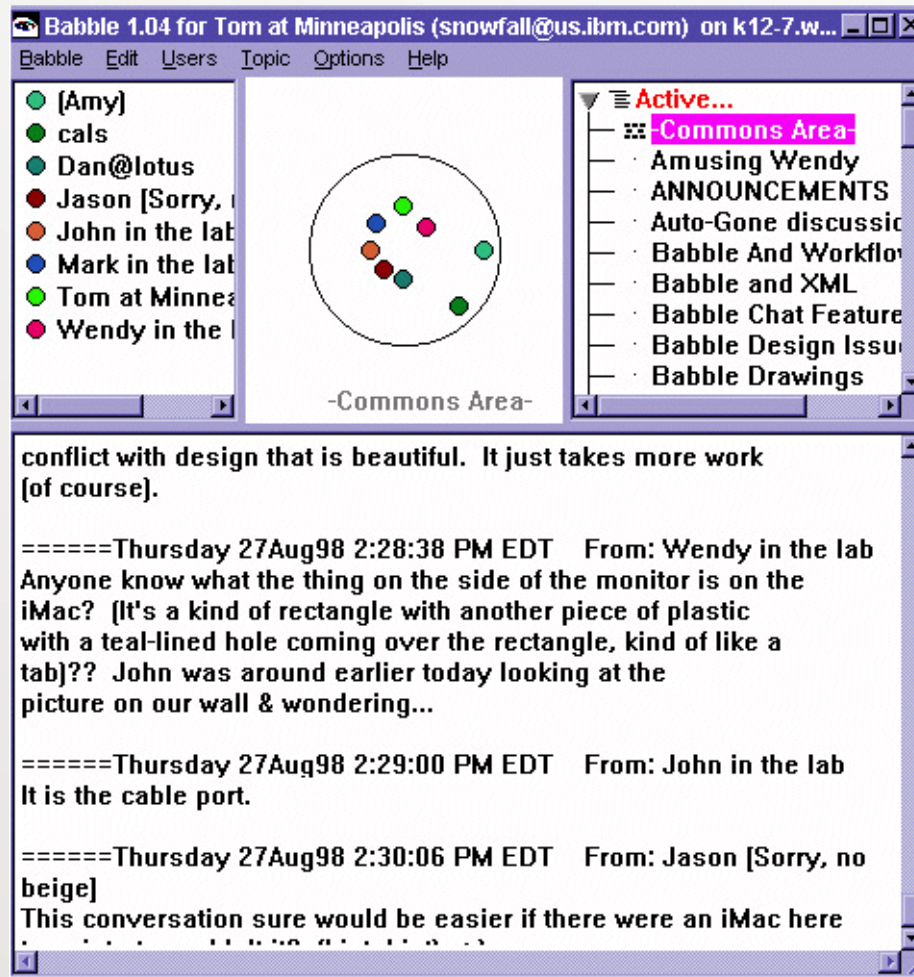


Social Media as Technologies of Accountability: Explaining Resistance to Implementation Within Organizations

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A Long History of Social Software



IBM's Babble
 (Erickson, et al., 1999)

Aspects of Social Media



An Affordances View (Treem & Leonardi, 2012)

1. **Visibility** - Allows workers across levels to broadcast messages throughout an organization (Bregman & Haythornthwaite, 2001)
2. **Persistence** - Displays information across time so that it may be confronted and used by individuals who are not present for the original act of communication (Erickson and Kellogg, 2000)
3. **Editability**- Ability of actors to spend time crafting and tailoring a communicative act before entering it into a technology and making it available for others to view (Dennis, Fuller, & Valacich, 2008; Walther, 1993)
4. **Association** - Ability to establish links or relationships between individuals or content (boyd & Ellison, 2007)

Technologies of Accountability

“systems aimed at the inscription and documentation of actions to which parties are accountable not only in the ethnomethodological sense of that term (Garfinkel and Sacks 1970), but in the sense represented by the bookkeeper's ledger, the record of accounts paid and those still outstanding.”

- (Suchman, 1994, p. 188)

Forms of Accountability

1. Makes communication visible to others such that it is “observable-and-reportable” (Dourish, 2001)
 - The explicit meaning of what people say and how
2. Reveals to whom communications are observable and to what the communications direct our attentions
 - The symbolic meaning of what people say and how

Research Question

How do perceptions of accountability influence workers' decisions to participate in an organizational social media system?

Setting and Methods

Setting:

- Global financial services company (American Financial) headquartered in the Midwestern U.S.
- 16 members of marketing division enrolled in American Financial's leadership program

Methods:

- Two rounds of interviews
 - First round prior to the implementation of social media
 - Second round five months after access to social media
- Texts of interviews analyzed using selective coding and axial coding; driven by research question

Setting and Methods

- During the first interview, employees were asked about a hypothetical a social media tool
- A-Life introduced around eight weeks later
- Features of A-Life:
 - Profiles
 - Groups
 - Blogs
 - Discussions
 - Document Sharing
 - “Connections”
 - Subscriptions to content
 - Alerts about site activity

A-Life Use

	Active After First Month	Allowed Content Notifications	Posted on Another's Wall	Active in a Discussion Thread	Posted a Document
Patrick	No	No	No	Yes	No
Abby	No	No	No	Yes	No
Blake	No	No	No	No	No
Debra	No	No	No	No	No
Blair	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Marie	No	No	No	No	No
Jenny	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Leo	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Brad	No	No	No	No	No
Mark	No	No	Yes	No	No
Vicky	No	No	No	No	No
Sara	No	No	No	No	Yes
Brian	No	No	Yes	No	No
Leah	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Matt	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Molly	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
<i>Number of participants</i>	3	5	3	5	4

Perceptions of Accountability

1. Accountability as a Professional
2. Accountability to an Unknown Audience
3. Accountability to Organizational Role

Accountability as a Professional

“I think there are some negative pressures to not post on [A-Life]. I’m afraid if I post on [A-Life] a lot my boss is going to be like, she doesn’t have enough work to do. That’s feedback I’ve heard from other people too.”

- Vicky

Accountability as a Professional

“I remember Joey would post on every single thing, and I remember thinking, ‘are you even working?’”

- Leo

Accountability as a Professional

- Participation on organizational social media was not viewed as a professional activity
- New employees were acutely aware of perceptions associated with social media use

Accountability to an Unknown Audience

“I don’t want people to see my conversations. I don’t know who is on it, and what higher-ups are on it. And I don’t want to sound dumb in any of the things I am saying because it is technically a professional environment, but it is not like email where I am taking time to write it, so it kind of a strange balance.”

- Debra

Accountability to an Unknown Audience

“It is not secrecy, I just don’t want people getting the wrong idea or misinterpreting what I do or what I’ve done.”

He added later, “I am way more confident in my ability to form accurate impressions of other people than I am for them to form accurate impressions of me based on stuff.”

- Brad

Accountability to an Unknown Audience

- Workers were aware that they were evaluated based on visible communication to coworkers (particularly superiors)
- There was a relationship between acceptance of accountability and perceived control of individual communication

Accountability to Organizational Role

“I literally haven’t talked to anyone on my team [about A-Life]. Outside of the leadership program, it has never come up whatsoever. I take that as a sign that they don’t need to engage with me on it.”

- Sara

Accountability to Organizational Role

“[A-Life is] more of a networking thing. You wouldn’t find it in your immediate job. Anything pertaining to my job and task at hand, I wouldn’t go to A-Life.”

-Leah

Accountability to Organizational Role

- Social media activity was viewed as separate from task-oriented communication
- It was unclear how social media use would fit within the already crowded space of organizational communication technologies

Discussion and Implications

1. Workers were very aware of the accountability associated with communications via social media
 - In organizational settings the “imagined audience” is very salient
2. Mediated performances are increasingly central in organizations, and are the product of co-construction between actors and audiences
 - Has significant implications for identity formation, expertise assessment, and information use

Discussion and Implications

3. Individuals view organizational social media in different ways than non-organizational social media
 - Draws attention to the importance of context in understanding the affordances of technologies

4. Familiarity with social media outside of organizations may increase resistance to “social media” inside workplaces
 - Organizations may not want to frame social media as similar to existing, non-organizational software