMicco et al. 2008, 2009; Skeels and Grudin 2009). This section highlights common SM applications and workplace SM initiatives that have proven effective.

46.3.1 Applications

Most workplace SM implementations encompass a common set of applications, which organizations integrate into customized portals. Table 46.2 describes these applications that have six characteristics (McAfee 2009): search, links, authoring, tags, extensions, and signals. Workplace SM applications may make searching and finding information more successful by allowing employees to share and post information in ways that they consider most beneficial (Kiron 2012c). Links may break down existing hierarchical data structures that have historically defined who can discuss certain topics as well as generate, share, and access information (Kiron 2012c). Links enable employees to define how the organization will organize its documents by promoting a self-imposed structure, which emerges out of everyday work practices. Authoring shifts corporate intranets from a top–down information flow reflecting management’s voice to a tool that empowers employees to update information and provide commentary. Tags allow employees to keep up with useful web resources. Employees can assign descriptive reminders to the content they have accessed and browse their coworkers’ content. Signals notify employees when new and relevant information is added such as when coworkers update documents of interest.
46.3.2 Outcomes

While the business press is filled with stories of how workplace SM benefits organizations (Bradley and McDonald 2011; Li 2010; McAfee 2009), academic research highlights four areas where organizations have effectively deployed workplace SM. These include acclimating new employees, changing organizational culture, managing knowledge, and promoting innovation.

46.3.2.1 Acclimating New Hires

Organizations have leveraged workplace SM to acclimate new hires into the workplace (Koch et al. 2012a; Leidner et al. 2010). USAA implemented its workplace SM in 2009 in efforts to attract and retain college hires in the IT area. USAA’s new hires use workplace SM throughout their new hire program. In the early stages of their program, these tools help new hires become familiar with their area, learn where to go for help, find people like them, make friends, and learn about social events. In the later stages of their program, the workplace SM allows more senior new hires to develop leadership skills by mentoring first-year new hires, developing content, and leading events.

While managers recognize several benefits from integrating SM into new hire acclimation programs including better retention, recruiting, morale, engagement, and productivity, concerns are still prevalent (Koch et al. 2012a). Since workplace SM shifts some of the burden of mentoring new hires away from middle managers while simultaneously exposing the new hires to upper management, middle managers can experience isolation and inequity. These emotions often manifest themselves in middle managers protesting that the SM encourages the new hires to socialize during the workday.

46.3.2.2 Changing Organizational Culture

In addition to making the workplace more social, organizations have implemented SM to also bring about information sharing cultural changes (Koch et al. 2012a; Majchrzak et al. 2009). SM promotes information sharing cultures in several ways. User profiles let employees know their coworkers’ current projects and expertise. Document repositories provide central locations where employees can access
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documents such as contracts. Wikis and blogs allow employees to share meeting notes and frequently asked questions. Activity feeds keep project team members up to date on one another’s project status. Organizations have leveraged these applications to promote employee health and safety and share best practices (Bradley and McDonald 2011).

SM can make the workplace more social by promoting social events where employees can physically get together and providing online forums for employees to learn about one another and nurture their personal relationships. These activities encourage employees to share their personal interests and hobbies. As part of its cultural change effort, a security company hosted a luncheon where employees brought and discussed pictures of themselves having fun (Koch et al. 2013). Subsequently, management encouraged the employees to post their pictures along with their hobbies on the workplace SM site.

Despite SM’s potential to promote cultural changes, employees and management often challenge these efforts (Denyer et al. 2011; Koch et al. 2013). Both groups are concerned about socializing at work (Skeels and Grudin 2009), unnecessary distractions (O’Driscoll and Cummings 2009), and protecting confidential information from unauthorized employee access. While employees are sometimes reluctant to communicate openly in fear of management ramifications (Hewitt and Forte 2006; Skeels and Grudin 2009), management wants to control communication. SM can facilitate cultural change, when management highlights the need for organizational change and implements leadership-based, policy-based, and socialization-based integration mechanisms to align the SM with the organization’s culture (Koch et al. 2013).

While SM-induced organizational change research is emerging, the theory of IT-culture conflict has proven useful in this area (Koch et al. 2013). This theory posits that IT implementations may encounter system conflict when the values embedded in the IT conflict with group member values (Leidner and Kayworth 2006). The theory suggests that organizations can resolve IT-culture system conflict by implementing integration mechanisms that bring group member values and the IT values closer together.

46.3.2.3 Managing Knowledge

Organizations can use SM to manage knowledge by facilitating knowledge sharing, knowledge transfer, and knowledge preservation (Bradley and McDonald 2011; McAfee 2006, 2009). In contrast to the knowledge management systems of the 1990s that required employees to preserve their knowledge by entering best practices and experiences in knowledge repositories, workplace SM can capture employee’s knowledge as part of their routine work practices (McAfee 2006).

Workplace SM facilitates knowledge sharing by allowing employees to pose and answer questions. Employees who respond to the forums are often people with interest in an area rather than people assigned to an area, thus allowing organizations to tap into hidden skill resources. SM enables employees to find knowledge resources within the organization. For example, employees located at different worldwide divisions can locate their counterparts at other divisions. SM’s social aspect (i.e., the profiles and the activity feeds) helps promote relationships that may ensure that the counterpart responds to the request for help.

SM facilitates knowledge transfer by allowing coworkers to stay abreast of one another’s activities and facilitating succession. As an example of staying abreast of coworker activities, employees in the defense industry, who had historically e-mailed their managers weekly activity reports, began using SM to post their activity reports (Koch et al. 2013). This allowed their team members to monitor their project progress (Koch et al. 2013). By giving new team members access to their predecessor’s portal, SM enables new employees to learn who their predecessor communicated with and the electronic resources they used.

Employees can use SM’s knowledge transfer capabilities to gain broad-based or pulse knowledge (Jackson et al. 2007). Broad-based knowledge may include strategies, initiatives, policies, or events. For example, reading coworkers’ blogs can help employees understand how changes to the companies’ pension program affect them (Jackson et al. 2007). Pulse knowledge gives employees an insight
to their coworkers’ thoughts. Pulse knowledge can help executives assess organizational climate, assist human resources professionals to create a positive working environment, and allow newcomers to fit in.

46.3.2.4 Promoting Innovation

Research on workplace SM-enabled innovation includes business success stories, explanations of how organizations have used SM to promote innovation, and the relationship between SM tools and innovation. Business press authors like Charlene Li (2010), Andrew McAfee (Kiron 2012c; McAfee 2009), and Gartner Group executives (Bradley and McDonald 2011) share many case studies of organizations that have leveraged workplace SM to promote innovation. These case studies suggest that SM-enabled innovations have positively impacted efficiency, quality, culture, savings, and revenue. Examples range from a semiconductor design company that increased its engineering productivity by 25% to a healthcare company that created a collaborative community to provide better care for the elderly (Bradley and McDonald 2011).

With innovation becoming the entire organization’s responsibility (Birkinshaw et al. 2011), workplace SM, like event planning systems, internal rating systems, and innovation forums, has the potential to involve all employees in the innovation process. Event planning systems promote innovation contests. USA held a contest that encouraged its employees to develop a banking application for the Android mobile phone operating system before Android became mainstream. Innovation forums and internal rating systems allow employees to post, develop, and vote on innovative ideas. Threadless (Malone et al. 2010), IBM, and Scotland’s Royal Bank (Birkinshaw et al. 2011) have leveraged ideas generated from workplace SM by creating connectors between idea generators and those that can make the idea come to life (Whelan et al. 2011).

Both blogging and social bookmarking can foster innovation by bringing together weak ties. Explicated in structural holes theory (Burt 1992; Granovetter 1973), weak ties describe people who are acquaintances and as a result of operating in different networks possess different information. Structural holes theory predicts that bridging gaps between unconnected individuals can expand one’s sphere of influence, build knowledge resources, and foster innovation.

As an informal mechanism for linking weak ties, blogging has the potential to link disparate parts of the organization in an initial step toward promoting innovation through cross-functional collaboration (Jackson et al. 2007). As an example, a cement building and materials company credited its SM-enabled cross-functional collaboration with facilitating corporate process changes that helped decrease its emissions by raising its alternative fuel use (Bradley and McDonald 2011).

At the individual level, organizational social bookmarking applications can increase employee innovativeness when the process of reading coworkers’ bookmarks provides employees novel information (Gray et al. 2011). For example, one employee attributed regularly reading his coworkers’ bookmarks to staying abreast of developments in the visualization area and developing creative ideas for clients (Gray et al. 2011).

46.4 Future Research

Given the nascent stage of SM use within the workplace, additional research is necessary to better understand the phenomenon at both organizational and individual levels.

46.4.1 Organizational Level

Fruitful organizational level research topics include SM’s impact, governance, and sustenance. Since SM often comes in a suite with a variety of applications including blogs and wikis, we need to understand the workplace impact of both particular SM applications (e.g., social networking and wikis) and SM initiatives as a whole.
Currently, practitioners have little guidance on what to do with SM or which SM applications may help solve workplace problems (Pettit 2010). To help practitioners, researchers should continue to investigate SM applications in the workplace, as part of a larger effort to build a workplace SM application taxonomy. Such a taxonomy would help practitioners understand which SM applications are best suited to address workplace needs like creating knowledge, fostering commitment, and promoting change. Further taxonomy development might investigate employee types that are most likely to benefit from particular SM applications. This research could investigate SM in different functional areas (e.g., accounting, marketing, information technology), levels (e.g., executive, middle management, entry level), and maybe even industries (e.g., retail, energy, distribution).

In addition to understanding how SM applications like wikis and social networking affect various processes in the organization, we need to understand how SM as a whole impacts the organization. This stream of research might bolster the case studies linking workplace SM use to positive organizational outcomes with quantitative evidence (Gray et al. 2011; Kiron 2012a). Research might measure how workplace SM initiatives affect collaboration, learning, information sharing, knowledge management and communication, and the resulting impact this has on key performance indicators such as turnover, innovation, and return on investment.

We also need to understand the dark side of SM in the workplace. While both the trade press (Cain et al. 2011) and academic articles (Denyer et al. 2011; Koch et al. 2013) document management’s and employees’ concerns about SM reducing productivity, we need quantifiable evidence about SM’s negative effects in the workplace. Research in this area might investigate lost productivity, workplace disruption, and information overload.

These potential negative ramifications of workplace SM use might be addressed with SM governance. Governance refers to the management, policies, guidance, processes, information rights, and decision rights associated with an organization’s SM initiatives (Weill and Ross 2004). Since many organizations implemented SM in an effort to experiment with this new medium and its open, collaborative, nonhierarchical values (Koch et al. 2013), we need to know more about effective SM governance. Research in this area might describe both effective and ineffective SM governance practices that address content management, information credibility, and employee rights. How do organizations balance the need for confidentiality vs. the need to share information, workplace surveillance vs. employee privacy, and encouraging collaboration vs. stifling gossip?

In addition, we know little about sustaining SM initiatives. Future research needs to address this along with how to integrate SM into existing work practices. As SM technologies continue to advance and incorporate Web 3.0, big data, predictive analytics, and mobile computing (Andriole 2010; King 2012), research might investigate mindful SM adoption (Swanson and Ramiller 2004).

### 46.4.2 Individual Level

Individual-level research will help us understand how workplace SM initiatives affect employees. How does SM impact communication processes like attention, persuasion, learning, and leadership? How does SM change coworker relationships? Some research areas include the effect of online relationships on offline relationships, social isolation, and weisure time. Weisure time refers to a time where employees cannot distinguish between where work ends and their social life begins (Luttenegger 2010). While we know something about how weisure time impacts employees from an organizational perspective (Koch et al. 2012a), we know less about the impact on the employees’ personal life.

### 46.5 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a starting point for scholars interested in understanding SM use in the workplace. Contrary to SM use in the public domain (e.g., Facebook and LinkedIn) and organizational SM use for external relationship (e.g., customers and business partners), workplace SM use deals with
employees. While these initiatives can empower employees, they can also result in loss of managerial control and social–work life integration. Case studies describing workplace SM uses such as acclimating new hires, changing organizational culture, managing knowledge, and promoting innovation characterize research in this area. Future research needs to investigate the quantifiable impacts of SM as well as its governance and sustenance. Some theories that may be useful to guide these inquiries are available on the IS theories page at http://istheory.byu.edu/wiki/Main_Page.

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