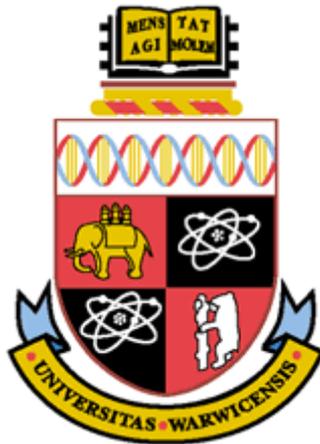


MSc Information Systems Management & Innovation

(ISMI)

2012-2013



***Community Management: A new form of leadership emerges
in organizations implementing Enterprise Social Networks***

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Date of submission: September 2013

Word Count: 7200

COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT: A NEW FORM OF LEADERSHIP EMERGES IN ORGANIZATIONS IMPLEMENTING ENTERPRISE SOCIAL NETWORKS

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Year of submission: **2013**

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Yammer Management Report

“Community Management: A new form of leadership emerges in organizations implementing enterprise social networks”

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Abstract

The use of social enterprise tools has climbed up the maturity curve over the past few years, effectively transforming the way organizations operate to a more transparent communication model. Nowadays, enterprise social network strategies offer businesses critical opportunities to engage and inspire people, to more effectively connect and collaborate. Community management, which involves fostering the active use of an enterprise social network aligned to business value, has become a critical component of social enterprise strategies. However, the role of community managers is rapidly evolving, thus leading to redefinition and specialization of the required skills, and ambiguity regarding the practices it should involve.

This empirical research project with Yammer investigates the role of community managers in seven organizations that have adopted enterprise social networks. It explores the conditions that lead to the emergence of community management, the practices that community managers adopt to overcome existent challenges, and the outcomes from their efforts. The research findings shed more light into this emergent role that moves away from the traditional push and control communication management model and adopts a more democratic approach to foster the use of enterprise social networks in a business environment. Finally, the results from the research link the role of community managers as a critical factor for the successful adoption of enterprise social networks and suggest that businesses need to invest in community management in order to succeed in their social initiatives.

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Introduction

In a social era with more than half of the internet's population in social networks, organizations have acknowledged the impact of social initiatives in the business, and a full range of industries are increasingly implementing enterprise social networks to keep an edge over their competitors. As the use of social enterprise tools is climbing up the maturity curve, enterprise social network (ESN) strategies offer businesses the opportunity to transform the way they operate into a more transparent communication model, which in turn enables them to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their internal operations, collaborate with outside partners more efficiently, and raise the productivity of interaction workers.

The adoption of ESN entails, however, significant challenges that often prevent organizations from capturing the true value of these platforms. Organizations often deploy new technology without designing goals, processes, and rewards to promote employee engagement, and this prevents them from reaping the full benefits of improved communication and collaboration in the workspace. Moreover, business leaders often underestimate the true potential of ESN tools to empower people's actions by bringing them together towards a common goal, and hence, in the absence of leadership and executive sponsorship, their ESN strategies miss critical opportunities to engage and inspire people, to more effectively connect and collaborate.

Affected by the ever increasing focus on social business, community management, which often evolves as part of the job description for internal communications staff and involves fostering the active use of an ESN aligned to business value, has become a critical component of social enterprise strategies. Moreover, the role of community managers is rapidly evolving, thus leading to redefinition and specialization of the required skills. Given the differences between internal and external community management initiatives, and taking into account the unique organizational settings existent in every business, the role of community managers is not clearly defined, thus leading to ambiguity as to what practices it should involve and where it should be situated in the organizational chart.

This empirical research project with Yammer investigates the role of community managers in seven organizations that have adopted ESN platforms, to provide a rich description that conveys what community management is all about. It explores what the setting looks like in modern organizations implementing ESNs and what kind of challenges they are facing, who these emergent leaders are and why businesses need them to succeed in their social initiatives, what kind of practices they adopt in managing and supporting their online communities, and finally, what are the outcomes from their efforts. By adding substantive context to our understanding of the central role played by community managers, the findings from this research shed more light into the nature and the importance of this emergent role that moves away from the traditional push and control communication management model and adopts a more democratic approach that goes beyond traditional hierarchies, with an aim of fostering the use of ESNs in a business environment.

Research Findings

Section 1: Conditions for the emergence of community management

Although ESNs have the power to change the way people work, their adoption entails hidden challenges that often prevent organizations from reaping the full benefits of their usage. Community management is an emergent and evolving key-role that attempts to overcome these challenges and foster the active use of an ESN aligned to business value.

1.1 Organizations implement ESNs to pursue a number of different goals

Modern organizations make the decision to adopt an ESN for various reasons. One of the most important reasons is that contrary to old fashioned intranets, ESNs enable employees to have a voice, and thus allow for a much flatter discourse in organizations that enables the latter to break free from traditional talk down communications and promote a culture of knowledge sharing. Another major reason leading to their adoption is the fact that ESNs can improve communication across the business and substantially reduce the number of emails, thus increasing productivity. At the same time, they bring together people from different teams and communities of practice scattered across different locations, and help them communicate and collaborate more efficiently.

In addition, ESNs offer businesses the opportunity to consolidate multiple disparate tools, such as intranets, portals and wikis, into a single platform and thus save costs from support and maintenance. This consolidation also reduces the issue of channel confusion, since people are not forced to incorporate the use of multiple systems in their workflows, and also enables businesses to have everybody on the same platform, which in turn facilitates their efforts of reaching out and communicating to everyone in the organization. Finally, ESNs help organizations reach out and connect with their external partners, and facilitate the alignment of businesses spread across different locations.

1.2 Organizations adopting ESNs face significant challenges

Despite the obvious benefits of ESNs, however, their adoption entails significant challenges related to both the organizational environment and the nature of the tools themselves, which can become a great obstacle to their successful assimilation by modern organizations.

First, although the majority of companies implementing ESNs are trying to push their culture to become more open and collaborative, their existing culture often becomes an obstacle to the adoption of these tools. On the one hand, cultures which are very hierarchical can pose an obstacle to collaboration, and on the other, highly regulatory cultures can restrict information sharing across the organization. More importantly, ESNs are not a panacea for cultural problems and cannot fulfill the vision of an open culture alone; rather they can only enforce the existing culture in an organization. Hence, organizations should not expect that throwing money at an ESN will solve all their problems; rather they need to acknowledge that they have to make a lot of effort to effectively change the culture of people and thus promote open communication and knowledge sharing across the organization, and that the enterprise social networks will only act as tools facilitating the whole change process. Otherwise, businesses implementing ESNs will probably find themselves struggling against significant cultural barriers that will hinder the adoption of these platforms, thus preventing the former from succeeding in their social initiatives.

Second, unlike other tools and technologies which are more straightforward, the nature of ESNs is more complicated and their benefits can be different for every individual, and thus, a lot of people do not understand their concept and often consider them as just another piece of technology that will simply waste their time. This false opinion is reinforced by the fact that contrary to external social media, such as Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn that have been around long enough to prove their business value, enterprise social networking is still at a relatively infant stage and thus, people often disregard its value and refuse to get on board.

In addition, although ESN are powerful tools in the hands of an experienced user, in order to reap the benefits from their usage, one has to make a personal investment first, which most people are unwilling to make. Added to that comes the fact that most people are often quite happy with the way they work and do not see how ESNs can improve that in any way and this poses another great barrier to the adoption of these tools. As several respondents explained, there is no safe way of predicting with accuracy, when or how exactly a person's mind will "click" about the platform, thus enabling him or her to understand how they can actually benefit from using it, because everybody's 'light bulb moment' happens at a time and a place that is right for them. People respond differently to the information and guidance provided to them, and it is up to them as individuals to try and interpret the concept of these tools in a meaningful way.

Last but not least, enterprise social networks have big implications for the organizations adopting them, because they "threaten" to change the way people are used to controlling the context and flow of information across the organization. Hence, the concept of enterprise social networking often scares the internal coms people and prevents them from embracing these tools, which makes the adoption of ESNs even more challenging.

1.3 Community management contributes to the success of these large-scale social initiatives

Although enterprise social networking can potentially offer substantial benefits to modern organizations, the tools themselves cannot bring these benefits to life, and at the same time, due to the abovementioned issues, their adoption is a very challenging task that requires a significant investment in both time and money. The adoption and assimilation of an ESN is a large-scale initiative that requires a significant resource investment, and the people leading these enterprise-wide social efforts, thus being responsible for their success, are known as community managers.

Community management is a new breed of role that often evolves from that of internal communications professionals, external social media advisors, or even company intranet owners, and involves all the actions necessary for growing and sustaining an online community in companies that have adopted an enterprise social network. Interestingly, community management is also a multifaceted role, and thus, except for being responsible for managing the ESN, driving adoption to the platform and supporting the online community, community managers are often responsible for a variety of other tasks: they act as tool owners, thus ensuring the good functionality of the tool from a business perspective; they act as consultants, thus advising businesses and key audiences on how to utilize the network in ways that best addresses their needs; and they often manage multiple communication channels in addition to the enterprise social network.

Community managers come from a wide range of professional backgrounds including marketing, technology, business, and HR, but regardless of their background and professional experience, what distinguishes them and thus makes them appropriate for leading their brands' social efforts is the fact that they have developed a clear understanding of social initiatives and their impact on driving business results, fused with an advanced social skillset that enables them to engage and help employees connect with others and build relationships.

One of the most important characteristics of a community manager is having a strong passion for making work a better place, and attempting to go against work stereotypes, by creating a positive environment that opens up work and makes it more human. Another important characteristic is having a strong belief in the power of ESN to help people break free from their job descriptions, connect with others, learn much more about their colleagues and their organization as a whole, expand their network both inside and outside the organization, and ultimately improve their work. Furthermore, community managers gain motivation from helping others bring their own passions to life and become successful, as well as a sense of achievement from enabling people to release themselves from the old fashioned way of working and find pleasure in their work. Last but not least, community managers share a common vision of making work a better place, and they are committed to helping others break free from the traditional hierarchies and silos and share a feeling of community.

Section 2: Community management practices in modern organizations

In order to help the organization succeed in their social initiatives, community managers perform a number of actions related to the growth and sustenance of their online community.

2.1 Growing the online community

Getting everyone on board and therefore growing the online community, is indeed a very challenging task for community managers. If the transition to these platforms is not managed properly, organizations will fail to get the critical mass of activity necessary for getting these tools off the ground.

Bottom up approach – Promoting the platform’s usage across the organization

To effectively promote the use of the platform across the organization, community managers run live sessions whereby they demonstrate its usage to the people and, more importantly, have meaningful discussions with them through which they attempt to answer everyone’s questions and explain to them what the platform is all about and why they will benefit from its usage both personally, and as a community. Community managers are aware of how important offline interaction is for conveying the message to the rest of the people in the organization, and given that most of them do not have enough time to go and speak with everyone, they often try to balance that by plugging themselves into events happening in different places across the business, in order to get their “20 minute pitch”, which will allow them to speak to people, understand their problems and help them take advantage of the platform to improve their work.

When explaining the tool’s value to employees, community managers do not present it as a silver bullet that will sort everybody out, but rather as a democratic tool that empowers people with voice to express their opinions, powerful enough to facilitate communication, collaboration, and networking, and ultimately improve the way people work. More importantly, community managers recognize that personal motivation is very important for people to actually begin using these platforms, and hence, when they introduce them, they try to tap into people’s passions and channel them to the platform, instead of solely focusing on the tools’ features.

Despite the fact that ESNs are tools that help people work and build community, community managers understand that people work and build community in different ways, and hence, they do not try to push and force people into using them. Conversely, they let the doors to these networks fairly open, thus allowing everyone in the organization to join in, while empowering and encouraging people across the organization to share their own ideas and participate in conversations on the platform. Moreover, they try to pull people into the platform by uploading content that will be useful to them, such as news releases and announcements or organizational updates, without populating fake content in order to bring people in, or faking discussions on the platform for discussion’s sake. To demonstrate good behaviour and show best practice, community managers also try to shift as much of their work in the platform as possible, and avoid the usage of email. By working out loud and sharing their ideas and thoughts with others they try to set the example for other users to follow and engage with the platform in meaningful ways. They also take advantage of the platform to publish other people’s content and thus give them exposure to the rest of the organization.

To succeed in selling the people on the benefits of using these tools, community managers need to shift their perception about the platform, from “a water cooler discussion tool” to “a powerful tool that can help me drive my business forward”. As some of the respondents explained, most business-related discussions are taking place within private or secret groups on the platform, and hence, a casual user who only accesses public content will most likely miss all that business-related content, thus creating a false perception about the business functionality of these tools, which in turn leads to negative feedback against their usage, such as “It's chit-chat and I don't want to use it” or “All I'm seeing is water cooler content about what's my favorite recipe...”. In order to shift people's perception about the platform's value, community managers absorb negative feedback and address that with research findings and solid examples that demonstrate clearly how different individuals across the organization are benefiting from using the network. Having a few good stories is very important for convincing these individuals or groups that they can adopt similar practices to achieve the same, if not better results.

Moreover, people in organizations adopting ESNs, and particularly in businesses that are at the early stages of their adoption process, are quite often scared about using the platform because they fear that they have nothing valuable to contribute, or because they are afraid of the implications of making a mistake, such as leaking confidential information, saying something that might insult others in the organization, or even giving the wrong impression to the rest of the people by expressing their thoughts and opinions on the platform. Hence, part of the job that community managers have to do is educate people about the proper usage of these tools and empower them to overcome their fears and become an active part of the online community.

Finally, in order to get the internal coms people to embrace the platform, community managers need to break down their fears first. Internal coms people are often used to owning internal communications by controlling the message and the flow of information and most of the times consider the adoption of these tools as the cause for the obsolescence of their role. To succeed in helping internal communications teams break away from the traditional communication paradigm of publishing and pushing information to rest of the organization, community managers need to help them understand that their role will not cease to exist because of these tools, but will rather evolve to include the fostering of two-way communication and social networking across the whole organization.

Top-down approach – Getting the executives and managers on board

Promoting the usage of the platform to all employees across the organization is a very challenging and time consuming task, but is not enough for the successful adoption of an ESN. Community managers also need to get the senior people on board, because their participation is crucial for the successful promotion of the platform to the rest of the organization.

In businesses where the executives are championing the platform, a lot of people are motivated by their actions and follow their example, thus using these tools to deliver value for themselves and the organization, while the leaders are able to use the channel to get feedback from their employees. When the executives are championing the platform, community managers acknowledge and support their actions and encourage them to continue inspiring others to become an active part of the network.

However, that is not always the case, and often senior people are either reluctant to use these tools, or strive to use them in an effective way. Contrary to junior people who most of the times do not have difficulties in understanding the concept of these tools and either follow their managers, or learn from others how to use the platform, senior people often need to be told what to do and thus require more “manpower” to join in. Hence, given the importance of getting the senior people on board, all community managers reported engaging their executives through presentations and face-to-face meetings, during which they explain to them what these tools mean and the benefits that they can offer to the organization, thus helping them understand why it is important for them to become an active part of the network. Most people in the executive suite have to prove their ability to run multi-million dollar businesses, and therefore need to be quite antagonistic and look for assets that can offer them a competitive advantage. Hence, community managers can take advantage of that to present the platform as a powerful asset to their efforts, in order to convince them to join in.

Except for the executives and senior managers, most community managers also try to approach the middle management layer, because they see a lot of potential from empowering that population. Middle managers have a substantial audience that follows them and replicates their actions, and therefore their stance determines, quite often, the actions of their subordinates. At the same time, their number is much larger versus the much more limited number of senior people in every organization, which makes them a great asset for growing the online community. To get them on board, community managers can take advantage of their ambition to progress in their career, and use that as lever for promoting the usage of the platform as an asset that will help them build a profile for themselves, connect with others who share the same business interests, and gain exposure in the organization.

After the executives join the platform, community managers need to make sure that they actively promote them and that they receive all the positive reinforcement they need to remain engaged. A lot of executives and senior managers are stuck to the old communication paradigm where information equals power and struggle to make the transition to the new era, characterized by the vast amounts of information produced on a daily basis and the commoditization of information. Community managers need to help senior people move forward, by explaining to them that nowadays power does not come to those hoarding information, but to those who know how to aggregate information and make use of it to drive their business forward, and thus help them realise that these tools can be valuable assets towards the achievement of such goals. Moreover, to effectively dissolve their fears of investing time and energy on the platform that will eventually turn out to be a waste, because nobody will be listening to what they are saying, community managers must help senior people, and particularly those new to the platform, set expectations about its usage and understand that they need to be patient and invest time on the platform to gradually build their audience.

2.2 Supporting the online community

Except of getting people on board, the role of community managers also involves overseeing the platform's usage and providing support to the online community.

Governing the platform's usage

First, community managers take a lot of actions to ensure that the tools are working from a business perspective. They assist people in creating their own groups, they upload infographics on the network that display useful information about platform users and their achievements, and they conduct scans on a regular basis to identify and close down inactive groups, which helps the system remain clean. Second, they perform monitoring activities for tracking network health and measuring network performance, using metrics such as the number of online users, user population per division or region, participation and contribution within groups, content interaction, most active and most followed users, most viewed and most liked content, and top discussions.

In addition, community managers are responsible for resolving information security issues on the platform, and thus, they protect sensitive and confidential data by channeling those into secure groups with controlled access, educating people on how they should treat this type of information, and helping them decide what is confidential and what is not. From an inappropriate content standpoint, community managers ensure that the system is used appropriately but do not "police" the network; rather they let the communities police themselves and only intervene when it is absolutely necessary. Most community managers reported that there are hardly ever any serious incidents whereby people make mistakes that actually require some type of warning or punishment. What is most often the case, according to them, is people being reported for posting something on the network which is objectionable, without actually having the intention of doing any harm. In such cases, community managers contact these people not to shout them down, but rather to help them understand the implications of their actions and take any actions necessary for making it up to the community.

Community managers also take actions to ensure that the platform's usage will remain a positive experience and work together with the vendors to resolve any relevant issues, as well as to develop the product roadmap by suggesting ideas for improvement. One of the challenges that community managers need to face is that the use of ESNs can result in information overload for employees. Most users join multiple groups existing on their network because they are interested in their activity, and that, combined with the absence of sophisticated filtering, can potentially result into an excessive amount of content that flows through their activity streams. To address this issue, community managers work with vendors to improve the filtering functions of their platforms and advise people to avoid joining groups that they are not really interested in. Improving the search experience is also another challenge for community managers, who are often working with vendors to improve the search capabilities of their platforms, and also attempt to remove junk content from their systems. As the number of users on the platform increases, so does the amount of junk content that is being introduced on the system, and thus, reviewing and expiring inactive groups on a regular basis is necessary for the system to remain neat and clean.

Helping people get the best out of the platform

There are always people in every organization that do not fully understand the concept of ESN, and who either refuse to become an active part of the organizational network, or end up using these platforms in a limited way, which prevents them from receiving the actual benefits that these tools can bring to work. More importantly there is a wide variety in people's needs, which depends on everyone's location, seniority, business division and line of work, and which grows significantly larger in global organizations operating in multiple business locations.

These micro-cultures in the workspace pose a great obstacle to getting everyone on board, and hence, to effectively get to all the population, community managers attempt to understand the different needs of the people at the different levels, and support employees by giving them talks about the platform's usage, operating online training modules on the platform, and running training sessions for individuals or groups who want to know how to use these tools in the best way possible. Furthermore, they try to help people understand that doing actual work and using the platform should not be a competing choice. They explain to people that they need to stop looking at the platform as an additional tool on which they can spend one hour throughout the day to talk to others, and assist them in making it part of their daily workflows and thus, use it to collaborate with others and do real work.

Another barrier to the successful adoption of an ESN is the existence of communicational silos that can be found in almost every business, particularly amongst the different divisions and functions, the number of which increases along with the size of the organization. These mental silos prevent people from talking with others outside their division, thus forming a large obstacle for collaboration and knowledge sharing which would otherwise lead to substantial cost savings and risk reduction in modern organizations. By talking to people across the organization and helping them understand that being open and working out loud is important for connecting with others facing relevant issues, community managers break down old stereotypes that restrict the way in which people think about collaboration in the workspace, and motivate people to take advantage of these tools to connect with each other and change the way the work, which brings back benefits to them and to the organization as whole.

2.3 Taking advantage of organizational assets that facilitate community growth and support

Community managers acknowledge that it is impossible for them alone to succeed in getting everyone on board and effectively reach out and support all the population, particularly in large-scale, global organizations. For that reason, they seek for assets in the organization that can help them accomplish their tasks of growing and supporting the community.

Identifying, engaging and supporting ambassadors

In order to increase their impact on the organization, community managers attempt to identify individuals who understand the potential of ESN and who have access to, or are able to influence, a large amount of people in the organization, as well as individuals or groups who have good content to share with the rest of the community but are not necessarily sharing that on the network. After having identified those people, community managers attempt to reach out and engage them in meaningful ways, thus requesting for their help in championing the growth and support of the online community.

There were several approaches reported by the respondents in terms of identifying those who could assist them in growing and supporting the community. One of them involved bringing on board the owners of either online or offline communities that existed before the introduction of the platform, who had a need to introduce their content on the network. Another involved identifying people from different departments who are very active in either online or offline social context, and who might be keen on taking on roles that will allow them to support the growth of online groups on the platform. Another common approach was checking the platform statistics to distinguish those who are the most active on the platform and either post very frequently and/or have a large number of followers, and contact them to become network champions. An additional approach was to look for individuals or groups that had good content but were not yet taking advantage of the platform to share it with others in the community. Some of the respondents from global organizations also reported having a network of advocates and super users, consisting of internal communications people and other nominated staff who understand how to use the platform and work with community managers to help them carry on their tasks in all the different regions.

When identifying and selecting ambassadors, community managers often need to go against traditional hierarchies, structures, and reporting lines established in the corporate environment, thus adopting an opposite, anti-corporate approach that looks beyond people's titles and positions within the organizational chart, and recognizes their actual skills and their ability to influence others in the organization. Often these people are behind the most active groups and have proven their contribution to the community, either by supporting the community and answering people's questions, or by proposing ideas for improvement.

All community managers reported supporting their ambassadors in different ways and empowering their efforts to both assist and influence others within the organization. One way of doing that is to acknowledge and highlight these people's efforts on the platform, and attempt to point others to their work. Another way of engaging with ambassadors is to contact them to become network champions, who will support others on using the platform and also champion its usage to the rest of the organization. Some community managers mentioned that they gave these people more administrative roles, thus placing them in charge of groups on the platform, which made them responsible for growing and supporting these groups, as well as for monitoring user activities and ensuring the usage of proper content. An additional approach is to treat these people in a more exclusive way, by setting up special groups for them, and using these groups to provide them with all the information they need to be able to carry out community management tasks.

Getting executive sponsorship

Getting sponsorship from their executives is one of the biggest challenges for community managers. Corporate support and leadership is crucial for the change management process involved in social initiatives such as the adoption of enterprise social networks, and organizations that are lacking executive support are faced against a large barrier to the adoption of these platforms as business tools.

Getting executive sponsorship is also critical for getting access to additional funding, which can be used to provide a technical infrastructure that will allow a positive user experience on the platform. More importantly, executive sponsorship allows community managers to request for additional manpower for increasing their impact on the organization. Often organizations are spending money on technology, but are not necessarily investing properly in community management. Some do not even have a dedicated community manager, and thus, for the people taking on this role, community management is only one, amongst their many responsibilities which makes it very difficult for them to provide adequate support to their community.

Community management is a multifaceted and demanding role, and given that the amount of work involved increases along with the size of the business, community managers often have teams of colleagues who assist them in their role. However, even in organizations where community managers do receive help from their colleagues, when thousands of people join the platform and its usage really picks up, community managers get sucked into the day-to-day operational requirements, thus trying to facilitate every conversation and support every group. Hence, it becomes very difficult for them to take a step back and look at the strategic part of their work which requires them to identify and focus their attention on the aspects that are most critical for the community's well-being. To effectively support their vast online communities, large-scale organizations consisting of tens of thousands of employees, and particularly those with a global presence, often employ several community managers who work together in teams, and provide them with the resources they need to effectively reach out and support the population in all the different locations.

To succeed in getting their sponsorship, community managers need to prove to the executives that enterprise social networks are worth their money. Similarly to other technology initiatives, enterprise social networks require a significant investment of resources, and given the fact that these tools are relatively new to the business, senior executives often request for figures which can prove that these tools drive value for the organization and are therefore worth the investment.

One of the benefits from the use of enterprise social networks that community managers bring forward when trying to justify the value of these tools are the cost and time savings that companies can achieve, by taking advantage of these tools to instantly bring together people from different locations. Another benefit that community managers bring forward is the fact that the adoption of ESNs allows companies to perform quick technology rollouts, compared to the much lengthier process of building their own intranets from scratch, while enabling them to stay up-to-date with the latest changes in technology.

A common method that community managers follow for proving the value of these tools, is the use of reporting frameworks that they fill in on a regular basis, thus reporting against a set of objectives intended to measure the success of the platform in improving communication and collaboration across the organization, and which include metrics for aspects such as levels of cross-functional work and cross-departmental information sharing. Some community managers also attempt to promote open innovation and crowdsourcing initiatives on the platform, the results of which can then be used to demonstrate the value these platforms can deliver to the business. Finally, community managers often attempt to identify actual cost savings from the platform's usage, which they can then use to support its business value.

Section 3: Outcomes from community management

The actions community managers take to grow and support their online community bring back substantial benefits to both individuals participating on the platform and to the organization as a whole, which justify why businesses implementing ESN need to make a proper investment in community management.

3.1 Benefits for individuals

The efforts of community managers to get everyone on board and support them in getting the best out of the platform lead to substantial benefits for all individuals participating in the ESN. First, their actions help both employees and managers improve the way they work and become more efficient in dealing with challenging tasks. By incorporating the platform to their daily workflows, people are not only able to access useful information easier, but also use the community to crowdsource ideas, which in turn empowers them to tackle problems that they would otherwise be incapable of handling on their own. Furthermore, the ability to access other people's work allows employees to quickly discover best practices on the platform, which prevents them from "reinventing the wheel" and thus increases their overall productivity.

Second, the support that employees and managers receive from community managers also enables them to unlock their hidden value and use the platform to build a brand for themselves in the organization. Often people are very talented in their work but do not know how to take advantage of the platform to gain exposure to the rest of the organization. Hence, by showing them how to use the platform to share their work with the rest of the organization, and by pointing others to it, community managers help these people build a profile and use that to connect with others who share the same interests and passions. This enables employees and managers to gradually build an audience that follows their activities, thus increasing their exposure within the organization and promoting the value of their work, regardless of their working title.

The supportive actions that community managers offer to the community also benefit the executives. By helping the executives get on board and become an active part of the network, community managers effectively reduce the distance between the top management level and the rest of the organization, and thus bring the executives closer to their employees. At the same time, this presents the executives with a great opportunity to use the platform for receiving valuable feedback from the rest of the organization regarding their actions, which can help them make better decisions and improve their leadership skills.

3.2 Benefits for the organization

Except from benefiting individuals across the organization, the actions of community managers also help drive value for the organization as a whole. Their overall ability to understand how social initiatives can impact business results enables them to understand the strategic needs of the business and what people are actually trying to achieve, and figure out how the platform can be used to address these needs in a cost effective way. Furthermore, by breaking down communication silos, community managers improve communication and collaboration across different departments, which in turn improves business performance and increases cost savings for the organization. Moreover, by driving crowdsourcing initiatives on the platform they support the generation of ideas that drive added value and foster innovation in the business.

Apart from driving value for the organization, the supportive actions of community managers also promote a community feeling across the organization that helps towards the creation of an open and honest culture, where people respect each other's opinions and are willing to share ideas. Last but not least, the overall efforts of community managers also contribute towards promoting the human side of the organization. People have a lot of hobbies and interests that they pursue outside work and thanks to community managers' initiatives, these activities are better supported and propagated through the platform, thus making work a better place.

Concluding Remarks

The findings from this research indicate that although enterprise social networking has the power to change the way people communicate and work, it forms a large-scale social initiative that requires proper change management when it's being introduced to succeed. ESNs differ from traditional technologies and thus, the benefits they bring to the workplace vary according to the needs of every individual. Hence, in order for people to join in and make the platform part of their daily workflows, everyone in the organization, from the most junior to the most senior person, needs to understand on a personal level how the platform can benefit him or her as an individual, and how it can benefit the organization as a whole. Reaching out and effectively communicating this message to all the population in the different levels proved to be a very challenging and demanding task, particularly in large-scale businesses operating in multiple locations, one that also increases in complexity in organizational settings characterized by traditional cultures and communication silos that prevent people from sharing information and collaborating with others across the business.

Given the significant challenges inherent in the adoption of ESN, the research findings suggest that in order to reap the full benefits from going "social", organizations need to shift their focus from selecting the right technology, to understanding how people communicate and work and figuring out ways in which technology can be used to address people's needs in the workplace. Moreover, taking into account the overall benefits from community managers' efforts, the results from the research suggest that organizations need to invest in community management, which will enable them to take advantage of these platforms to grow and sustain online communities that break down communication silos and promote a culture of knowledge sharing and collaboration across the enterprise. The results from the study showed that organizations investing properly in community management are able to get these powerful tools off the ground and reap the benefits from improved communication and collaboration that they promise, thus highlighting the key-role of community managers in the success of these large-scale social initiatives.

Thanks to their advanced skillset and unique characteristics, community managers are able to figure out what is going on in the business, how people communicate and work, what it is that they are trying to achieve, and what are the problems that they are facing at work. More importantly, they have a very good understanding of the impact that these tools can have on the business, and they are able to successfully communicate that to the rest of the people, and help them use the network to connect with others and address not only their business, but also their social needs. With their efforts, community managers help individuals drive business results, while promoting the human side of the organization and making work a better place. They have the ability to focus on their organization's largest asset, its people, and take advantage of the platform to leverage their value, and ultimately bring substantial benefits to the organization as a whole.

In addition, considering the large complexity and amount of tasks involved in community management, the results from this research suggest that in order to succeed in maximizing the impact of ESNs in driving business results, organizations need to deploy dedicated community managers who will lead the combined efforts of growing and sustaining the organization's online community, thus uniting people and empowering them to achieve great things. Finally, given that the amount of work involved in community management increases along with the size of the business and the number of operating locations, large-scale organizations, and particularly those with a global presence, need to invest in teams of community managers and provide them with the resources necessary for them to reach out and effectively engage all the population in the different locations.

Appendix

Below is a table that summarizes the findings from the research and groups them in the following three categories: the conditions that lead to the emergence of community management, the practices that community managers adopt when performing their role and the outcomes of those practices for both individuals and organizations.

Table 1. Summary of research findings			
Core Categories	Categories	Concepts	Properties
Conditions for the emergence of community management	Organizations implement ESNs to pursue several goals	<p><i>Short term goals</i></p> <p><i>Long term goals</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing productivity by reducing the use of email Improving connectivity and collaboration between teams Consolidating multiple disparate systems into a single platform Promoting a flatter discourse in the organization Promoting a culture of knowledge sharing and collaboration Aligning businesses operating in different locations Reaching out and connecting with external partners
	Organizations face significant challenges related to the adoption of ESNs	<p><i>Organizational challenges</i></p> <p><i>ESN-related challenges</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizational culture often becomes a barrier to the adoption Organizations don't get "it" and they like things the way they are ESNs are not a panacea for cultural problems ESNs have big implications for the organizations adopting them
	Community management contributes to the success of these social initiatives	<p><i>Community management is a multifaceted role</i></p> <p><i>Community managers have special characteristics</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responsibility for managing the online community Responsibility for driving adoption to the ESN Accountability for good functionality of the ESN Provision of business advisory services Management of multiple communication channels Good understanding of social initiatives' and their impact on driving business results Good communication skills Passion for making work a better place Strong belief in the value of ESN Motivation gains from helping others

Community management practices	Growing the online community	<p><i>Bottom up approach: Promoting the platform's usage across the organization</i></p> <p><i>Top-down approach: Getting the executives and managers on board</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Selling" the platform to the people • Leaving the door fairly open • Pulling instead of pushing people in using the platform • Shifting people's perceptions about the platform's value • Breaking down people's fears • Engaging the executives and the middle managers • Breaking down their fears and helping them set expectations
	Supporting the online community	<p><i>Governing the platform's usage</i></p> <p><i>Helping people get the best out of the platform</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administering the usage of the platform • Guiding instead of shouting people down • Making the platform's usage a positive experience • Training and supporting people on using the platform • Understanding people's needs at different levels • Helping people make the platform part of their daily workflows • Breaking down communication silos in the organization
	Taking advantage of organizational assets that facilitate community growth and support	<p><i>Identifying, engaging and supporting ambassadors</i></p> <p><i>Getting executive sponsorship</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying and engaging ambassadors • Maintaining a network of advocates • Going against traditional hierarchies • Supporting and empowering ambassadors • Identifying and bringing forward the platform's business value • Identifying and bringing forward the platform's "hidden" value
Outcomes from community management	Benefits for Organizations	<p><i>Value-driven business is fostered</i></p> <p><i>Work becomes a better place</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better support of strategic goals • Increased cost savings • Increased Innovation • Promotion of an open and honest culture • Better support of people's hobbies and interests
	Benefits for individuals	<p><i>Benefits for employees and managers</i></p> <p><i>Benefits for executives</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved productivity and work efficiency • Ability to build their own brands • Opportunity to get closer to their employees • Ability to use the platform as a feedback channel