

NYU Stern School of Business
Department of Information, Operations & Management Sciences
INFORMATION SYSTEMS RESEARCH SEMINAR

TOPIC: Ambient Awareness: Using Social Media to Improve Accuracy of Organizational Metaknowledge

SPEAKER: Paul Leonardi (Northwestern University)

DATE: Thursday, September 19th, 2013

TIME: 4:00-5:30pm

PLACE: KMC 4-60

ABSTRACT

Accurate metaknowledge (knowledge of “who knows what” and “who knows whom” within the organization) is necessary for a variety of work processes. But organization theorists know little about how people develop and can improve the accuracy of their metaknowledge. The argument in this paper is that use of enterprise social networking sites can increase the accuracy of people’s metaknowledge and increase the similarity in metaknowledge held by coworkers in the organization (also known as a transactive memory). The results of a quasi-natural field experiment in which only one of two matched-sample groups within a large financial services firm was given access to the enterprise social networking site for six months revealed that by making communicative messages visible and people’s social networks translucent, the technology enabled observers to learn vicariously from the communications occurring amongst their coworkers and, consequently, improve the accuracy of their metaknowledge (a 31% improvement in knowledge of “who knows what” and an 88% improvement in knowledge of “who knows whom”). The results also show that individuals’ metaknowledge became more similar to each other when using the technology, thus creating a transactive memory. Based on these findings, I discuss how the concept of “ambient awareness” – awareness of ambient communications occurring amongst others in the organization – can contribute to the work of organizational theorists interested in understanding and enabling the conditions for effective knowledge transfer.

BIO

Paul Leonardi (Ph.D., Stanford University) is the Pentair-Nugent Associate Professor at Northwestern University. He teaches courses on the management of innovation and organizational change in the School of Communication, the McCormick School of Engineering, and the Kellogg School of Management. Leonardi’s research focuses on how companies can create organizational structures and employ advanced information technologies to more

effectively create and share knowledge. He is particularly interested in how data intensive technologies, such as simulation and social media tools, enable new ways to access, store, and share information; how the new sources of information these technologies provide can change work routines and communication partners; and how shifts in employees' work and communication alter the nature of an organization's expertise.