Author: Eisner, Gina R.

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STUDENT:

NAME: Gina Eisner DATE: 12/17/2018

ADVISOR: (Committee Chair if MS Plan A or EdS Thesis or Field Project/Problem):

NAME: Daisy Pignetti, PhD DATE: 12/17/2018

-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

This section for MS Plan A Thesis or EdS Thesis/Field Project papers only

Committee members (other than your advisor who is listed in the section above)

1. CMTE MEMBER’S NAME: DATE:

2. CMTE MEMBER’S NAME: DATE:

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-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

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**Abstract**

This study sought to look at the use of Enterprise Social Networks (ESNs) in the workplace as a tool for team communication and a place to foster a sense of community. A survey with 22 participants was conducted at a financial services corporation to determine the employees’ perception of whether the chosen ESN, Yammer, provided an effective means of communication within teams and helped create a sense of community through special interest and employee resource groups. Participants responded to multiple choice and open-ended questions to provide insight into the use of the ESN and its perceived effectiveness. In general, participants felt that the ESN was an effective tool for communication within their team; furthermore, there was a correlation between using it more often (once a day or more) and finding it effective. However, the results were inconclusive as to whether the ESN helps to foster a sense of community in the workplace, and further research needs to be conducted on this topic.
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Chapter I: Introduction

Enterprise Social Networks (ESNs), also referred to as Enterprise Social Media, are defined as follows:

Web-based platforms that allow workers to (1) communicate messages with specific coworkers or broadcast messages to everyone in the organization; (2) explicitly indicate or implicitly reveal particular coworkers as communication partners; (3) post, edit, and sort text and files linked to themselves or others; and (4) view the messages, connections, text, and files communicated, posted, edited and sorted by anyone else in the organization at any time of their choosing.

(Leonardi, Huysman, & Steinfield, 2013)

I currently work as a Technical Writer for a financial services organization, henceforth referred to as XYZ Financial, that utilizes Yammer as their ESN platform. Yammer is a Microsoft platform that comes integrated with their Office365 software and comes pre-downloaded on all employee computers. There is also a Yammer app available for download on mobile devices.

At this organization, Yammer is used to communicate company-wide information, to provide a platform for team communication and information sharing, and to help provide a social platform to encourage a sense of community within the organization. In my team, Yammer is used primarily for asking questions and learning new information. In addition to email, instant messaging, and phone conversations, Yammer provides a method for both one-on-one and group communication within the company. Although no one on this team exclusively works remotely, the company has many remote workers with whom members of this team may need to communicate. Additionally, the company has two primary headquarter locations, which are 10
miles apart, and other various branches throughout the country. Yammer provides a central communication platform for many of these locations.

Yammer functions as an internal network site, meaning that only company employees have access to and can use the site. Within the company network there are smaller groups, which can be public or private, and are how information is shared and received. Public groups can be joined by anyone and their content is accessible to all, while users have to be invited by an administrator to join and access content in private groups. Every employee at the corporate locations is automatically part of the “all company” group so that they can see any communication that is meant for the entire organization. Other groups are joined individually by the user and often include private groups for teams where more confidential, team-based information is shared. There are also interest groups and Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) which bring together people of shared interests or passions and provide a place to interact with others.

Not much training is provided to new employees on the use of Yammer, though the extent of the training depends on the team’s use of the platform. In general, new employees are shown the site and how to access it, given access to team-specific, private groups, and often given some insight into how the notifications can be set up. Employees have control over their notifications and can receive email alerts when a new post is added to their groups or when comments are made on existing posts. Each team uses Yammer somewhat differently, depending on the other primarily-used communication tools. On the team surveyed for this research, Yammer is primarily used to communicate new information related to training or team-specific questions. Within the larger Learning Strategy and Execution (LS&E) team that was surveyed, there are smaller teams which also utilize Yammer for more specific information relating to
expectations, deadlines, and other questions that don’t need to be shared with the larger group. The expectation for all members of this team is to utilize Yammer as much as possible and to check it at least once a day.

Communication technologies are changing rapidly and ESNs are a newer tool that could potentially take the place of or help supplement mass emails. ESNs provide a more user-friendly and interactive way to converse with multiple people and eliminate the “reply all” struggle of mass emails which often leads to missed information or confusing email chains.

Additionally, providing a sense of community for employees can be an important step toward job satisfaction. This increased job satisfaction can lead to better performance and can decrease job turnover. A sense of community can help by providing a place where employees feel they can go and meet with (either physically or virtually) other like-minded people.

Organizations can (and do) still have ERGs without the use of an ESN, relying only on emails and in-person communication. Other, in-person activities organized by a company (picnics, outings, lunches, etc.) can also help build this sense of community. In such a large company, these kinds of activities are typically limited to teams or departments though, because coordinating the schedules of too many people can be very challenging. The ESN helps provide a wider audience, breaking through barriers of location that can’t easily be managed with other methods of building a sense of community.

**Statement of the Problem**

The majority of studies regarding ESNs focus more on their benefits to organizations, both classrooms and workplaces, without looking at users’ perception of communication effectiveness. This study attempts to supplement the small body of existing research on this topic.
Purpose of the Study

ESNs have the capability to help facilitate information at community at work, but it’s unclear whether they are used appropriately or how useful employees feel ESNs are as a communication tool. Although Yammer is used for several purposes at this organization, this study examines its use as a tool for communication within teams and its use for creating a sense of community in the workplace and its effectiveness in these endeavors. Specifically, this research attempted to answer the following questions: (1) Is the ESN an effective way of communicating team updates and information? (2) Does the use of an ESN provide employees with a sense of community within the organization?

Assumptions of the Study

The following assumptions exist for this study:

1. Each person will answer the survey questions honestly.

2. Each participant knows what Yammer is and how to use it correctly, despite potential differences in team expectation and training.

3. Teams at this organization use Yammer for similar purposes such that this team is a representative group for the whole company.

Methodology

This study used an online survey conducted through Qualtrics to collect quantitative and qualitative data. The survey consisted of nine questions – four multiple-choice and five text-based to allow for greater detail about opinions.

The survey was distributed as a link though an email to the entire team. All email addresses were placed in the Bcc line so the invited participants could not see who else was invited. The email provided background on the study and invited recipients to participate. The
survey was anonymous and the only identifying information provided was job title, which was not sufficient for me to determine the identity of any participant.

**Limitations of the Study**

Multiple ESN platforms exist and this study focused only on the use of one (Yammer) at one organization. Results may differ based on the platform used and how each individual organization utilizes its capabilities.

This study also focused on only one, relatively small area of the organization. Due to limited access to all employees, the study relied on responses from only one team and had only 22 respondents as all members of the team did not participate. This may not be a representative portion of the use of the ESN by the organization as a whole. Additionally, it’s possible that those who chose to participate were people who used Yammer more and/or had stronger feelings about it, which could have affected the results.

The use of Yammer was examined in isolation, rather than in relation to other communication tools used by the subjects, which limits the scope of the study. It’s possible that participants feel Yammer is more or less effective due to the fact that email notifications are received or how they use Yammer in relation to other communication media not specifically studied in this research.

Finally, the term “effective communication” is somewhat subjective and was never explicitly defined for the survey participants. Effective communication for the purposes of this study refers to the communicator’s satisfaction with the interaction(s). This can include aspects such as efficiency, accessibility, and connection with others. These subjective aspects are difficult to measure and not clearly defining the term may have affected the results due to
inconsistencies based on each participant’s own personal views of what constitutes effective communication.
Chapter II: Literature Review

Communication between members of an organization (internal communication) is vital to the organization’s success. Effective internal communication offers several advantages:

(1) it is the driver of motivation and innovation; (2) it can serve as an early warning system for those responsible in the company; (3) responsible experts and departments can be identified quickly and easily; (4) it can contribute to reducing costs, rising sales and profits. (Schiller & Meiren, 2018, p. 1)

Internal communication is important for communicating information about the organization and sharing knowledge within the company. It occurs through a variety of methods including meetings, emails, informal conversations, instant messaging, and – more recently – social networking sites.

Social Networking

Public social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter are prevalent parts of how society communicates today. These tools are used for a variety of purposes including asking questions and getting support after traumatic or challenging life events (Ellison, Gibbs, & Weber, 2014). In the workplace, sites like Facebook have become both a hindrance to productivity and a useful tool for reaching the public. Use of public social media by employees has become a concern to organizations as it can be a distraction from work tasks and even pose a security liability depending on how employees use it (Mortleman, 2011). Some employers are also using social media accounts of potential or current employees to make employment decisions (Lawson, 2011).
This prevalent use of social media by both employees and consumers, however, also provides an opportunity to reach consumers in another way. According to Singh, Lehnert, & Bostick (2012):

companies are actively leveraging social media to create brand communities and crowd sourcing models, gain consumer insights, enhance product/brand awareness, improve search engine optimization efforts, reduce customer acquisition and service costs, and optimize overall marketing and communication efforts. (pp. 863-864)

Many companies have Facebook and Twitter accounts, allowing them to easily reach their consumers and the community at large. In addition to marketing and awareness, these platforms can also provide a method for two-way communication between organizations and the public, a phenomenon that was not previously available with other media.

**Enterprise Social Networks.** A newer use of social media platforms is for internal communications, using new platforms that are hosted on the organization’s intranet and are exclusive to employees. These new social media platforms are called Enterprise Social Networks (ESNs) or Enterprise Social Media and allow communication and collaboration between members of the same organization.

ESNs often incorporate a variety of functions on one platform, including instant messaging capabilities, online storage tools, and elements of public social networking sites such as posting updates and commenting (Weber & Shi, 2016). They are used for “sharing knowledge, engaging in organizational politics, understanding the work environment, and collaborating in the everyday work of teams” along with “social purposes such as establishing ties, finding common ground, and maintaining relationships with coworkers” (Ellison et al.,
The use of ESNs can offer organizations a competitive advantage due to the ease with which knowledge can be transferred through them and their ability to allow people to cross physical boundaries that would normally hinder communication (Choudrie & Zamani, 2016, p. 131). Although similar to other organizational communication tools, ESNs “afford visibility, persistence, edit ability, and association, all of which that [sic] were difficult or impossible to achieve in combination before the introduction of these technologies” (Choudrie & Zamani, 2016, p. 132). ESNs have also been shown to “have an emotional impact (e.g., frustration, improved morale, resentment, increased engagement) on employees, especially when boundaries between work and social life become blur, which in turn can lead to organizational impacts” (Choudrie & Zamani, 2016, p. 131).

As with most new technologies, some users have resisted the change toward this new communication platform. Users often resist new technologies when they do “not resonate well with the virtue of environments in which employees identify themselves with organizational norms and values” (Choudrie & Zamani, 2016, p. 132). When first working with a new technology, users compare its use with prior experience with similar technologies (Choudrie & Zamani, 2016, p. 132). Since email has been the primary communication platform for many years, ESNs are often looked at by users in comparison to the effectiveness of email or in-person meetings. Organizations’ use of top-down implementation plans encouraging ESN use has been found to be helpful in their success for internal communication (Azaizah et al., 2018, p. 291).

**Types of Enterprise Social Network Platforms**

The use of ESN platforms in organizations typically takes one of two forms, either use of a private version of a third-party software (Yammer, for example), or the organization creates its own proprietary platform (Weber & Shi, 2016). There are a variety of third-party platforms
available, each with unique offerings, but all of which have some similar features. Some of the more popular ESNs include Workplace by Facebook, Slack, and Yammer. Each of these platforms has specific goals for its users and highlights different features that are useful in the workplace.

Workplace by Facebook boasts the ability to facilitate conversations with an entire organization, drive culture by promoting openness, feedback, and diversity, and providing a dashboard for other apps used within the organization (Workplace by Facebook, 2018). According to Vigliarolo (2018), it is a useful platform for less tech-savvy users due to its similarity to the Facebook interface. There are currently two levels of the product available – one free and one priced per active user per month. The paid service provides enterprise features such as administrative controls, monitoring tools, integration with other programs, and admin support that the free version does not (Workplace by Facebook, 2018). Recently the paid version of the platform has been made free for education and non-profit organizations and it is used by over 2,000 non-profit organizations already (Johnson, 2018). Workplace by Facebook was launched in October 2016 and 30,000 organizations worldwide currently use it (Johnson, 2018).

Figure 1. Workplace by Facebook interface. (Workplace by facebook, 2018, Why Workplace?)
Slack emphasizes its “channels” and their use in keeping conversations organized and accessible (Slack, n.d.). Slack also allows apps to be added to provide a centralized location for tools used regularly and emphasizes its data security (Slack, n.d.). Like Workplace by Facebook, Slack has different levels for their platform, based on price – a free version and two paid versions, standard and plus (Slack, n.d.). The free version puts limits on searchable messages and the number of linked apps (Slack, n.d.). The plus version provides a simplified user-authentication process, more administrative options, more storage, and better support services than the standard version. As of 2017, Slack had over 50,000 teams paying for services and over six million daily users (Konrad, 2017).

Figure 2. Slack interface. (Slack, n.d., Why Slack?)
**Yammer**

Yammer, the platform used in this study, is Microsoft’s ESN platform and according to Mantymaki & Riemer (2016), a leader in the market with 500,00 user organizations (p. 1043). Microsoft has another platform – Teams – which is often compared to Slack for its similar features and is a chat-based communication platform (Heath, 2018). Microsoft’s website emphasizes Yammer’s use for communication across an organization and its use in sharing, creating, and editing content directly on the platform along with the security measures in place for ensuring protection of data (Microsoft, 2018). Microsoft purchased Yammer in 2012 and integrated it into their Office 365 package in 2016 (Wilhelm, 2018). Yammer is more useful for team-wide communication, rather than direct messaging between two people, which Slack focuses more on (Wilhelm, 2018). The Yammer interface resembles Twitter in that it features a “posting stream” based on followers the user has selected (Azaizah et al., 2018, p. 285). The primary function in Yammer is the use of groups, similar to Facebook groups, “which can contain different users in the network and can be created by a user according to specific requirements (e.g., for a topic area or project team)” (Azaizah et al., 2018, p. 285). When posting their own updates, users can post for all other users to see or within groups so that only members of the group have access (Azaizah et al., 2018, p. 285). Monika Wencek, the Senior Customer Success Manager at Yammer stated in Bell’s (2012) interview that:

> Yammer acts as a rich social learning platform free of both time and space boundaries, a third space between e-learning and classroom that can be used for cultural integration with one’s future workplace, manager and peers, induction, ongoing job-specific and workforce development training needs. (p. 48)
However, according to Choudrie & Zamani (2016), Yammer is more often used as a tool for interaction and discussion as opposed to knowledge sharing and informing (p. 132). This difference between its intended use and its actual use could mean it is less effective in practice than in theory.

![Yammer interface](image)

*Figure 3. Yammer interface. (Microsoft, 2018, Yammer Overview)*

**Advantages of Enterprise Social Networks**

ESNs provide a variety of capabilities to assist in the everyday work of users. ESN platforms encourage employees to share opinions, activities and knowledge (Azaizah et al., 2018, p. 285). By providing a platform on which all users can share equally, communication between members of different teams can occur, and users can find and utilize conversations from other members to expand their own knowledge and social network.

**Knowledge sharing.** The primary source of an organization’s competitive advantage has recently shifted from financial resources to knowledge and information resources (Lestari, 2015,
According to Schiller & Meiren (2018), ESNs can help “enable more efficient, effective and cooperative connections between employees to exchange information and data” (p. 1). This primarily assists in the exchange of knowledge. Knowledge sharing is defined by Ellison, Gibbs, & Weber (2014) as “the process of providing and receiving information, advice, or feedback” (p. 105) and is vital for innovation and collaboration. ESNs have been shown to facilitate knowledge sharing in organizations and teams often design platforms to promote this sharing (Weber & Shi, 2016, p. 5). According to Mantymaki & Riemer (2016), users leverage ESNs to perform the following tasks in regard to knowledge sharing: (1) share various forms of external input as unsolicited messages to no one in particular; (2) post requests for input and ideas regarding a specific product or project; (3) ask others for help with a specific question or for resources to help solve a problem; (4) post solutions to questions or provide additional resources to help with problems already posted (p. 1044).

ESNs provide not only a place to communicate and share knowledge with others, but these conversations are stored and thus can be accessed by others at a later time. According to a study cited by Kane (2015), this accessibility has been shown to increase group efficiency by 25% (p. 2). This continued access to communication in its original form is called persistence by Leonardi, Huysman, & Steinfield (2013) and is one of the primary benefits of ESNs. Because other communication tools such as videoconferencing or instant messaging do not necessarily retain an exact record of the conversations held, ESNs outperform these methods by allowing communication to have effects beyond the initial conversation. Additionally, these conversations can be seen by people other than those directly involved, allowing for a wider audience and greater knowledge sharing than may be available via other communication methods.
**Interpersonal connections.** According to Weber & Shi (2016), “social networking increases the frequency of communication and helps to decrease the emotional distance between people” (p. 4). In the context of ESNs, this translates to not only the frequency of communication but the idea of *social capital*. ESNs can help “improve an individual’s perceived social capital by reinforcing existing connections and helping users to access and establish ties to new colleagues as well as those in different organizational divisions” (Weber & Shi, 2016, p. 3). This can increase closeness and trust among colleagues and stronger interpersonal connections which may positively influence work outcomes (Weber & Shi, 2016, p. 3). The formation of these interpersonal connections can also affect the organizational culture and allow cross-team communication that may not otherwise have existed (Weber & Shi, 2016, p. 6).

**Proven improvements.** There have been a few studies that have shown marked improvement in organizations due to the implementation of ESNs. Cardon & Marshall (2015) cite one study in which the organizations achieved 24% higher revenue after implementing the use social media for team communication (p. 278). Another study cited by Cardon & Marshall (2015) found that “companies that use social media tools for team communication achieved nearly twice as much innovation and approximately 50% more sales and profit growth than companies that did not” (p. 278). Other studies have indicated less pronounced results, but still claim that ESN users were more productive.

**Disadvantages of Enterprise Social Networks**

Cardon & Marshall (2015) identify some potential challenges and risks of ESNs including:

- slower-than-anticipated adoption and penetration of these tools, security concerns,
- overreliance on these tools when richer channels of communication are needed,
potential fragmentation of information as more communication channels become available, possible information overload, potential distraction from work, lack of control and clear accountability, excessive self-promotion, and threat to current management systems and structures. (p. 277)

According to Schiller & Meiren (2018), the three largest reasons for failure of ESNs are: (1) unprofessional implementation; (2) insufficient employee involvement; (3) under-support by managers (p. 4).

These potential disadvantages can keep some organizations from using ESNs or potentially decrease their effectiveness.

**User perceptions.** One current disadvantage of ESNs appears to be the users’ opinion of the ESN’s effectiveness or importance to their work. In a study cited by Cardon & Marshall (2015), although ESN use slightly improved productivity, less than 25% of the users felt that the tool was vital to their work (p. 278). Similarly, Weber & Shi (2016) state that many employees find ESNs as an unnecessary, additional task that adds to their daily workload (p. 7). According to a study of Yammer’s use by Choudrie & Zamani (2016), users viewed the ESN as an interruption or inconvenience in their daily work, hindering completion of projects in a timely manner and not providing insight into current tasks (p. 143). Completion of tasks still takes priority in the workplace, so when working with deadlines and project completion, ESN use can be seen as another task getting in the way of productivity (Choudrie & Zamani, 2016, p. 143).

Also, those in upper management positions may be less inclined to support the use of ESNs since it could serve to lessen their power by making information more readily available (Weber & Shi, 2016, p. 7). This negative perception of ESNs by users will only stand in the way of the tool’s full potential.
Future Use of Enterprise Social Networks

According to Cardon & Marshall (2015), email continues to be the most popular form of interpersonal business communication (p. 274). Experts in the industry, however, believe that social networking will take over as the primary form of business communication within the next decade (Cardon & Marshall, 2015, p. 274). Compared to older tools like email, ESNs are considered better at facilitating efficient and effective team communication and collaboration (Cardon & Marshall, 2015, p. 277). Experts in ESN platforms believe that business professionals will need to alter the way they share information and with whom it is shared to allow for this shift in business communication (Cardon & Marshall, 2015, p. 274).

Enterprise Social Networks can be an extremely useful and productive tool for communication in the workplace. Due to the disadvantages and challenges stated above, however, in order for ESNs to become an effective and vital tool in organizations, more work has to be done to encourage their use and educate both current and users on their benefits. Employees who are not well-versed in the benefits of ESNs or trained how to properly use them may be less likely to succeed and less-inclined to view them as useful tools for communication and collaboration.
Chapter III: Methodology

This research was conducted at XYC Financial using an online survey and participants were all members of the Learning Strategy and Execution (LS&E) team this organization. This team is part of the operations department that supports the client service areas of the organization. LS&E provides support for learning and performance for all client service areas. The members of this large team are also on smaller teams, all of which use Yammer to communicate new information, provide training, ask questions, and provide answers. The members of the team are expected to use Yammer at least once a day for whatever purpose they need – often this just entails looking in their groups to determine if any new information has been posted.

Not all teams at XYC Financial have the same expectations for use of Yammer, but this team is assumed to be representative of the organization’s Yammer use as a whole. Because the LS&E team is responsible for learning and performance support, the team is very focused on knowledge sharing and learning than other areas may be. Additionally, as a financial services company, the use of an ESN may be different than in other industries. Due to general confidentiality regulations, protected client information cannot be shared, except with verified individuals. Customer service representatives must verify callers before providing them with any protected information, or sending anything via email. This means that even in private groups, there is still a confidentiality concern when posting questions to Yammer that may not be a concern in all industries that use ESNs.

Subject Selection and Description

Subjects were all from the LS&E team and were invited via email to participate voluntarily (see Appendix A for a copy of the invitation email). I am unfamiliar with most
members of this team, which allowed it to remain anonymous, despite the inclusion of job title in the survey. The anonymity was important to allow participants to feel comfortable expressing their opinions truthfully, without fear of identification. The email included all members of the team and all invitees were Bcc’d to maintain anonymity among participants. The email came from my work email, described the study, and provided a link to the survey for subjects to complete if desired. The email was sent to 63 subjects, 22 of whom participated. The team consists of a variety of positions including:

- Technical writers
- Trainers
- Learning and Development positions
- Knowledge consultants
- Managers and other supervisory positions

The job titles for individuals vary, but most of the team members fall under one of the above categories.

**Instrumentation**

A survey created using Qualtrics software was used to collect responses from the participants. The survey contained four multiple-choice questions and five open-ended questions. The questions were written to be neutral and not prejudice the respondent toward one way of answering. The multiple choice questions examined the frequency of use for team communication and the perceived effectiveness of Yammer as a tool for communication within teams. A multiple-choice question was also used to determine how many participants were members of Yammer groups outside their required team group(s). The open-ended questions provided the participants with the ability to explain their opinions on why Yammer was an
effective tool and how they felt about its use to provide a sense of community in the organization. The participants were also provided with a text-box to indicate their job title since the job titles on the team vary. The open-ended questions were not required to be answered, as they did not apply in all situations; for example, the two questions relating to membership of groups outside of team groups would not apply if the participant was not a member of any additional groups.

**Data Collection Procedures**

The survey invitation was sent on October 10th, 2018 and the survey remained available until October 19th, 2018. On October 29th, 2018, the results were exported via Qualtrics into a report (see Appendix B). Individual responses were also further analyzed using the Data & Analysis capabilities in Qualtrics and Microsoft Excel.

**Data Analysis**

The survey had 22 responses, although not all participants responded to all questions. The multiple-choice questions were analyzed based on number and percent of responses for each option. Thematic analysis was used for the open-ended questions to find common themes in the responses. Some key words (such as “email”) were identified and used as themes in the examination of the results.

**Limitations**

The primary limitation of this study is its small pool of participants and the potential for that skewing the results. Similarly, the fact that all respondents were members of only one team at only one organization has the potential to affect results and may not be entirely representative of the company or the use of ESNs in general. Because the survey was voluntary, those who
chose to participate may be individuals who have stronger feelings about the use of ESNs or those who use them more regularly, which again would affect the results.

Additionally, the use of a survey may not have allowed participants to fully express their opinions as an in-person conversation might. It’s possible that the responses were less detailed due to time constraints and the impersonal nature of surveys. In the planning stages of this research, focus groups were considered instead of online surveys. The use of focus groups may have provided richer responses than the survey did. Ultimately, due to employee disruption and ability of Qualtrics to code and organize results, a survey was chosen as the research tool.
Chapter IV: Results

The results showed that the majority of respondents found Yammer to be an effective tool for communicating information within teams. Several people compared its use to email and provided advantages of Yammer over mass emails for team communication (centralized conversations, quick, easy to use). In the responses that were not in favor of Yammer as a team communication tool, reasons included the high number of communication tools available and difficulty with time-sensitive information. Just under half the respondents who belong to Yammer groups outside of their team-specific groups felt that these were helpful for creating a sense of community at work. Some felt that these groups help fill in the gaps caused by distance and can be a supplement to or help replace in-person activities to create comradery at work. Others, however, felt that these groups only served as a waste of time and were not helpful in bringing them closer to others in the organization.

Demographic

Of the 22 participants, 6 were technical writers, 6 were Learning and Development Consultants or Specialists, 2 were Performance Consultants, and the rest had various other positions (see Table 1 for details).
Table 1

*Participant Job Titles*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Title</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technical Writer / Tech Writer</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning and Development Consultant</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning and Development Specialist</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance Consultant</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Training Specialist / Training Specialist</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operations Knowledge Consultant</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Trainer Senior Specialist</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Technology &amp; Media Consultant</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Director</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultant</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Instructional Designer</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Item Analysis**

The results of the survey indicated that Yammer is used more often to receive team information than to provide it or ask questions. More participants responded that Yammer is used to communicate important information or ask questions of their team less than once per month or never than any other option (see Table 2). The next highest response, however, was that Yammer was used for this purpose one to four times per week, indicating that job role may be an important part of when the ESN is used for this purpose or not. Over half (55%) of the participants claim to use Yammer to receive important information or answer questions for their team once per week to once per day (see Table 3).
Table 2

*How Often do You Use Yammer to Communicate Important Information or Ask Questions of Your Team?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Choice Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than once per month or never</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once per month</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than once per month but less than once per week</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 4 times per week</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22.73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once per day</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13.64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than once per day</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.09%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3

*How Often do You Use Yammer to Receive Important Information or Answer Questions of Your Team?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Choice Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than once per month or never</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once per month</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than once per month but less than once per week</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>6</td>
<td>27.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once per day</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than once per day</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of participants (73%) felt that Yammer was an effective way to communicate within teams (see Figure 4). Many of the responses as to why participants felt this way compared the use of Yammer to email – nine of the fourteen positive responses compared
Yammer to email in one form or another. Participants liked the centralized and quick nature of Yammer, as compared to the “bogged down,” complicated, and difficult-to-find emails. Reduction of emails and streamlining of the reply process was another theme in the responses. Other benefits of Yammer for team communication included: ease of use, encouraging group discussions and dialogue, accessibility, and a sense of community.

![Figure 4](image)

**Figure 4.** Is Yammer an effective way to communicate within teams?

Two of the responses not in favor of Yammer also compared it to email, stating that email provides a better platform for time-sensitive information and that Yammer just causes additional emails because notifications are sent to the user’s email. Another theme in the negative responses was the fact that there are many communication tools to choose from and adding another one (Yammer in this case) can cause missed information, wasted time looking for things, and repeated messages on multiple channels.

The frequency of use for providing and receiving information appears to be correlated to the opinion of whether Yammer is a useful communication tool (see Figures 5-8). Providing
information on Yammer did not necessarily correlate to the perceived effectiveness, but more frequent use of Yammer to receive team information was positively correlated with feeling that it is an effective tool. Given the scope of the study, it is unclear which is the precursor – if using it more makes it seem more effective or if it is used more because it is already perceived as effective, but the correlation exists.

Figure 5. Frequency of providing information on Yammer for participants who responded that Yammer is a useful tool for communication.
Figure 6. Frequency of receiving information on Yammer for participants who responded that Yammer is a useful tool for communication.

Figure 7. Frequency of providing information on Yammer for participants who responded that Yammer is not a useful tool for communication.
Figure 8. Frequency of receiving information on Yammer for participants who responded that Yammer is not a useful tool for communication.

A majority (73%) of participants also responded that they belong to an Employee Resource Group (ERG) or other Yammer group outside of those required by their team. Although the survey did not ask participants to share the names of these groups (to help maintain anonymity), a few participants did provide the names of the outside groups they belonged to, which included the African American ERG, the Pets group, and the Photography group. Only the African American ERG is considered an Employee Resource Group, the others are special interest groups where people with a shared interest (pets or photography in this case) can gather and post pictures, comments, or questions. Just under half (41%) of the participants explicitly stated that these groups help provide them with a sense of community (see Figure 9). Of the remaining responses, however, only 18% explicitly stated that these groups did not provide a
sense of community. The remaining responses were either not clear or did not specifically address the questions of community at work.

![Pie chart](image)

**Figure 9.** Do other Yammer groups help provide a sense of community at work?

Four participants felt that Yammer groups helped provide more of a sense of community than other, in-person options. Five participants mentioned that, while not necessarily superior to in-person or other options for building a sense of community, Yammer is at least as effective and helps “fill in the gaps” caused by physical location and distance that can be difficult to overcome. Only three participants explicitly stated that Yammer did not provide more of a sense of community than other options.

The additional comments provided about Yammer repeated much of the same information provided in the other survey questions. One additional item brought up by three participants was the idea of quality posts versus “junk content” such as complaining or joking. These participants felt that Yammer contained too much of this unnecessary content which was distracting or considered a waste of time.
Chapter V: Conclusion and Recommendation

This research study sought to answer the following questions: (1) is the ESN an effective way of communicating team updates and information? and (2) does the use of an ESN provide employees with a sense of community within the organization? The survey results from one team at a major financial institution (referred to as XYZ Financial) can be extrapolated to represent other teams in the organization and potentially the use of ESNs in other organizations.

Conclusions

Overall, the results of this study indicate that the ESN is effective for communication of team updates and information. Because ESNs are considered a tool for collaboration and knowledge sharing and have been viewed in other research as a replacement or compliment to email, it is important to note that several participants specifically mentioned the ESN in comparison to email. In all but two of these comparisons, the ESN was considered the preferred alternative. The benefits of the ESN for team communication included that it was centralized and quick and allowed information to be found much easier than email chains. Since one of the main benefits of ESNs is their storing and searching capacity, allowing users to find information and conversations that may not have directly involved them, this result indicates that ESNs are successful in this task and users see the benefit of it.

The negative comparisons to email included statements about time-sensitive information and additional emails. One participant felt that email was a better platform than the ESN for time-sensitive information. This may be because email is checked more regularly, or notifications are more prevalent on the user’s computer. The comment about the ESN creating additional emails relates to the notification system of Yammer; if the user elects to receive notifications for new posts, those notifications can be either as in-site notifications that appear
when on the site or they can be sent as an email, causing additional email messages. It’s possible that the participant who preferred email for time-sensitive information did not have notifications elected or did not have the ESN open enough to review it for new post notifications. This issue could likely be resolved with better training on the tool and a shift in the way of thinking (i.e., relying on email less heavily). The use of the ESN to receive team information was positively correlated with its perceived effectiveness. However, it remains unclear which comes first – if the increased use of the ESN causes the positive perception or if the positive perception causes people to use it more often.

The majority of participants belonged to groups outside of their required team groups, but the results were somewhat inconclusive as to whether these help provide a sense of community. Many responses were unclear, or the participant had conflicting opinions, which may indicate that the sense of community in the workplace can be difficult for employees to judge. There were more explicitly positive responses than negative ones, however, which implies that there is a sense of community provided by these groups. Additionally, some participants felt that the ESN provided an alternative or a supplement to other, in-person community options. It was stated that these ESN groups help fill in the gaps due to physical location and distance, which makes sense given the different office locations and remote workers involved.

As past research has indicated, one primary concern from users of the ESN was the concept of quality posts versus “junk” such as jokes or complaints. This, too, could perhaps be remedied with better training and more clear expectations in place for the use of the ESN.

Much of what was discovered in this study is similar to what has been previously found. ESNs can be a useful tool for communication and collaboration when used properly, but not all users see the value or use them appropriately. With better training and clearer user-expectations
form leadership, ESNs could thrive as a primary communication tool, provided employees learn to shift their focus from the older tools such as email to this new platform. User education is vital for ESNs to thrive as a team communication tool as well as a place for employee community.

**Recommendations**

Based on the results of this study, the use of ESNs can be very helpful for effective team communication. In XYZ Financial, however, it appears that additional training and clear expectations regarding use may be helpful to increase its effectiveness. Ultimately, some employees will always be resistant to change, and as ESNs are still a relatively new technology, it may take time for people to adjust to their use and become comfortable with relying on them. Clearly steps have been taken in the right direction as the majority of survey participants felt that the ESN was an effective tool for team communication and many also felt that it helped to provide a sense of community in the workplace.

**Future research.** Due to the limitations of this study, further research is still necessary to fill in some of the gaps from this research. Because this study had a small pool of participants, all of whom were on the same team at XYZ Financial, more research should be done with a larger group of participants from different teams, to ensure that these results are truly representative of how the ESN is used throughout the company.

Further examination of the use of ESNs in organizations of different industries can also help provide insight as to how this organization and industry may differ in their implementation of the ESN. Additionally, this study looked only at the use of one ESN platform, Yammer. Other platforms have different features and capabilities and may be used differently than Yammer so further research should be done studying a variety of ESN platforms.
References


Appendix A: Invitation Email

Good Morning,

I am currently working toward finishing my master’s degree and as a research project this last semester I have chosen to look into the use of Enterprise Social Networks (Yammer in our case) for communication in the workplace. I have created an anonymous survey to try to gather data for this research. If you could take 5-10 minutes out of your day to quickly complete this survey, I would greatly appreciate it. The survey will be available to complete October 10th through October 19th.

Click the link below to access the survey:

https://uwstout.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6EvSUhr3Vg0c0dL

Feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions or concerns.

Thank you,

Gina Eisner | Technical Writer
## Q1 - What is your job title?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technical Writer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Writer (Consultant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operations Knowledge Consultant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Trainer Senior Specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning and Development Specialist</td>
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<td>Technical Writer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning and Development Consultant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning &amp; Development Consultant</td>
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<td>Learning Technology &amp; Media Consultant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tech Writer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning &amp; Development Specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance Consultant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training Specialist</td>
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<td>Technical Writer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning &amp; Development Consultant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Technical Training Specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance Consultant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Writer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q2 - How often do you use Yammer to communicate important information or ask questions of your team?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
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<th>Std Deviation</th>
<th>Variance</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>How often do you use Yammer to communicate important information or ask questions of your team?</td>
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<td>6.00</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>2.75</td>
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<table>
<thead>
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<th>#</th>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Choice Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Less than once per month or never</td>
<td>27.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Once per month</td>
<td>9.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>More than once per month but less than once per week</td>
<td>18.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1 to 4 times per week</td>
<td>22.73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Once per day</td>
<td>13.64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>More than once per day</td>
<td>9.09%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Showing rows 1 - 7 of 7
Q3 - How often do you use Yammer to receive important information or answer questions of your team?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std Deviation</th>
<th>Variance</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>How often do you use Yammer to receive important information or answer questions of your team?</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Choice Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Less than once per month or never</td>
<td>18.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Once per month</td>
<td>4.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>More than once per month but less than once per week</td>
<td>18.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1 to 4 times per week</td>
<td>27.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Once per day</td>
<td>27.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>More than once per day</td>
<td>4.55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Showing rows 1 - 7 of 7
Q4 - Do you think that Yammer is an effective way to communicate within teams?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std Deviation</th>
<th>Variance</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Do you think that Yammer is an effective way to communicate within teams?</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Choice</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>72.73%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>27.27%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Showing rows 1 - 3 of 3
Q5 - Why or why not

Why or why not

It can be effective for focused teams. It also fills the gap that email communications are not good at.

Once everyone is onboard, Yammer is a quick and easy way to engage team members in discussions -- getting their thoughts and ideas, sharing valuable information, building camaraderie and teamwork.

I like it. It's fast and easy and doesn't get as bogged down as email.

Yammer does not give consistent notification of updates. This causes me to miss information.

Yes but only if the entire team is onboard for communicating in this specific way. Easier to read than an email string.

Yes, because it is a place accessible by the entire team where “conversations” can happen. And, you can search for past information. However, since communication still happens through email, and Yammer email notifications are received, using Yammer is yet another place to keep up with.

The ability to have a dialogue and share ideas back and forth is a terrific way to learn and grow in a just in time fashion.

Keeps information centralized rather than in lost or misplaced emails.

It provides a sense of community with the different groups and how the posts can be publicly seen by anyone, and it's a good way to get info out to many people other than through email.

It’s an effective way to promote discussions and share important information without being muddled through “reply all” emails.

too many Yammer pages; hard to watch all of them and decipher where to get what people are too busy to spend a lot of time digging through Yammer sites.

I would rather go to a person to ask a question.

Once you get used to it, it's an easy way to communicate information to other team members.

While I do think Yammer can be an effective way to communicate within teams, it isn’t my ‘go-to’ channel for day-to-day, business-specific information exchanges with my team or the company at large. We are saturated with communication tools at this organization and choosing to adopt one over another really comes down to tool capabilities and team needs.

Ease of use; better collaboration than email

- Email reduction - Transparency of work - Collects communication in one spot

It’s nice being able to see the entire conversation thread in order, rather than having to sift through a chain of emails to follow a discussion.

Because it is another vehicle to use and not everyone checks it so you end up creating multiple communications for the same message.

It could be but currently it is not being used effectively to communicate with my specific team.

When information is time-sensitive, meaning that it needs to be seen or acted on by a certain date or time, Yammer is not a good option. Email, in that case, would be better. Yammer seems best suited to optional, non-critical information. It’s also a poor step-brother/sister of more powerful tools, so that further limits its usefulness.
It quickly spreads information in a central location.

Showing records 1 - 21 of 21
Q6 - Do you belong to any Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) or other Yammer groups outside of those required by your team?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std Deviation</th>
<th>Variance</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Do you belong to any Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) or other Yammer groups outside of those required by your team?</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>22</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Choice</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>72.73%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>27.27%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Showing rows 1 - 3 of 3
Q7 - If you answered yes to question 6, do the other groups help provide a sense of community at work? Why or why not?

If you answered yes to question 6, do the other groups help provide a sense...

I daily use Yammer to help understand what other groups in the company are working on. I need the awareness when documenting various systems within the company.

Yes. Engaging in Yammer helps me stay abreast of current happenings and allows me to feel connected to the groups I subscribe to.

Yes, I like staying up to date with other groups I don’t have other daily interaction with.

Yes. They talk about, and post pictures, of team events and updates.

No, other Yammer groups are a place to get information, ask occasional questions, but it doesn’t really make me feel a part of a community.

I like it for the information and further growing at work - less about “sense of community”

yes

n/a

Yes, I’m in a few groups that involve interests outside of work. It definitely helps to put some personality to an otherwise sterile work environment.

AAERG

There’s so much going on within the company, Yammer is a helpful communication tool to convey the information and make people feel included.

Yes, because these extra-curricular social groups help connect me with like-minded individuals whose paths may never converge with mine over business. They also provide an outlet where colleagues can freely share thoughts and ideas on subjects outside of the typical sphere of business.

These groups do provide a sense of community, but am not sure I would attribute that to Yammer use. Yammer use/adoptions among other groups is inconsistent and not always understood.

Somewhat. I’m still fairly new so I feel like a bit of a lurker still, but it feels like it helps you get to know people a bit more which is nice.

Yes and no. I think it is nice the ERGs recognize various groups however, I am on the Autism spectrum and I do not have the resources I would like to have at work nor is there truly an awareness made to all staff on what being on the spectrum means. More awareness that is not optional would be nice.

I’m in the Pets and Photography yammer group. I don’t think it provides a sense of community for me specifically, but it is something interesting to look at.

Photography, ERG. I can share and receive information to a group of people I don’t normally see. The information can be pulled by the user or can be pushed to the reader.
Q8 - If you answered yes to questions 6 and 7, do you think these groups provide more of a sense of community than other (in-person options)? Why or why not?

I believe they provide a sense of community company wide, although in-person options such as team meetings are helpful also. For remote workers Yammer can help fill the gap for lack of in-person options.

In today's fast-paced “just do it” work environment, we don’t always have the luxury for face-to-face discussions (which is my preferred way of communicating). Also, having a dual campus also prohibits walking over to someone’s desk to have a conversation. Yammer is an acceptable alternative to help build that sense of community.

Not sure.

No nothing beats in-person interaction to build relationships. Yammer helps support that but does not trump in-person

Yes

n/a

Not necessarily. But the ease of access is appealing. I can choose on my terms how I interact with the groups.

Yes. It allows me to connect.

I still like in-person options but with people working in different locations (downtown, Franklin, other offsite locations) it’s almost impossible to get people together these days. Yammer at least fills the gap for providing people information and allowing them to respond.

My attitudes about sense of community are pretty old fashioned. I’ll probably always believe that nothing is quite as effective as a face-to-face meeting, both for exchanging ideas and for building bonds at the team and organization levels. Even so, I recognize how opportunities for connections are expanded when virtual/digital options are offered. In my opinion, Yammer does a good job accommodating this need.

No - Yammer use is inconsistent and, while formally used, is not supported on an informal basis. There are many opportunities being missed.

I think they can. Not everyone is comfortable speaking up or sharing information face-to-face in groups, so I think online groups can help those who are more introverted, or communicate more easily in written form, feel more connected and engage with the group.

No. The events they have are varied and I do not feel comfortable at the ones I have gone to.

I don’t think they do, but I haven’t actively participated in any groups.

I think there is a chance for a sense of community, but the number of employee resource groups is small. If there were a wider selection, I might be more inclined to get involved.

Yes - I can communicate with people quickly when I have time. I’ve received and shared information with people I would not have otherwise had contact with.
Q9 - Please provide any general comments about the use of Yammer.

Please provide any general comments about the use of Yammer.

What I like most about Yammer is the ability to read posts when you have the time and remain "in the know." I also believe it cuts back on emails. I find I get through my emails faster and more efficiently because most of them are now need-to-know information vs nice-to-know information.

I like Yammer and think it's pretty easy to use.

Yammer is a good, but inconsistent tool. It is not widely used, and information can get lost.

Information is split into different groups which can be good, but that can also be bad. When you feel like you have to belong to so many groups in order to get information you want/need, it requires a lot of time to weed through them all. If Yammer was used to replace something else and everyone within a group used it regularly, maybe that would be different. Also, I tend to see plenty of posts that I find do not fill a real purpose and are a waste of my time. Complaining, joking... just not enough time for all that.

I rarely use it to communicate because I can get it done via email, IM, etc. but I can see that it helps other people that have been around longer and have leadership type roles where they have to communicate with many people, plus it has helped me learn a bit more about the company culture, events/happenings, etc. with the many boards it offers.

The value of Yammer is reflective of how people use it. It can be invaluable or completely worthless. Its initial success is greatly determined by culture, buy-in, and habits.

We have too many forms of communication here - if we are to use Yammer then stop with the DC, email etc.

I'll admit I prefer Slack--the Facebook-esque nature sometimes seems to lend itself to people posting junk content (the stories I've heard about the various "gates" comes to mind). But it has also helped me connect with people elsewhere in the company and led to collaboration opportunities on projects, which is a great benefit that I likely would have needed way more time to come across otherwise!

I think many people use it to complain about their days rather than use it as a productive form of communication.

While Yammer is a good basic social media tool, I'd like to see something with a little more power in terms of how content can be formatted in posts (things like being able to bold, italicized, apply bullets and numbering, support HTML tags, basic tables and so forth).

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End of Report