

PURDUE UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL
Thesis/Dissertation Acceptance

This is to certify that the thesis/dissertation prepared

By Laura B. Young

Entitled Professional Networking Sites: An effective means for identifying individual knowledge and expertise?

For the degree of Master of Science

Is approved by the final examining committee:

Lisa B. Ncube

Chair

Lisa B. Ncube

Daniel O. Lybrook

Daniel O. Lybrook

Rodney C. Vandever

Rodney C. Vandever

To the best of my knowledge and as understood by the student in the *Research Integrity and Copyright Disclaimer (Graduate School Form 20)*, this thesis/dissertation adheres to the provisions of Purdue University's "Policy on Integrity in Research" and the use of copyrighted material.

Approved by Major Professor(s): Lisa B. Ncube

Approved by: Gary R. Bertoline

Head of the Graduate Program

4/22/2010

Date

**PURDUE UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL**

Research Integrity and Copyright Disclaimer

Title of Thesis/Dissertation:

Professional Networking Sites: An effective means for identifying individual knowledge and expertise?

For the degree of Master of Science

I certify that in the preparation of this thesis, I have observed the provisions of *Purdue University Teaching, Research, and Outreach Policy on Research Misconduct (VIII.3.1)*, October 1, 2008.*

Further, I certify that this work is free of plagiarism and all materials appearing in this thesis/dissertation have been properly quoted and attributed.

I certify that all copyrighted material incorporated into this thesis/dissertation is in compliance with the United States' copyright law and that I have received written permission from the copyright owners for my use of their work, which is beyond the scope of the law. I agree to indemnify and save harmless Purdue University from any and all claims that may be asserted or that may arise from any copyright violation.

Laura B. Young

Printed Name and Signature of Candidate

04/26/2010

Date (month/day/year)

*Located at http://www.purdue.edu/policies/pages/teach_res_outreach/viii_3_1.html

PROFESSIONAL NETWORKING SITES: AN EFFECTIVE MEANS FOR
IDENTIFYING INDIVIDUAL KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERTISE?

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty
of
Purdue University
by
Laura Bishop Young

In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
of
Master of Science

May 2010
Purdue University
West Lafayette, Indiana

To my parents, for your unconditional love, incessant encouragement, and infinite wisdom. You are in my heart and mind in everything that I do.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is with happiness and deep gratitude to thank those that have made this thesis possible. First and foremost, I would like to thank my committee members Dr. Lisa Ncube, Rodney Vandever, and Daniel Lybrook. My committee chair, Dr. Lisa Ncube, has generously contributed her wealth of knowledge and boundless patience in the development and composition of this thesis. It is her continued support and advisement that has made this thesis achievable. I would also like to thank Rodney Vandever for his judicious and business-minded contributions. Whose real-world experience and business acumen have imparted a level of real-world applicability in the writing of this thesis. Finally, I would like to thank Daniel Lybrook for his simultaneously insightful and charming contributions. Whose early support and genial disposition has continually reminded me of the reasons I initially embarked on this journey.

This thesis has also benefited from the counsel and understanding of my fellow graduate cohorts in the College of Technology: Holly Rhodes, Johana Lopez and Jeremy Johns. Thank you for the sympathetic ear and invaluable advice.

I would also like to thank my significant other, Henry Hansen. Whose undying devotion and dedicated support provided the encouragement that I needed when the task was seemingly insurmountable.

Last but not least, this thesis was made possible by the unrelenting support of my parents. Who are still the two most remarkable individuals that I have met in my life. I am eternally grateful for every dream that they have helped realize.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	vi
LIST OF FIGURES	vii
ABSTRACT	viii
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1. Background.....	1
1.2. Statement of Purpose	2
1.3. Significance	2
1.4. Research Questions	3
1.5. Assumptions	4
1.6. Limitations.....	4
1.7. Delimitations	4
1.8. Definitions of Key Terms.....	5
1.9. Summary	6
CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE	7
2.1. Importance of Knowledge Management	7
2.2. Types of Knowledge	8
2.3. Expertise Identification.....	9
2.4. Professional Networking Sites	11
2.5. Applications of Professional Networking Sites	12
2.6. Professional Networking Sites and Expertise Identification	13
2.6.1. Advantages of PNW Usage in EI	13
2.6.2. Potential Risks Associated with PNW Usage in EI.....	15
2.7. Summary	15
CHAPTER 3. FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY	17
3.1. Theoretical Framework	17
3.2. Research Design	18
3.2.1. Data Collection.....	19
3.2.2. Survey Structure	20
3.3. Survey Validity	23
3.4. Practical Considerations	24
3.5. Data Analysis.....	25

	Page
3.6. Summary	25
CHAPTER 4. RESULTS	27
4.1. Description of Data Conditioning and Analyses	27
4.2. Presentation of the Data	27
4.2.1. Demographics.....	28
4.2.2. Professional Networking Website Usage	29
4.2.3. Expertise Identification.....	32
4.2.4. Factors Affecting EI through PNW	37
4.3. Summary	40
CHAPTER 5. FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	41
5.1. Discussion	41
5.2. Conclusions	44
5.2.1. Defining Characteristics of Individuals Utilizing PNWs.....	45
5.2.2. Factors Promoting and Prohibiting the Use of PNWs in EI	45
5.2.3. Effectiveness of PNWs in the Identification of Expertise.....	47
5.3. Implications.....	48
5.4. Recommendations	50
5.5. Summary	51
LIST OF REFERENCES	52
APPENDICES	
Appendix A: Survey Email Prompt.....	54
Appendix B: Survey Questionnaire	55

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
4.1. PNW Usage by Education	30
4.2. PNW Usage Likert-like Item Breakdown	31
4.3. Expertise Identification Likert-like Item Breakdown.....	36
4.4. Factors Affecting EI through PNW Likert-like Item Breakdown	38

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
4.1. Total Survey Respondent Breakdown by Age	28
4.2. Total Respondent Breakdown by Education	29
4.3. Frequency of Utilizing PNWs in the Search of Expertise	33
4.4. Comparison of PNWs and Organizational Methods in EI.....	34
4.5. Length of Time Associated with Acquiring Information via PNWs.....	35
5.1. Organizationally Supported Methods Preferred	46
5.2. Changing Professional Networking Website Perceptions	49

ABSTRACT

Young, Laura B. M.S. Purdue University, May 2010. Professional Networking Sites: An effective means for identifying individual knowledge and expertise?. Major Professor: Lisa B. Ncube.

There is a significant amount of literature pertaining to the management of knowledge. In the past twenty years, knowledge management has become commonplace among those organizations striving to gain competitive advantage through the retention and dissemination of information. This field has grown exponentially, with innumerable applications and facets growing from this previously singular field. One such application is the location of expertise. Identifying those individuals with specific competencies and job-related information is valuable in many significant ways.

The purpose of this thesis was to justify the use of professional networking sites as a viable methodology for identifying individual knowledge and expertise. This was accomplished through a case study of a small telecommunications company located on the west coast. An electronic survey measuring respondent perceptions was distributed via email with 111 of 1,150 employees responding to the questionnaire. Survey respondents indicated that professional networking sites provided an opportunity to maximize certain aspects of organizational performance. Nonetheless, organizationally supported methods were rated more favorably than professional networking websites in the location of job-related information. Results from this study suggest that while professional networking websites provide a viable methodology for identifying expertise, certain respondent attitudes impede applicability in an organizational setting.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The leveraging of knowledge is particularly fascinating as the application and evaluation of this process is intangible. It is impossible to discriminate between those organizations that are proficient in the realm of knowledge management and organizational learning without considerable analysis of various metrics that define such success. The fact that competitive advantage hinges on the successful application of something that cannot be casually observed is powerful. Few organizations have found a way to capitalize on this concept of managing knowledge and individual expertise. Finding innovative and realistic methodologies that are simultaneously effective and resource conscious holds incredible possibilities. Through this study, the researcher hopes to assess the viability of professional networking websites in the management of individual knowledge and expertise.

This chapter establishes a basis for the completion of an expertise identification research study in the context of professional networking web sites. Research questions are defined through a description of area significance and statement of purpose. These research questions are then further distinguished through the identification of boundaries within which the subsequent study is performed.

1.1. Background

There is a significant amount of literature pertaining to the management of knowledge. In the past twenty years, knowledge management has become commonplace among those organizations striving to gain competitive advantage

through the retention and dissemination of information. This field has grown exponentially, with innumerable applications and facets growing from this previously singular field. One such application is the location of expertise. Identifying those individuals with specific competencies and expertise is valuable in many significant ways. This thesis seeks to justify the use of professional networking sites as a viable methodology for identifying such expertise. This is accomplished through a case study of a small telecommunications company located on the west coast. An analysis of respondent perceptions shed light on potential areas of benefit and risk in utilizing professional networking websites when locating subject experts. Furthermore, certain individual factors, that affect the overall acceptance and usage of professional networking sites, are explored. The resulting conclusions speak to the overall effectiveness of professional networking websites in the identification of individual knowledge and expertise.

1.2. Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of professional networking sites in the context of expertise identification. With the relative ease of use and popularity of networking sites today, it is the belief of the researcher that finding expertise through this medium is viable across various industries and organizations. While minor changes may be necessary in respect to the administration and accessing of professional networking web sites, it is the intention of the researcher to create a more generalized approach that will maximize outcome, or organizational performance, while minimizing input, or time and money.

1.3. Significance

The management of organizational knowledge has become increasingly important as baby boomers, or those born between 1946 and 1964 (Laff, 2009), prepare to retire. It is thought that the loss of these senior employees will result in

large deficits of expertise and experience (Basiulis, 2009). To further complicate the issue, promoted replacement employees will leave additional gaps in the knowledge network. This is because employees are often referenced in relation to their current position and related proficiency, rather than previous organizational station (Holloway, 2007). Filling gaps in the knowledge network is then reliant upon the identification of expertise. Organizationally supported techniques for identifying subject experts include selecting experts based upon the judgments of knowledgeable employees and stakeholders, informal interviews with managers, and nominations (Stein, 1992). Unfortunately, these types of identification methods can encourage certain bias. Perceptions of knowledge, skills and ability are not always accurate (Stein, 1992). Consequently, objective investigation of individual knowledge and expertise is necessary.

Unbiased evaluations of knowledge and expertise can be accomplished through a network analysis, also termed social network analysis (Lunce, Iyer, Courtney, & Schkade, 1993; Parise, Cross, & Davenport, 2006; Stein, 1992). A network analysis is created through the analysis of “interactions or relations between individuals” (Stein, 1992, p. 163). Unfortunately, the cost and time associated with analyzing communication and relationships within an organization is unrealistic for many businesses. A possible solution lies in the utilization of professional networking technologies to connect knowledge seekers with desired expertise. This thesis outlines the origins and importance of the identification of subject experts and the utilization of professional networking sites as a viable tool in the dissemination of expertise.

1.4. Research Questions

The questions of research in this study include:

1. What are the defining characteristics of individuals that utilize professional networking websites?

2. What factors promote the use of professional networking websites in the identification of expertise?
3. What are the barriers to the use of professional networking websites in the identification of expertise?
4. How effective is the utilization of professional networking websites in the identification of expertise?

1.5. Assumptions

The assumptions for this study include the following:

- The administration of the survey produced meaningful and immediately applicable insights both organizationally and individually.
- Participants of the study were truthful in their responses.
- Respondents are representative of the study population.
- A survey of this caliber provided an ample amount of data to explore the questions of the researcher.

1.6. Limitations

The limitations relevant to the aforementioned survey include:

- The distribution of this survey was bound by access to an organization that consented to the investigation of its employees.
- The survey was completed by individuals who have internet access and check their email regularly.
- The administration of the survey was bound by the limited resources available to the researcher including time and money.
- Online surveys generally have low return rates.

1.7. Delimitations

The delimitations relevant to the expertise identification survey include:

- Individuals included in the sample of this study are located on the west coast of the United States of America and work in the telecommunications industry.

1.8. Definitions of Key Terms

EI [expertise identification] – the process whereby individuals locate knowledge, skill, or opinion in an effort to complete or improve upon a task.

EMS [expertise management system] – an organizational system, virtual or otherwise, that is responsible for the identification, description, location and continuous improvement of expertise.

explicit knowledge – “knowledge that is articulated in formal language and easily transmitted among individuals both synchronously and asynchronously” (Frappaolo, 2007, p 10).

human intellectual capital or intellectual capital – “the collective value of an organization’s knowhow. Human capital refers to the value, usually not reflected in accounting systems, which results from the investment an organization must make to recreate the knowledge in its employees” (Frappaolo, 2007, p 92).

KM [knowledge management] – “the effective learning processes associated with exploration, exploitation and sharing of human knowledge...that use appropriate technology and cultural environments to enhance an organization’s intellectual capital and performance” (Jashapara, 2004, p 309).

KMS [knowledge management system] – an organizational system, virtual or otherwise that is responsible for the collection and dissemination of knowledge.

knowledge network – the sum of all knowledge sharing interactions within a defined boundary, such as an organization.

learning organization – “an organization with the necessary practices, culture, and systems to promote the continuous sharing of experience and lessons learned” (Frappaolo, 2007, p 96).

PNW [professional networking websites or professional networking sites] - professional networking sites are just one of many renderings of social networking media (Derven, 2009). They are geared toward industry professionals looking to network for a myriad of reasons including career opportunities, consulting offers, new ventures, job inquiries, expertise requests, business deals, and reconnecting with past employers or employees.

SNA [social network analysis] – “the measurement of interactions or relations between individuals. Interactions may be of several types: communication, instrumental exchange, power, sentiment, and kinship” (Stein, 1992, p 163).

social capital – “the value on the strength of linkages, connections, interactions and shared understandings among social networks in organizations” (Jashapara, 2004, p 310).

tacit knowledge – “personal knowledge embedded in individual experience and involving such intangible factors as personal belief, perspective, instinct, and values” (Frappaolo, 2007, p 10).

1.9. Summary

This chapter serves as the foundation for the study of expertise identification through the use of professional networking sites. Discussion points included background, significance, purpose, research questions and boundaries assigned to this study. The next chapter focuses on the review of previously explored aspects of knowledge management systems and social networking media. This includes an outline of those factors inherent to the administration of expertise management systems and professional networking websites.

CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

There is a significant amount of literature pertaining to the management of knowledge. In the past twenty years, knowledge management has become commonplace among those organizations striving to gain competitive advantage through the retention and dissemination of information. This field has grown exponentially, with innumerable applications and facets growing from this previously singular field. One such application is the location of expertise. Identifying those individuals with specific competencies and expertise is valuable in many significant ways. This review of literature justifies the use of professional networking sites as a viable methodology for identifying such expertise.

2.1. Importance of Knowledge Management

The organizational effects of knowledge management on strategy are undeniable. Leveraging knowledge and benefiting from human capital is an organizational resource that is often overlooked (Porter, 1985). Many companies amass the majority of their operating costs from labor. Resources exhausted through labor include salary, training, and gains or losses in productivity and quality. This fact serves as ample justification for organizations to focus on evaluating and taking steps to maximize the value chain in the context of knowledge management initiatives (Porter, 1985).

Knowledge management plays a paramount role in the tracking of product and services through various value adding activities. Not only do these information technologies serve to disseminate previously acquired information and competencies, but allows organizations to respond to unexpected obstacles

as well as to the ever changing needs of the customer (Porter, 1985). Utilizing successful knowledge management practices allow different functional areas to capitalize on organizational information. Furthermore, appropriate application of information technology can augment competitive advantage (Porter, 1985).

Effective knowledge management can be accomplished through the use of various technologies and best practices. Knowledge management technologies can be as simple as document management systems. These systems allow for the capture and retrieval of principal reference materials as well as necessary process documentation. While this type of knowledge repository can be helpful in the communication of more technical data, experience based data tends to get lost in translation. To address this issue, more complex learning communities are often utilized in addition to or in place of static document management systems (Frappaolo, 2006). Learning communities utilize the tenets of e-learning to create a collaborative and ever-changing system to retrieve and supplement information. These types of networks combine flexibility in the transfer of knowledge as well as ease of accessibility in the documentation and dissemination of information. They are also geared toward identifying and providing a means for contacting those individuals that are experts in the area of question, also known as expertise identification.

2.2. Types of Knowledge

The challenge of designing an appropriate knowledge management solution lies in the variability of information. All knowledge can be placed on a continuum from explicit to tacit (Frappaolo, 2006). Explicit knowledge is information that can be described using formal language. It is easily communicated through face-to-face or online mediums (Frappaolo, 2006). Traditionally, it is this type of knowledge that has populated document management systems. Examples of explicit knowledge in an organizational setting include manuals and documentation related to organizational processes and procedures. The predisposition toward explicit knowledge is fixed in the

belief that it is easier to summarize, disseminate and objectify (Frappaolo, 2006). More collaborative knowledge management solutions or learning communities tend to focus on the communication of tacit knowledge. While explicit knowledge may be easily communicated through words, graphs and audio-visuals, tacit knowledge is more obscure.

Tacit knowledge is rooted in personal experience and expertise (Frappaolo, 2006). This type of information is difficult to define using formal language; however, it is arguably the most valuable. Examples of tacit knowledge include mathematics, foreign language and complex technology or equipment. Where explicit knowledge can be recorded and disseminated with little commitment of time or cost to the organization, tacit knowledge cannot. Tacit knowledge requires copious amounts of time, resources and lost productivity. The dissemination of tacit knowledge necessitates trial and error in both its acquisition and documentation. Individuals may not recognize they possess or have difficulty verbalizing this information. Nevertheless, those companies that effectively identify and communicate employee knowledge gained through experience avoid expenses associated with the reacquisition of this job-related information. Consequently, “tacit knowledge plays a pivotal role in distinguishing companies and poising them for success” (Frappaolo, 2006, p. 11). The identification of subject experts is the first step in this process, as tacit knowledge is rooted in personal experience.

2.3. Expertise Identification

The acceptance and practice of knowledge sharing behaviors within an organization are multifaceted (Bock, Zmud, Kim, & Lee, 2005). In addition, to organizational factors such as culture, training, and resources, there are psychosocial factors at work that impact individual and group behaviors. These psychosocial factors include individual perceptions of connectedness, trust, reciprocity, and reputation. Adding to this complexity is the diverse nature of knowledge and expertise that must be communicated through knowledge sharing

networks (Kogan & Muller, 2006). While many proponents of knowledge management maintain that knowledge management systems are capable of conveying any type of knowledge, there is significant research that refutes this ability. Specifically, the exchange of tacit or experience-driven knowledge is thought to be particularly difficult to communicate. As such, the utilization of effective expertise identification techniques is necessary to not only document the expertise within the organization, but make this information readily available to others (Miller, 2004).

Expertise identification allows organizations to focus on the interdependency between individuals to accomplish a task (Lunce, Iyer, Courtney, & Schkade, 1993; Parise, Cross, & Davenport, 2006; Stein, 1992). These relationships are often overlooked in the knowledge management arena. Thus, this type of analysis allows for effective succession planning as key players in the organization have been identified. Such scrutiny starkly contrasts past efforts to identify individual expertise that have largely been informal and reactionary (Parise et al., 2006).

The identification of subject experts can build online communities (Miller, 2004). Through this community, individuals are able to find sources for desired area expertise. Techniques for identifying these experts include selecting experts based upon the judgments of knowledgeable employees and stakeholders, informal interviews with managers, and nominations (Stein, 1992). Unfortunately, these types of identification methods can encourage certain bias. Perceived knowledge, skills and ability are not always accurate (Stein, 1992). Furthermore, managers tend to unknowingly judge performance and related expertise on popularity and social interaction (Stein, 1992). In addition, individuals may over- or under-estimate their respective areas of expertise. As such, the objective investigation of individual knowledge and expertise is necessary.

Unbiased evaluations of knowledge and expertise can be accomplished through a network analysis (Lunce et al., 1993; Parise et al., 2006; Stein, 1992). A network analysis is created through the analysis of “interactions or relations

between individuals” (Stein, 1992, p. 163). Upon completion of a network analysis, interactions can be mapped to identify key individuals in the dissemination of job-related information. Those individuals that are continually consulted on a certain topic are deemed experts in their respective field. The logic behind network analysis is that only reliable sources of information will be repeatedly consulted. In addition, analyzing these types of professional interactions shed light on certain social networks within the organization. This further demonstrates the social aspect of knowledge transfer and expertise identification.

While a thorough network analysis can identify subject experts as well as sources of knowledge, they can also be impractical (Stein, 1992). The cost and time associated with analyzing communication and relationships within an organization is unrealistic for many businesses. As organizations increase in size, so does the commitment of cost and time. Consequently, there is a need for an expertise identification methodology that is both unbiased and practical in respect to cost and time.

2.4. Professional Networking Sites

Professional networking sites are just one of many renderings of social networking media (Derven, 2009). They are geared toward industry professionals looking to network for a myriad of reasons including career opportunities, consulting offers, new ventures, job inquiries, expertise requests, business deals, and reconnecting with past employers or employees. Examples of PNWs include LinkedIn, Ecademy, Plaxo, Xing, Biznit, and Focus, just to name a few. Many professional networking sites are free for personal users but charge companies looking to utilize these networks to advertise jobs. Once registered, users can set up profiles detailing professional competencies, past and current work experiences and professional affiliations. Users can also search for individuals within the network that meet certain criteria. These search criteria include name, location, industry, company, and professional affiliations. Connections can then

be established between users based upon previous or desired association. In addition, many PNWs make available a discussion forum or similar offering. In these forums users have the opportunity to ask business related questions and glean opinions or expertise from their peers.

2.5. Applications of Professional Networking Sites

Iterations of professional networking sites are currently used in both academia and industry. The value of social capital has been recognized by many organizations as the next step in connecting experts and knowledge seekers. Ultimately, the goal of any networking initiative is to “raise the IQ of organizations” (Anonymous, 2007). Arguably, the most valuable step in this process is the actual identification of the expert. Without identifying the expert, it is difficult, if not impossible, to impart expertise upon the knowledge seeker.

In academia, sites that mimic the functionality of professional or social networking sites are being utilized in professional development. Teachers employ this network to collect feedback, learn new teaching philosophies, and discuss those issues relevant to instructional design (Sawchuk, 2008). These sites are accessible from home or the office and allow for the identification of expertise on a continual basis (Sawchuk, 2008). By connecting novice teachers with those possessing years of experience, tacit knowledge can be effectively leveraged. Moreover, this type of collaboration allows for a team approach to learning that may benefit the subject expert as much as the knowledge seeker. In addition to creating their own networking sites, some districts utilize pre-existing professional and social networking sites to connect their employees (Sawchuk, 2008). Taking advantage of existing technologies that are of no cost to the organization increases the return on investment.

Another iteration of professional networking sites is the corporate alumni networking site. Corporate alumni networking sites provide an opportunity for current and previous employees to maintain and generate professional connections (Koc-Menard, 2009). These sites can be formally recognized by the

corporation these social networks target or some informal iteration (Baker, 2009). They provide an opportunity for companies and employees alike to keep in contact with individuals who may serve as future business connections, collaborators, or co-workers (Baker, 2009). In the current climate of corporate downsizing, corporate alumni networking sites must combat the main disadvantage of terminating large quantities of employees: brain drain (Baker, 2009). Maintaining personal connections allows for the retention of organizational knowledge and synergies. These individuals serve as both subject experts and potential rehires.

2.6. Professional Networking Sites and Expertise Identification

Many organizations entirely eliminate extraneous organizational cost during economic crisis. Expertise identification solutions are no exception to this practice. However, this seemingly damaging situation may provide ample motivation to find expertise identification methodologies that consume less organizational resources. Fortunately, professional networking sites provide networking opportunities that can be of little or no cost to the organization. Implementation time, cost and training is greatly reduced through these existing technologies. Moreover, PNWs charge the employee with the responsibility of identifying and locating deficient knowledge. As with most participative management initiatives, this gives employees a more proactive role in furthering their proficiency within the organization, thus inspiring higher performance and employee loyalty.

2.6.1. Advantages of PNW Usage in EI

There are several advantages to utilizing professional networking sites in the identification of expertise. First and foremost, the speed at which knowledge can be disseminated is a considerable advantage of utilizing PNWs. Professional networking sites are immediate and accessible from virtually any portal with an

internet connection (Derven, 2009). This allows for knowledge transfer at virtually any time, day or night. Moreover, using iterations of social networking technologies is generationally appropriate. Millennials, or those born after 1980 (Laff, 2009), are the most prolific users of social networking technologies which are closely associated with PNWs. It is estimated that “millennials will comprise 46% of the workforce by 2020” (Derven, 2009, p. 60). As such, future employees are primed to utilize these technologies in the identification of expertise.

The cost associated with utilizing professional networking sites that are in existence and free to users, eliminates organizational costs (Derven, 2009). Consequently, PNWs have the propensity to simultaneously reduce organizational cost and increase competitive advantage. In addition, such organizational initiatives may avoid one of the many pitfalls of turnover, brain drain. Professional networking sites provide a communication medium for previous employees as well as subject experts (Koc-Menard, 2009). In the current climate of organizational layoffs and the exodus of baby boomers from the workforce, efforts to avoid losses in organizational synergies are vital.

Professional networking sites also provide the opportunity to cross organizational boundaries. While this may raise questions of loyalty and communication of privileged information, the benefits may far outweigh the potential risks. By accessing expertise across organizational borders it is possible to significantly broaden the spectrum of knowledge accessible by the employee. In addition, this type of feedback may cement formal training initiatives. PNWs reinforce organizational synergies gained through training. They can also promote further exploration of knowledge and promote overall learning (Derven, 2009). Consequently, this type of feedback may pinpoint training weakness. Determining the synergies of subject experts through professional networking sites may uncover future training needs (Derven, 2009). Finally, professional networking sites capitalize on the need for social interaction in and out of the organization. By promoting formal and informal communication networks, organizations effectively expand their knowledge networks.

2.6.2. Potential Risks Associated with PNW Usage in EI

There are several potential risks associated with utilizing professional networking sites in the identification of expertise. Primarily, there is a risk for losses in productivity. PNWs may facilitate interactions that concern personal issues unrelated to the completion of work. These relations may detract from the accomplishment of organizational goals and the leveraging of previously recognized proficiencies (Derven, 2009). Ultimately, this may challenge the competency of these sites in the identification of expertise. Another potential risk in utilizing PNWs is the reliability of information. This is because experts on professional networking sites may communicate erroneous information. Furthermore, holding these individuals accountable for such inaccuracies is impossible. As such, the propensity to trust the information communicated across these networks may suffer. Professional networking sites may not sufficiently foster environments of trust and reciprocity. This may cause seekers of knowledge to doubt subject experts or avoid using such mediums altogether.

Perhaps one of the most noteworthy potential risks associated with PNWs is the exposure of privileged organizational information. Cross-Organizational information may divulge organizational competencies or reveal areas of weakness. This could compromise any competitive advantage possessed by the organization. Finally, professional networking sites may be met with significant organizational resistance. Older or less technically savvy employees may refuse this technology or see it as a waste of time. As such, effective change management practices are vital.

2.7. Summary

This chapter illustrated those concerns inherent to the administration of knowledge management systems and how they shape the boundaries within which expertise location techniques operate. From this framework, an overview of professional networking sites and their application in the identification of

expertise was formed. The next chapter discusses the specific methodology utilized in the professional networking website and expertise identification study.

CHAPTER 3. FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter defines the framework within which the study concerning the identification of expertise in the context of professional networking sites operated. This includes an explanation of the theoretical framework, a definition of the research methodology, research design, survey structure, study validity, practical considerations, and statistical analysis.

3.1. Theoretical Framework

The preponderance of analysis in this study was based upon quantitative data. Furthermore, this study was descriptive in nature as the researcher merely collected participant perceptions through questionnaire without intervention. While the majority of questions measure ordinal and nominal data, there are several questions soliciting user-defined entries that present opportunities to engage in qualitative analysis. This investigation of qualitative data sought to further refine variables defined by the researcher through thematic analysis.

The variables that were evaluated in the expertise identification and professional networking site study are related to those characteristics inherent to the usage of many of the iterations of social networking media. The advantages of such usage include:

- Speed: PNWs are immediate and accessible from virtually any portal with an internet connection (Derven, 2009).
- Generationally Appropriate: Millennials are the most prolific users of social networking technologies which are closely associated with professional networking sites. It is estimated that “Millennials will

comprise 46% of the workforce by 2020” (Derven, 2009). As such, future employees are primed to utilize these technologies in the identification of expertise.

- Cost: Utilizing PNWs that are in existence and free to users eliminates organizational costs (Derven, 2009).
- Avoids Brain Drain: PNWs provide a communication medium for previous employees as well as subject experts (Koc-Menard, 2009).
- Cross-Organizational: PNWs cross organizational boundaries thus broadening the spectrum of knowledge accessible by the employee.
- Social: PNWs capitalize on the need for social interaction in and out of the organization.

In addition to those perceived benefits of professional networking sites the study also attempted to evaluate potential risks associated with such usage.

These include:

- Loss in Productivity: PNWs may facilitate interactions that concern personal issues that detract from organizational goals and competencies (Derven, 2009).
- Reliability of Information: Experts on PNWs may communicate erroneous information.
- Exposure of Privileged Information: Cross-Organizational information may divulge organizational competencies or reveal areas of weakness.
- Trust: PNWs may be sufficiently foster trust. This may cause seekers of knowledge to doubt experts.
- Resistant Employees: Older or less technically savvy employees may be resistant to this technology or see it as a waste of time.

3.2. Research Design

The research in this thesis consisted of a case study involving an agreeing organization. While a study performed across many organizations and industries

would have provided a more realistic view of PNW usage in the context of EI, there were certain limitations. These limitations included time, money and the identification of an organization willing to permit such access. As such, the researcher utilized pre-existing business connections to locate an organization within which to perform the study. While geographic location inhibited the researcher from engaging in a full organizational analysis or the administration of experimental treatments, the distribution of a survey was possible.

According to the standards set out by the United States Small Business Administration, the organization that agreed to participate in this research study was considered small (Small Business Administration, 2008). This organization stipulated that it would remain anonymous in the write up of the research study and results. Thus, the only distinguishing characteristics that the researcher is permitted to share are the size, approximately 1150 employees, industry, telecommunications, and approximate location, the west coast of the United States, of the organization in question. As with many telecommunications companies, the majority of employees work in customer service, sales and technical support. As such, most research participants seek out job-related information in the aforementioned fields. In addition, these employees have access to computers and email as this is an integral part of completing work. Consequently, the distribution of an electronic survey through a link provided via email was chosen, as this method was both cost effective and timely (Appendix B).

3.2.1. Data Collection

The distributed survey was composed of 36 total items. While the sample in this study consisted of the 1150 employees of the agreeing organization, the population was much larger. The aim of the researcher was to evaluate white-collar workers across all industries and geographic locations. The survey required a 10- to 15-minute commitment from the study participants. It was administered through *Qualtrics Survey Software* which is available free of charge

through *Purdue University*. In the distribution of the survey, the company stipulated that the researcher would not have access to employee contact information. As such, the link to the survey was distributed to potential participants via a company-wide email that was sent by an executive level company employee (Appendix A). Company contact information was not contained in this email. Rather, the body of the email was a message composed by the researcher. It disclosed the purpose of the study, length, contact information for the investigators, and informed the potential participant that the survey was both voluntary and anonymous. Furthermore, potential study participants were informed that their organization would not be privy to the survey results individually or on a company-wide level. The link to the survey remained active for a period of two weeks.

3.2.2. Survey Structure

The survey consisted of a series of close ended questions that utilized both multiple choice and Likert formats. Some multiple choice offerings allowed the user to input text responses when “Other” was selected. In addition, survey participants were asked an open ended question concerning specific instances and mediums for expertise identification. Certain questions contained skip logic that allowed survey participants to bypass entire sections of the survey when certain responses were selected. Definitions and examples void of academic nomenclature were utilized when citing certain terminology. In general, the identification of expertise was referred to as the identification of job-related information. The purpose of such language was to ensure that participant responses reflected the intended meaning of the survey question.

The survey was divided into five distinct sections. The first portion of the survey gathered personal information related to demographics including age, education, title and length of employment. The item concerning age asked survey respondents to indicate their age in years according to generational affiliation. This breakdown was as follows: 18-29 millennial, 30-44 generation x, 45-64 baby

boomer and 65 and over traditionalists (Laff, 2009). The purpose of this section was to determine if factors such as generation, amount of education, position or departmental affiliation and corporate experience affected certain knowledge seeking behaviors.

The second portion of the survey evaluated knowledge seeking behaviors within the organization. Participants were asked what methods and how often they engage in these types of behaviors. In addition, the effectiveness and quality of these methods were ascertained through a Likert-like scale with four items: satisfaction, timeliness, accuracy and presence. The purpose of this line of questioning was to establish a baseline in expertise identification activities. This baseline was then compared to expertise identification activities through professional networking sites.

The third portion of the survey evaluated the survey participant's use of professional networking websites. The term 'professional networking site' was explained and the survey participant was given examples of these types of media. From this list, the participant was able to select those professional websites that they utilize. If the participant indicated that they do not use PNWs, the remainder of section three, four and five were bypassed. Instead, the participant was asked to indicate all reasons for non-use. These reasons included time, accessibility, know-how, lack of value, and a user defined entry.

Assuming the participant utilized professional networking websites, the third portion of the survey continued to ask questions in relation to the frequency, reasons for use, and location of access. Finally, survey participants were asked how often they use professional networking sites in the identification of expertise. If participants indicated that they do not utilize PNWs in the identification of expertise, then the fourth portion of the survey was bypassed and participants concluded the survey with the fifth section. If participants indicated that they utilized professional networking site in the identification of expertise at some interval, then they continued on to the fourth section of the survey.

The fourth portion of the survey evaluated knowledge seeking behaviors in the context of professional networking sites. The first set of questions sought to define participant attitudes concerning their use of PNWs in the identification of expertise. This was accomplished through a series of statements that participants ranked on a five item Likert-like scale with a range of strongly disagree to strongly agree. Topics included professional networking sites and efficacy, speed of information transfer, user preference, trust, inclinations for collaboration, and discussion of personal matters. These questions provided the researcher with insights as to the preferences and tendencies inherent to the usage of these sites. In addition, responses given in section two, concerning the effectiveness and quality of organizationally supported methods of expertise identification, were repeated in reference to PNWs. These perceptions were ascertained through a Likert-like scale with four items: satisfaction, timeliness, accuracy and presence.

Section four of the survey also asked the participants to describe the extent to which they utilized professional networking sites in the identification of expertise. This question provided the participants with an unbound text entry to elaborate on these knowledge seeking behaviors. The purpose of this question was to allow the user an opportunity to share their personal experiences with PNWs and the search for job-related information. Since understanding the application of these behaviors may vary based upon innumerable personal and professional factors, it was important that the participant had an opportunity to explain the frame of reference for their survey responses. The final question in this section sought to extrapolate a time frame for the acquisition of job-related information.

The fifth section of the survey sought to define attitudes concerning professional networking site usage. While individuals may not utilize PNWs in the identification of expertise, they do utilize these sites for a myriad of other business related reasons. As such, participants were asked to rank seven questions on a five item Likert-like scale. These scales ranged from strongly

disagree to strongly agree. Topics of inquiry included organizational condoned usage, losses in human capital, competition, socializing, privileged organizational information, reciprocity, and disruption in the workplace. These responses were intended to provide insights as to the perceived benefits and risks associated with professional website usage. Identification of these factors provided the researcher with valuable information pertaining to application and further research in this field.

3.3. Study Validity

As with any study, the research conducted concerning the utilization of professional networking sites in the identification of expertise is subject to an examination of validity. Validity tests relevant in this study include face validity, construct validity and content validity (Sekaran, 2003). Due to the fairly straightforward nature of the survey, this study appears to meet the requirements of face validity (Sekaran, 2003). All items on the survey seem to measure specific concepts and findings described in the literature review. In addition, this study appears to satisfy the conditions of construct validity in that many of the conclusions are supported by theories in this field (Sekaran, 2003). While there are some deviations from these previously accepted models, these could have resulted from certain lurking variables. Potential confounding variables in this study include demographic breakdown, geographic location, and industry. Finally, the criteria of content validity seem to have been partially met. While this research study was reviewed by experts in the fields of knowledge management, virtual environments and organizational behavior, an expert in the field of social networking media could not be found. As such, further research and development under the study of an area expert would be necessary to satisfy these conditions.

In terms of internal validity, this study sought to evaluate user perceptions in order to predict resulting behaviors (Sekaran, 2003). This cause and effect relationship was not directly validated as respondent behaviors were not

observed by the researcher; however, certain attitudes relating to PNW usage did correlate between predicted user defined behaviors. When looking at external validity, the research instrument, or survey, was supported by an extensive review of literature pertaining to expertise identification and social networking media (Sekaran, 2003). As such, the external validity of this study is corroborated through former research studies and formally identified theoretical frameworks.

3.4. Practical Considerations

A primary concern in the distribution of any survey is the response rate. In the professional networking site and expertise identification study, the organization did not condone the use of monetary incentives, such as an opportunity for survey participants to be entered in a drawing for a gift card. This was due to the fact that the organization did not want to appear as if there was some financial exchange motivating its compliance in survey distribution. Rather, this opportunity was afforded to the researcher due to pre-existing professional connections. As such, the distribution of the survey and overall cooperation of the organization was viewed as a non-precedent setting event, or in other terms a favor. It is the opinion of the researcher that overall response rates could have been increased through the use of such incentives.

The email inviting employees to participate in the research study was perceived by many to be spam email. In order to maintain impartiality in the distribution of the survey and avoid potential participants feeling as if participation was organizationally mandated, all contact information for the executive level employee distributing the survey was removed. Instead, the body of the email was a message composed by and included contact information for the researchers. Unfortunately, the organization experienced a computer virus the week of survey distribution. As a result, many employees reported the survey prompt email to the organization's Helpdesk inquiring as to the validity of its contents. Consequently, many employees did not participate in the survey due to their perceptions of questionable origin. Originally, the researcher collaborated

with the executive level employee distributing the survey and formulated an email that included contact information for both the executive level employee and the researcher; however, this prompt was not approved due to the aforementioned reasons.

A large sample size was necessary to validate this self-created survey. A pre-existing or previously validated survey was not immediately available to the researcher due to the nature of the subject matter and cost. Often, validated surveys require a monetary commitment or permission from the author. The researcher had certain financial and time constraints that limited access to distribution methods and pre-existing and/or previously validated surveys. In addition, the researcher felt that a survey created specifically for the purpose of the study yielded more relevant data.

3.5. Data Analysis

The majority of items investigated in the professional networking site and expertise identification study were quantitative. As such, descriptive statistics were utilized to explore the frequency, mean, standard deviation and percentage breakdown for the majority of items. In addition, cross-tabulations between demographics, and expertise identification and PNW perceptions were also explored. These cross-tabulations allowed the researcher to identify certain underlying factors in the acceptance and utilization of these sites. In addition, further examination of user-defined responses provided opportunities for qualitative study and thematic analysis.

3.6. Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the component parts of the expertise identification in respect to professional networking site study. Areas of discussion included theoretical framework, research methodology, research design, survey structure, study validity, practical considerations, and statistical analysis.

Successful completion of this study yielded a basis for analyzing the use of this type of social networking media in certain knowledge management activities. The next chapter will analyze data collected through certain statistical measures.

CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

Chapter 4 presents the data findings of the professional networking site and expertise identification study. Topics of discussion include description of data conditioning and analyses, and presentation of data. The presentation of data includes an objective analysis of the data utilizing certain statistical measures and visual representations.

4.1. Description of Data Conditioning and Analyses

The data for the professional networking site and expertise identification study was collected utilizing Qualtrics Survey Software. The data was then downloaded into an excel spreadsheet and analyzed employing SPSS statistical software. The conditioning of the data entailed classifying variables, and defining values assigned to item responses automatically in Qualtrics. Because the survey contained skip logic respondents were not prompted to complete the entire survey. As such, the number of individuals taking the survey differed in each of the five survey sections. Consequently, the item sample size is disclosed when analyzing responses. Approaches to data analysis include frequencies, cross-tabulations and some qualitative analysis.

4.2. Presentation of the Data

The sample size for the data consisted of 1150 individuals. These individuals are employed by a small telecommunications company located in the United States. Of the 1150 employees that were invited to participate in the survey, 115 employees responded. Of these employees, 111 actually completed

the survey with 4 employees failing to respond to any of the items on the questionnaire. The overall response rate to this survey was 9.65%.

4.2.1. Demographics

Of the 111 individuals responding to this survey 50.5% were males and 49.5% were females. Respondents also varied by age, or generational standing, with 4.5% of respondents age 18-29, 60.4% age 30-44, 34.2% age 45-63, and 0.9% age 64 or greater (See Figure 4.1).

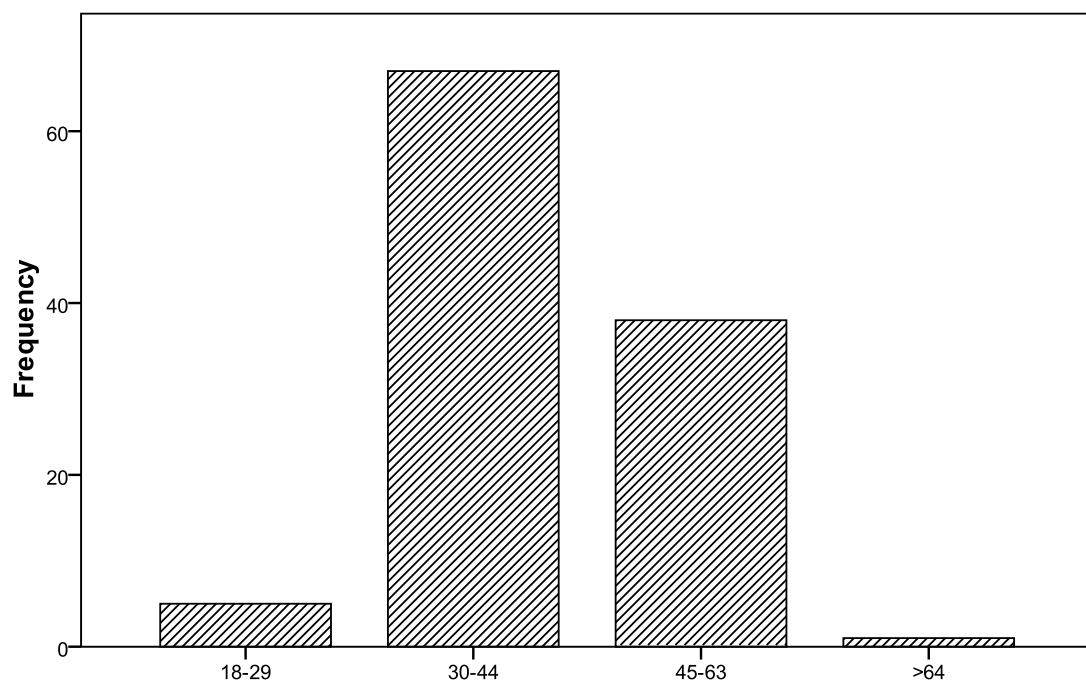


Figure 4.1. Total Survey Respondent Breakdown by Age.

Finally, respondents differed by education with 23.4% possessing a High School Degree or GED, 14.4% possessing a 2-year College Degree, 38.7% possessing a 4-year College Degree, and 23.4% possessing a Postgraduate Degree (See Figure 4.2).

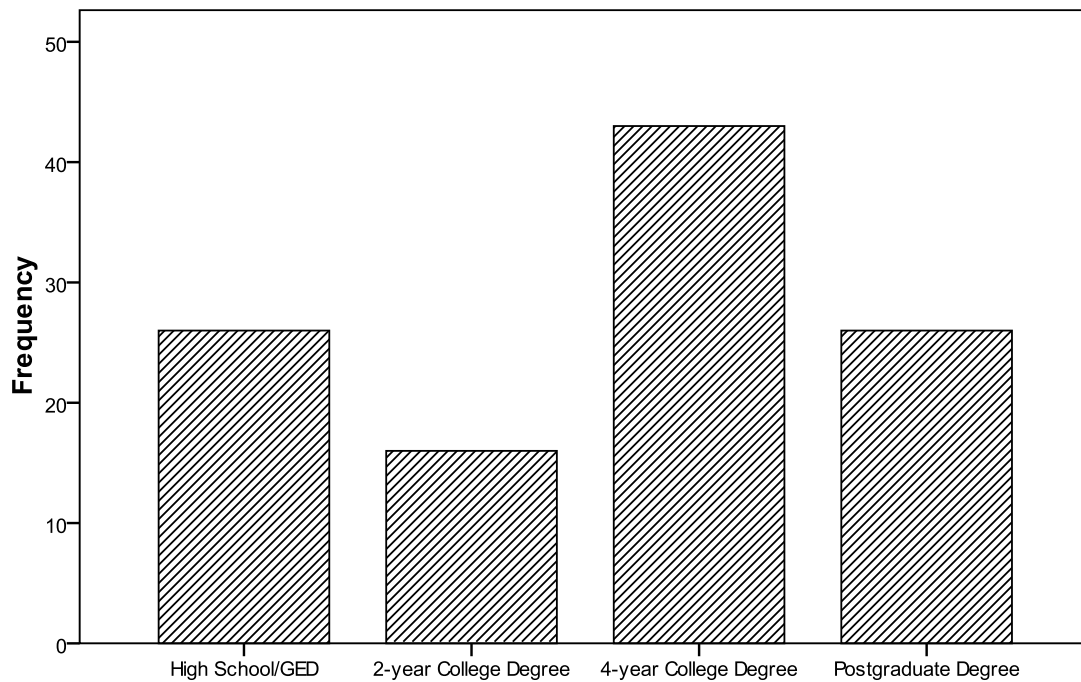


Figure 4.2. Total Respondent Breakdown by Education.

4.2.2. Professional Networking Website Usage

Of the 111 survey respondents, 34.2% did not use professional networking sites. Reasons cited for non-use included investigator defined responses of time, accessibility, know-how, and value. Respondents were also able to submit user defined answers when “other” was selected. Of the 38 individuals that do not use PNWs, 11.7% cited time, 2.7% cited accessibility, 6.3% cited know-how, 10.8% cited value, and 9% cited other reasons. The most frequently cited user defined entry for “other” was disinterest.

Of those 73 individuals, or 65.8%, that utilized professional networking sites, the most commonly cited reasons for usage were reconnecting with past co-workers, at 41.4%, career opportunities, at 27.9%, and business dealings, at 15.3%. In addition, there were certain demographic factors that played into an individual’s utilization of PNWs. When looking at gender, males, at 73.2%, were more likely to utilize these sites than females, at 58.2%. Similarly, education also

appeared to play a role in professional networking site usage. As education increased so did the percentage of individuals utilizing these sites with those individuals possessing a High School Degree or GED at 46.2%, a 2-year College Degree at 43.8%, a 4-year College Degree at 74.4% and a Postgraduate Degree at 84.6% (See Table 4.1).

Table 4.1.

PNW Usage by Education.

Education		User	Non-User	Total
High School/GED	Count	12	14	26
	% within Education	46.2%	53.8%	100.0%
2-year College Degree	Count	7	9	16
	% within Education	43.8%	56.3%	100.0%
4-year College Degree	Count	32	11	43
	% within Education	74.4%	25.6%	100.0%
Postgraduate Degree	Count	22	4	26
	% within Education	84.6%	15.4%	100.0%
Total	Count	73	38	111
	% within Education	65.8%	34.2%	100.0%

When looking at age, there was no significant relationship between generational standing and professional networking site usage.

Respondents that utilize professional networking sites were asked their location of access. Participants had an option to indicate that they accessed these sites at home, work and other, which was a user defined entry. The majority of individuals that opted for the user defined entry indicated that they accessed these sites via their cell phone. Individuals were permitted to select more than one option to account for those respondents that access PNWs in

more than one way. When looking at access locations, 52.1% accessed these sites from work, 79.5% accessed these sites from home and 9.6% accessed these sites from user defined points of entry.

Participants also responded to likert-like items that assessed several contributing factors related to professional networking website usage. Respondents could select strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree and strongly agree in response to these statements (See Table 4.2). In the analysis of this data, numeric values were assigned to responses as follows: strongly disagree = 1, disagree = 2, neither agree nor disagree = 3, agree = 4, and strongly agree = 5.

When asked if their organization supported the use of professional networking sites, the majority of respondents, or 44.3%, indicated that their organization did not support the use of PNWs (See Figure 4.2). In addition, a significant percentage of respondents, or 36.1%, were not sure if their organization supported these sites ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 0.95$).

Table 4.2

PNW Usage Likert-like Item Breakdown

Survey Item	Strongly Disagree/Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Strongly Agree/Agree	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Organizational Support of PNWs	44.3%	36.1%	19.7%	3.00	0.95
PNWs are Distracting in the Workplace	24.6%	39.3%	36.1%	3.20	1.06
PNWs Serve as a Social Outlet	67.2%	23.0%	9.8%	2.31	0.81

In addition to questioning the perceived organizational support of professional networking website usage, respondents were also asked if PNWs were a distraction in the workplace (See Figure 4.2). While most respondents, or

39.3%, neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement, 36.1% indicated that these sites were a distraction in the workplace. Furthermore, a mean value of 3.20 signifies that the inclination is for respondents to deem PNWs as distracting ($SD = 1.06$).

Another aspect associated with the level of distraction caused by the use of professional networking sites in the workplace are their propensity to serve as social outlets (See Figure 4.2). The greater part of respondents, or 67.2%, revealed that they did not consider professional networking sites to be social. This is further corroborated by the mean value of 2.31 which verifies that respondents disagree with this statement ($SD = 0.81$). Consequently, fewer individuals indicated that PNWs were distracting in the workplace than indicated that they served as a social outlet.

4.2.3. Expertise Identification

Of 73 individuals that access professional networking sites, 65.2% utilized these offerings in the search for job-related information, or expertise identification. This means that 38.2% of participants responding to this item did not use PNWs in this manner. Furthermore, respondents indicated that they did not utilize these methods as consistently as their organizationally supported counterparts. As the frequency of expertise identification through PNW usage increased, the amount of individuals engaging in this behavior decreased (See Figure 4.3). This inverse trend was not consistent with organizationally supported methods that signified a positive relationship.

Respondents were asked to rate the effectiveness of organizationally supported methods of expertise identification and expertise identification through professional networking sites. 111 individuals rated the effectiveness of organizationally supported means and 66 individuals that utilize PNWs, rated the effectiveness of these sites in the identification of expertise. Respondents rated these methods on four dimensions: satisfaction, timeliness, accuracy and whether or not the information could be found through these methods. In this

likert-like item, respondents could select strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree and strongly agree. In the analysis of this data, numeric values were assigned to responses as follows: strongly disagree = 1, disagree = 2, neither agree nor disagree = 3, agree = 4, and strongly agree = 5. The mean value of these responses in respect to organizationally supported methods and professional networking sites were compared (Figure 4.4).

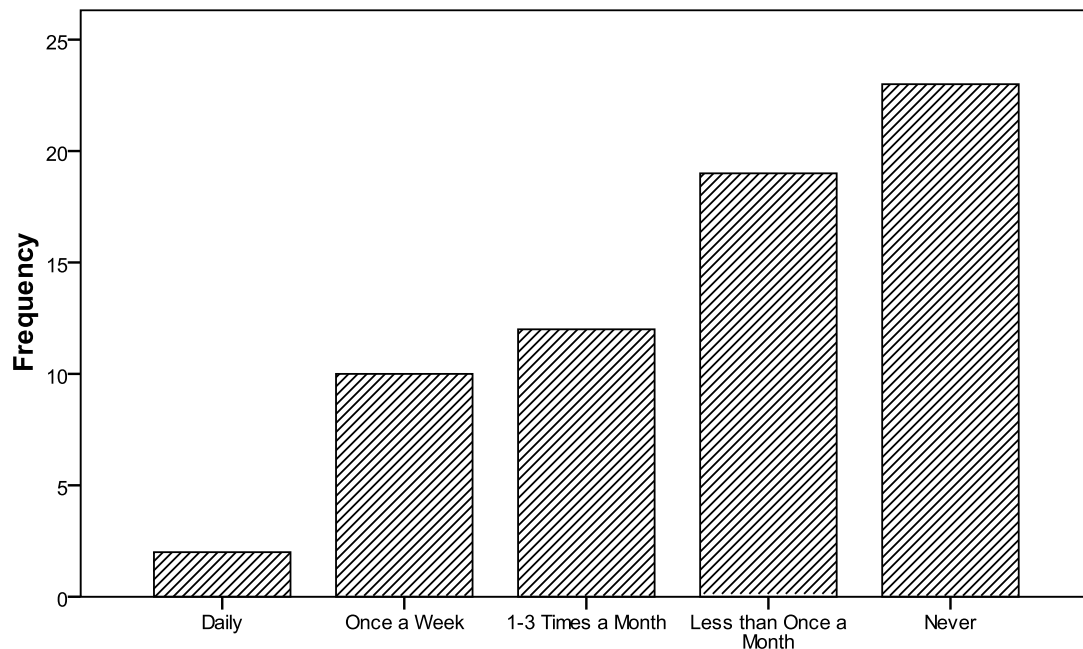


Figure 4.3. Frequency of Utilizing PNWs in the Search of Expertise.

There are distinct difference in user perceptions of organizationally supported methods and PNWs in the identification of expertise. When looking at how well the information gathered through these methods satisfied the information seeker's query, organizationally supported methods rated slightly higher, at 3.37 ($SD = 1.08$), than PNWs, at 3.2 ($SD = 0.99$). However, in terms of timeliness in receiving user solicited information, PNWs were rated slightly higher, at 3.5 ($SD = 0.93$), than organizationally supported methods, at 3.26 ($SD = 1.08$). This is further substantiated by responses to an item gauging the amount of time associated with acquiring job-related information through professional

networking websites (Figure 4.5). 52.6% of respondents indicated that this information was received within an hour. Furthermore, 86.8% indicated that this information was received in a day or less.

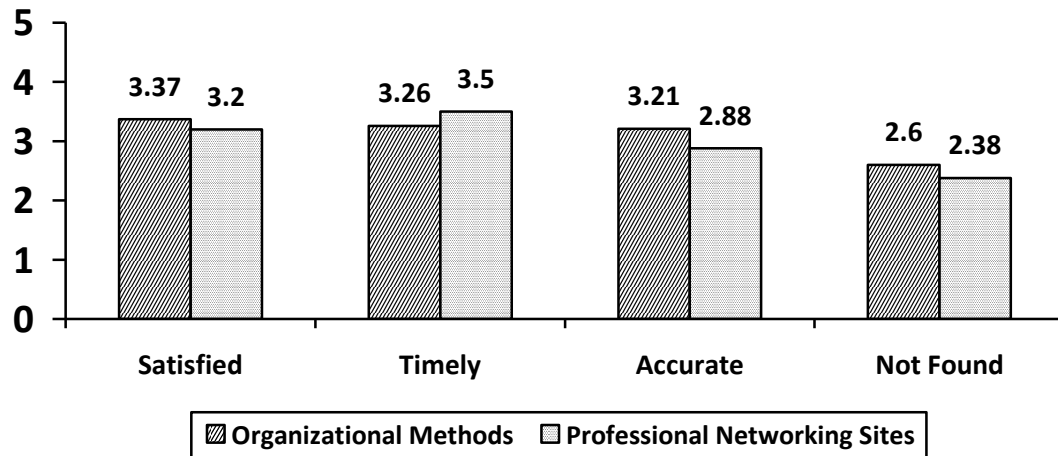


Figure 4.4. Comparison of PNWs and Organizational Methods in EI.

In a similar item, survey participants also responded to the statement that professional networking sites are faster conveyors of job-related information when compared to organizationally supported methods. In the analysis of this data, numeric values were assigned to responses as follows: strongly disagree = 1, disagree = 2, neither agree nor disagree = 3, agree = 4, and strongly agree = 5. Direct comparisons of professional networking sites and organizationally supported methods signified that PNWs were timelier; however, this item did not conclusively support these results. While the mean value was 3.18, suggesting that respondents somewhat agreed with the statement that PNWs were faster conveyors of job-related information, over half of respondents, or 48.7%, indicated that they were unsure ($SD = 0.85$).

In terms of the accuracy of information gathered (Figure 4.4), organizationally supported methods were rated slightly higher, at 3.21 ($SD =$

1.07), than professional networking sites, at 2.88 ($SD = 1.04$). Finally, a greater number of respondents indicated that information could not be found when utilizing organizationally supported methods, at 2.6 ($SD = 1.12$), than PNWs, at 2.38 ($SD = 0.78$).

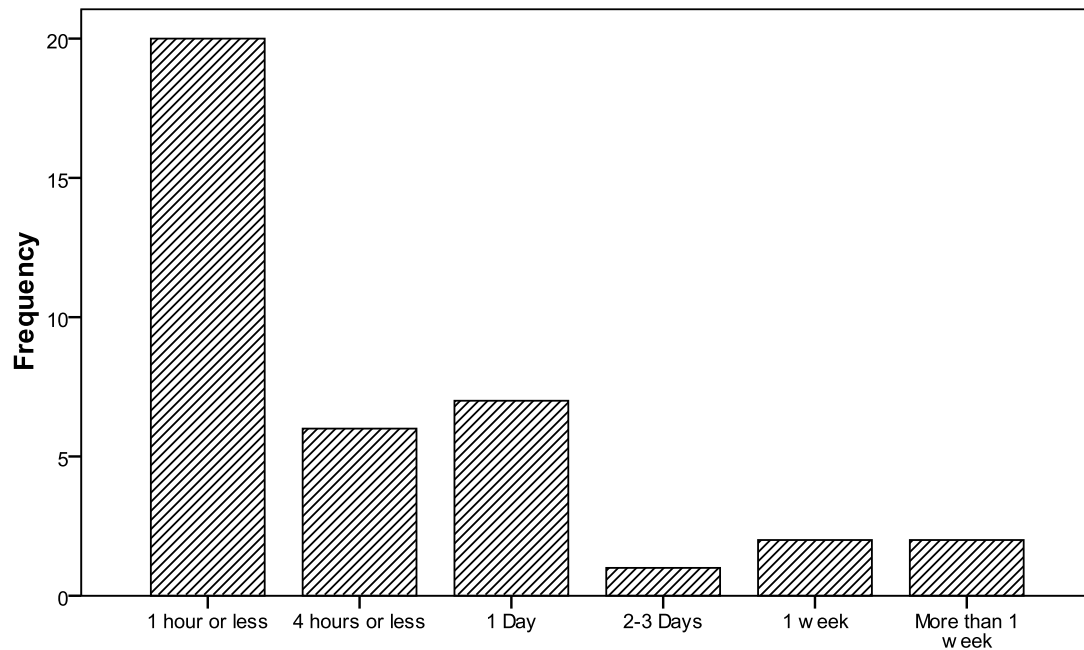


Figure 4.5. Length of Time Associated with Acquiring Information via PNWs.

Participants responded to likert-like items that assessed perceptions related to the identification of expertise in relation of professional networking websites and organizationally supported methods. Respondents could select strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree and strongly agree in response to these statements (See Table 4.3). In the analysis of this data, numeric values were assigned to responses as follows: strongly disagree = 1, disagree = 2, neither agree nor disagree = 3, agree = 4, and strongly agree = 5.

Survey respondents were asked if professional networking sites provided access to individuals that had job-related information not accessible through their organization (See Table 4.3). A mean value of 3.64 suggested that respondents agreed with this item ($SD = 0.78$). Furthermore, the majority of respondents, or 64.1%, indicated that professional networking websites provided access to

individuals that had job-related information not accessible through their organization.

Table 4.3

Expertise Identification Likert-like Item Breakdown

Survey Item	Strongly Disagree/Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Strongly Agree/Agree	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
PNW Provide Information Not Accessible Through Organization	5.2%	30.8%	64.1%	3.64	0.78
Information Has Been Lost Through Retirement and Layoffs	63.3%	20.0%	16.7%	2.45	1.03
Prefer PNW Over Organizationally Supported Means	46.2%	25.6%	28.2%	2.87	1.03

In addition to the accessibility of job-related information, survey participants were asked if organizational knowledge had been lost through retiring employees or layoffs (See Table 4.3). The greater part of respondents, or 63.3%, indicated that such knowledge had not been lost. A mean value of 2.45 confirms this perception ($SD = 1.03$).

Survey respondents were also asked if they prefer to utilize professional networking sites over organizationally supported methods when locating job-related information (See Table 4.3). The majority of respondents, or 43.6%, indicated that they did not prefer PNWs over organizationally supported means. Furthermore, over a quarter of participants, or 25.6%, had no preference. These perceptions were confirmed as the mean value of this item was 2.87 ($SD = 1.03$).

Finally, individuals that utilized professional networking sites in the identification of expertise were asked to what extent they utilized PNWs to obtain job-related information. This item allowed the respondent to enter a text response

describing personal accounts of expertise identification behaviors utilizing PNWs.

A summary of text entries included:

- Product and strategy resource
- Sounding board
- Industry salary trends
- Leads or contacts
- Job opportunities and market data
- Development
- Best Practices
- Locate experts to exchange information off-line
- Supplementary to organizationally supported means
- Industry updates and new knowledge

From these text entries, certain themes concerning expertise identification and professional networking sites emerged. These themes included career opportunities and analysis, personal improvement and development, and up to date industry insights and feedback.

4.2.4. Factors Affecting EI through PNW

The factors affecting the likelihood of individuals engaging in the search for job-related information through professional networking sites include user predilections for trust, collaboration, comfort, competition and reciprocity in respect to these virtual environments (See Table 4.4). Consequently, 61 survey participants that utilize PNWs completed items that measured their perceptions and inclinations toward engaging in these behaviors when utilizing PNWs in the search for subject experts. Each of these items were likert-like with researcher defined responses of strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree and strongly agree. Furthermore, in the analysis of this data, numeric values were assigned to responses as follows: strongly disagree = 1, disagree = 2, neither agree nor disagree = 3, agree = 4, and strongly agree = 5. These

values were integral in the calculation of the mean and standard deviation of each item.

Table 4.4

Factors Affecting EI through PNW Likert-like Item Breakdown

Survey Item	Strongly Disagree/Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Strongly Agree/Agree	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Trusting Individuals Contacted Through PNW	2.6%	38.5%	59.0%	3.64	0.67
Collaborating with Individuals Contacted Through PNW	5.1%	30.8%	64.1%	3.64	0.67
Comfort Contacting Individuals from Competing Organizations	50.8%	21.3%	27.9%	2.72	1.04
Not Purposefully Sharing Privileged Information	3.2%	4.9%	91.8%	4.49	0.81
Reciprocity in Information Exchange	34.4%	34.4%	31.2%	3.03	0.98

In respect to trust, survey participants responded to a statement indicating that they trusted individuals contacted through professional networking websites (See Table 4.4). Over half, or 59%, of respondents agree or strongly disagree that they trusted individuals contacted in this manner. Further validating this perception was the mean value of this item which was 3.64 ($SD = 0.67$).

In an effort to evaluate perceptions of collaboration, survey participants responded to a statement revealing their level of comfort in collaborating with individuals through professional networking websites (See Table 4.4). While the preponderance of individuals responding to this item affirmed that they felt comfortable collaborating via PNW, or 59%, there was also a significant percentage that were not sure ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 0.67$).

Survey respondents also responded to an assessment measuring their comfort in contacting individuals outside of their organization (See Table 4.4).

This statement evaluated whether or not individuals would feel comfortable contacting employees from competing organizations for information necessary to complete their job. 50.8% of respondents disagreed with this statement indicating they did not feel comfortable contacting individuals from competing organizations. While, the majority of individuals disagree with the consultation of individuals from competing organizations, there were also significant percentages of respondents that neither agree nor disagree, and agree, respectively ($M = 2.72$, $SD = 1.04$).

Another aspect associated with contacting individuals from competing organizations is the disclosure of privileged information (See Table 4.4). As such, survey participants were asked to respond to an item assessing the likelihood of purposefully sharing privileged information through professional networking sites. This item provided the most definitive results in terms of respondent agreement. The majority of survey participants selected agree or strongly agree with a combined percentage of 91.8% ($M = 4.49$, $SD = 0.81$). This signifies that the preponderance of respondents would not purposefully share privileged information when engaging in information exchange.

Finally, survey participants were asked to respond to an item measuring their penchant for reciprocity in these virtual environments (See Table 4.4). Specifically, this item asked if respondents would feel inclined to reciprocate information exchange if someone on a professional networking site were to provide useful job-related information. This item proved to be somewhat ambiguous with responses indicating no clear preference. The majority of individuals, or 34.4%, neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement. Furthermore, percentages of respondents that agreed or disagreed were roughly equal ($M = 3.03$, $SD = 0.98$). When comparing survey participant attitudes toward reciprocity and collaboration, individuals are more likely to collaborate through professional networking websites than reciprocate information exchange.

4.3. Summary

This chapter presented the data findings for the professional networking site and expertise identification study, and forms the basis for the next chapter. This included the description of data conditioning and analyses, and presentation of data. Topics in the presentation of data included an overview of the demographics of the study, survey respondent perceptions of professional networking websites, expertise identification utilizing professional networking websites, and an exploration of those factors that affect expertise identification behaviors in the context of professional networking websites. The next chapter will present the study findings, conclusions, discussion, and recommendations.

CHAPTER 5. FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter discusses the outcomes of the professional networking website and expertise identification study supported by the findings in chapter four. These conclusions form the basis of a discussion in respect to the questions of research. In addition, future areas of investigation and practice are explored.

5.1. Discussion

The demographics of the professional networking site and expertise identification study demonstrate a relatively balanced distribution in terms of gender. However, the age breakdown is not as evenly composed. Considering the fact that generational standing is one of the major factors affecting professional networking website usage, this unevenness may adversely affect the final conclusions and recommendations of this study. According to Derven (2009), millennials are predisposed to utilizing PNWs. Unfortunately, less than five percent of the individuals taking this survey belonged to this group. Finally, the respondents were grouped by education. While those with a 4-year degree composed the largest group of the survey, there were a significant number of survey respondents in the other categories as well.

When looking at those individuals that utilize professional networking websites, the most influential factor affecting usage was level of education. Contrary to what the review of literature suggested, there was no significant relationship between generational standing and PNW usage. This may be due in part to the fact that there lacked literature specifically addressing the use of professional networking sites. As such, the use of social networking media was

used as a baseline to explain PNW usage. The relationship between education and PNW usage may be due to the popularity of social networking media amongst classmates as a means of maintaining contact with current and previous acquaintances. Consequently, those individuals that utilize social networking sites may be predisposed to using PNWs.

Of those individuals that utilize professional networking websites, the most commonly cited reasons for usage were reconnecting with past co-workers, career opportunities and business dealings. In another item addressing usage this was supported by user-defined entries detailing reasons for usage. Cited rationale included career opportunities and analysis, personal improvement and development and current industry insights and feedback. These participant responses provide insights into the perceived application of PNWs. For the most part, individuals find job-related information via these sites that is personally relevant. Rather than finding data that is relevant to their position, individuals view these sites as an opportunity to gain or maintain occupational competitiveness. This is further corroborated by the large percentage of individuals that access these sites from home as the information garnered through PNWs is not viewed as immediately applicable in a work environment.

Perhaps the reason individuals do not view professional networking sites as a resource to be utilized in the workplace is the lack of perceived organizational support. Less than twenty percent of individuals responding to the survey indicated that the organization supported their use of PNWs. Furthermore, only one in four respondents indicated that professional networking sites were not distracting in the workplace. As such, the preponderance of survey participants questioned PNWs and their effect on work flow. However, this attitude was starkly contrasted by the perception that PNWs do not serve as a social outlet. While the majority of participants feel as if PNWs may detract from work, it is not the result of increased social interactions.

When looking at the percentage of individuals that utilize professional networking sites in the identification of expertise it was not as great as those that

utilize organizationally supported methods. However, when comparing the effectiveness of organizationally supported methods and PNWs in the identification of expertise, there was not a clear preference. PNWs were rated more highly than organizationally supported methods in terms of timeliness and the presence of job-related information. The perceived benefit of timeliness is due to the potentially immediate satisfaction of knowledge inquiries. Over 50% of respondents indicated that their queries were satisfied within an hour. Additionally, the fact that survey participants perceive PNWs to have more job-related information is a result of a larger network of references. Where organizationally supported methods are limited by the number of employees, PNWs have networks that are unbound by organization, country or even continent. This was further confirmed by survey respondents in their affirmation that PNWs provide information that is not accessible through their organization.

The factors affecting the likelihood of individuals engaging in the search for job-related information through professional networking sites include trust, collaboration, comfort, competition and reciprocity in respect to these virtual environments. Of these factors, trust, collaboration, and competition were areas in which individuals indicated confidence in the utilization of PNWs. As such, survey participants would both trust and collaborate with individuals contacted through this medium. Additionally, respondents indicated that they would not feel inclined to share privileged information with individuals from competing organizations. These respondent perceptions indicate that individuals could simultaneously foster virtual environments of trust and collaboration without compromising competitive advantage. Areas of discontent in respect to expertise identification and the utilization of professional networking sites include comfort and reciprocity. Survey respondents indicated uneasiness in respect to contacting individuals from competing organizations and reciprocating information exchange. Consequently, the survey indicates that respondents are comfortable collaborating with and trusting individuals contacted through professional networking websites so long as they are not from competing

organizations. Furthermore, survey participants revealed that the location and transfer of job-related information may not be reciprocated.

According to survey respondents, individuals may engage in expertise identification activities within the confines of their organization and social network, but avoid this knowledge exchange when dealing with individuals that cross these boundaries. This aversion to collaborating with individuals from competing organizations or outside the user's network may stem from a lack of perceived attachment. Within environments of virtual collaboration, such as professional networking sites, it is vital to create feelings of connectedness and belonging (So & Brush, 2008). Individuals must experience a sense of unity and kinship within these virtual communities. Insights, into nurturing this affiliation while simultaneously supporting the goals and mission of the organization will prove valuable in the utilization of professional networking sites. Ultimately, humanizing this virtual experience (Kaplan-Leiserson, 2005) is the key crossing organizational boundaries in the identification of expertise.

5.2. Conclusions

This section will evaluate the outcomes of this study based upon the results communicated in Chapter 4 and the previous section outlining the resulting conclusions. In order to evaluate the outcomes of this study, it is necessary to revisit the original questions of research. These research questions include:

1. What are the defining characteristics of individuals that utilize professional networking websites?
2. What factors promote the use of professional networking websites in the identification of expertise?
3. What are the barriers to the use of professional networking websites in the identification of expertise?
4. How effective is the utilization of professional networking websites in the identification of expertise?

5.2.1. Defining Characteristics of Individuals Utilizing PNWs

The defining characteristics of individuals that utilize professional networking websites include certain demographic traits as well as perceptions and uses for these offerings. In terms of demographics, education level appeared to have the most significant effect on PNW usage. As education increased so did the utilization of professional networking websites. This conclusion suggests that PNW usage in EI may be best adapted in environments that require employees with higher levels of education. Individuals working in these traditionally white collar environments may be pre-disposed to accessing these technologies due to the fact that many of these positions require the use of computers and related technologies.

According to the study, perceptions and uses of professional networking sites had a tendency to benefit the individual rather than contribute to organizational knowledge. While some respondents indicated that they use these sites to garner industry insights and feedback, many indicated that they used PNWs to discover career opportunities and reconnect with past co-workers. A lack of organizational support may have contributed to this attitude. Furthermore, survey respondents indicated that PNWs were distracting in the workplace. This may be due to the fact that many individuals utilize these sites for personal rather than organizational benefit. Consequently, endorsing the use of professional networking sites for the identification of expertise will largely depend on changing user perceptions. If PNWs are not viewed as viable sources for job-related information they will not be treated as such.

5.2.2. Factors Promoting and Prohibiting the Use of PNWs in EI

The factors that promote the use of professional networking sites in the identification of expertise are varied. While the majority of survey participants indicated that their organization did not support the use of professional networking sites, there was not a clear preference when evaluating its effectiveness. When comparing the effectiveness of PNWs in the identification of

expertise versus organizationally supported means, each method excelled in different areas. This demonstrates that while individuals may not formally recognize their support, the reasons behind this aversion are not related to effectiveness. Again, this fact confirms that perceptions of PNWs play a large role in the overall acceptance of this technology.



Figure 5.1. Organizationally Supported Methods Preferred.

Factors that play into the acceptance of professional networking websites in the identification of expertise include timeliness and contacts acquired through a larger network (See Figure 5.1). These items were rated more highly than organizationally supported methods for EI. However, organizationally supported methods were perceived as superior to PNWs in the areas of inquiry satisfaction and information accuracy. Specifically, survey respondents felt as if organizationally supported methods for EI provided information that more adequately satisfied their search for job-related information and produced information that was more accurate. While it seems PNWs and organizationally

supported methods present equivalent trade-offs in terms of expertise identification, user perceptions also come into play. For example, individuals participating in this study indicated that they did not prefer professional networking sites over the use of organizationally supported means. This combined with the perception that PNWs are a distraction in the workplace suggests that organizationally supported methods are favored over their PNW counterparts. As such, individuals would likely choose organizationally supported methods for expertise identification over professional networking websites when given a choice.

5.2.3. Effectiveness of PNWs in the Identification of Expertise

The effectiveness of professional networking sites in the identification of expertise lies in their propensity to provide information that is up to date and immediately accessible. These environments present an opportunity for individuals to engage in knowledge transfer across virtually any boundary. Furthermore, survey respondents pointed to a level of trust in contacting subject experts through PNWs. While additional survey items indicated ambivalence when engaging in EI activities from individuals in competing organizations or reciprocating information exchange, it is the belief of the researcher that this attitude could be changed. Moreover, study participants felt comfortable fostering environments of collaboration which could be especially useful in the leveraging of organizational knowledge. Capitalizing on the previously acquired synergies of other organizations and industries combats the eyelash learning curve that plagues many organizations. Furthermore, PNWs allow organizations to expand the concept of social capital to those that are external to the organization. By broadening the knowledge network, human intellectual capital is drastically increased. Consequently, professional networking sites provide an opportunity to maximize outcome, or organizational performance, while minimizing input, or time and money.

5.3. Implications

According to survey participants, professional networking websites offer access to job-related information that is not accessible through their organization. This perception should be addressed when attempting to change perceptions of professional networking websites in the identification of expertise (See Figure 5.2). Furthermore, an organizational shift to utilizing these sites in EI should provide sufficient rationale behind the change. Survey participants indicated that organizational knowledge had not been lost through layoff or retiring employees; however, research has revealed that retiring baby boomers and a faltering economy has led to significant deficits. In fact, the next twenty years will add nearly 80 million baby boomers to those individuals collecting social security benefits (Basiulis, 2009). The reasoning behind this response may be due to the fact that the loss of employees is not perceived by respondents to affect the surveyed organization.

When addressing the effectiveness of PNWs in the identification of expertise, respondent perceptions indicate that the capabilities of these sites are not in question. Rather, when looking at effectiveness, prime concerns for PNW usage stem from user attitudes. These attitudes are influenced by PNW know-how and willingness to utilize these sites. As such, further research is necessary to more extensively analyze the benefits and potential pitfalls of PNW usage in the identification of expertise. From these conclusions, pre-existing attitudes may be addressed on an organizational level.

Further research should involve an all-encompassing study that evaluates more than respondent perceptions. Assessing expertise identification behaviors and the quality of information acquired through professional networking sites would yield more concrete conclusions. As such further research and study in the applicability and acceptance of such networking mediums is necessary to determine the real world relevance of these technologies.

When changing perceptions of professional networking sites, it is also necessary to implement reward systems for usage. Under the current system,

individuals are rewarded for usage of PNWs that is personally beneficial. These benefits are seen through an increase in career opportunities, and networking. Utilizing these sites for the benefit of the organization is not formally supported or rewarded. Consequently, the key to changing perceptions of professional networking sites is linking this desired behavior to a user need or want.



Figure 5.2. Changing Professional Networking Website Perceptions.

A final consideration in the shifting of professional networking website and expertise identification attitudes is continuous observation and improvement. While PNWs present a viable means to engage in expertise identification at this juncture, the nature of technology guarantees that this will not always be the case. This final observation provides the basis for this study; that virtually all organizational systems and procedures are eventually surpassed. As such, capitalizing on viable technologies ensures that competitive advantage will be sustained.

5.4. Recommendations

There are numerous techniques defined for the identification of expertise. However, organizational limitations such as cost, time, and training restrict those options that are viable for many organizations. With the relative ease of use and popularity of professional networking sites today, finding expertise through this medium is viable across various industries and organizations. While minor changes may be necessary in respect to the administration and acceptance of professional networking websites, there are significant advantages to employing this technology. Furthermore, adoption of PNWs in the identification of expertise can be done in tandem with organizationally supported means. Supporting dual lines of information exchange will only augment organizational knowledge and opportunities for evaluation. With continued assessment and objective analysis, organizational processes can be better tailored to fit the needs of the organization and its stakeholders. In addition, PNWs may provide a means to compensate for perceived areas of weakness in organizationally supported methods of EI.

The utilization of professional networking websites in an organizational setting is not relegated to expertise identification. While this thesis focuses on the application of this technology in EI, areas related to the collection, documentation and propagation of organizational information may also benefit from PNW usage. One such application of professional networking sites is the evaluation of organizational training initiatives. This applicability is twofold and includes cementing formal training initiatives and pinpointing training weakness.

Professional networking sites reinforce knowledge gained through training initiatives. In order to be a true learning organization, organizations must find ways to promote the continuous “sharing of experience and lessons learned” (Frappaolo, 2007, p 96). Through PNW usage, organizations may reinforce training programs and information gained through knowledge management systems. They can also promote further exploration of knowledge and promote overall learning (Derven, 2009). In addition to cementing formal training

initiatives, professional networking sites present knowledge seekers with the ability to uncover future training needs (Derven, 2009). Through knowledge exchange and evaluation, areas of weakness may be identified. By pinpointing training weakness, organizations may implement training programs that more accurately reflect market conditions and incorporate current industry best practices. Furthermore, addressing the effectiveness of training initiatives through professional networking sites allows for the continued assessment and improvement of organizational processes.

5.5. Summary

This chapter presented the outcomes of the professional networking website and expertise identification research study. Topics included conclusions, discussion, implications, and recommendations based upon the analysis of data collected through the survey. Through this study, user and non-user perceptions concerning PNW and EI behaviors were identified. From the insights gathered through this research and supporting literature, areas for future investigation and development in respect to the utilization of professional networking sites in the identification of expertise were extrapolated.

LIST OF REFERENCES

LIST OF REFERENCES

- Anonymous. (2007). Social networking gains momentum at work. *T+D*, 61(8), 16.
- Baker, S. (2009). You're fired but stay in touch. *BusinessWeek*, 4129, 54-55.
- Bock, G., Zmud, R. W., Kim, Y., & Lee, J. (2005). Behavioral intention formation in knowledge sharing: Examining the roles of extrinsic motivators, social-psychological forces, and organizational climate. *MIS Quarterly*, 29(1), 87-111.
- Derven, M. (2009). Social networking: A force for development. *T+D*, 63(7), 58-63.
- Frappaolo, C. (2006), *Knowledge management*. West Sussex, England: Capstone Publishing Limited.
- Holloway, P. (2007). How to protect knowledge from walking out the door. *Contract Management*, 47(4), 60-63.
- Jashapara, A. (2004). *Knowledge management: An integrated approach*. Essex, England: Pearson Education Limited.
- Kaplan-Leiserson, E. (2005). Virtual work. *T + D*, 59(8), 12-13.
- Koc-Menard, S. (2009). Knowledge transfer after retirement: the role of corporate alumni networks. *Development and Learning in Organizations*, 23(2), 9-11.
- Kogan, S. L., & Muller, M. J. (2006). Ethnographic study of collaborative knowledge work. *IBM Systems Journal*, 45(4), 759-771.
- Laff, M. (2009). Closing the Generation Gap. *T + D*, 63(5), 20.
- Lunce, S. E., Iyer, R. K., Courtney, L. M., & Schkade, L. L. (1993). Experts and expertise: An identification paradox. *Industrial Management and Data Systems*, 93(9), 3-10.

- Miller, R. (2004). Can I find an expert? Better networking through technology. *EContent Magazine*, 30-34.
- Parise, S., Cross, R., & Davenport, T. (2006). Strategies for preventing a knowledge-loss crisis. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 47(4), 31-38.
- Porter, M. (1985). How Information Gives You Competitive Advantage. *Harvard Business Review*, July-August 1985, 2-13.
- Sawchuk, S. (2008). Sites mimicking social networks set up for staff development. *Education Week*, 28(1), 1-3.
- Sekaran, U. (2003). *Research Methods for Business*. (4th ed.). New York: Wiley.
- Small Business Administration (2008). Table of small business size standards matched to north American industry classification system codes. Retrieved from: http://www.sba.gov/idc/groups/public/documents/sba_homepage/serv_sstd_tablepdf.pdf
- So, H., & Brush, T. (2008). Student perceptions of collaborative learning, social presence and satisfaction in a blended learning environment: Relationships and critical factors. *Computers & Education*. 51(2008), 318-336.
- Stein, E. (1992). A method to identify candidates for knowledge acquisition. *Journal of Management Information System*, 9(2), 161-179.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Survey Email Prompt

Hello,

My name is Laura Young and I am a graduate student in Purdue University's College of Technology and a former Surveyed Organization* intern. Currently, I am working on my masters' thesis concerning the use of professional networking sites, such as LinkedIn, in the identification of subject experts. In an effort to gather real world data, I have developed a survey.

The following link http://purdue.qualtrics.com/SE?SID=SV_3atXnM6Ua8BVHsE&SVID=Prod is to a survey concerning your perceptions pertaining to the discovery of job related information and professional networking website usage.

The survey takes approximately 15 minutes to complete and is anonymous. Furthermore, the survey is not conducted, monitored, sponsored, nor accessible by the company. Hence, Surveyed Organization* will not be privy to the survey results individually or as a company on the whole. Your participation is voluntary.

I appreciate your participation in the survey. Should you have any questions please feel free to access the contact information of the research study investigators below.

Thank you,

Laura Young
lbyoung@purdue.edu

*The phrase 'Surveyed Organization' replaced the actual name of the organization to maintain anonymity.

Appendix B: Survey Questionnaire

To: Survey Participants

This research experience is in partial fulfillment of a requirement for a graduate level thesis on the use of professional networking sites in the identification of subject experts. Your participation is appreciated. Should you have further questions, please feel free to contact Laura Young via email: lbyoung@purdue.edu.

Sincerely,
Laura Young

What is your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

What is your current age?

- ☐ 18 to 29
- ☐ 30 to 44
- ☐ 45 to 63
- ☐ Greater than 64

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- ☐ Less than High School
- ☐ High School / GED
- ☐ 2-year College Degree
- ☐ 4-year College Degree
- ☐ Postgraduate Degree

What is your position/title in your organization?

How long have you been employed by your organization?

At times, employees may need to find job-related information in order to complete a task or make a decision. The following questions concern the location of job-related information in your organization.

What methods do you utilize to locate job-related information?

- ☐ Fellow Employee
- ☐ Memos
- ☐ Meetings
- ☐ Emails
- ☐ Company Manuals
- ☐ Company Websites
- ☐ Intranet
- ☐ Data Management Systems (such as MIS)
- ☐ Other
- ☐ I don't locate job-related information

How often do you seek out job-related information?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Less than Once a Month
- ☐ Once a Month
- ☐ 2-3 Times a Month
- ☐ Once a Week
- ☐ 2-3 Times a Week
- ☐ Daily

Please rate the following statements on a scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Job-related information accessed through my organization...

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
...satisfies my inquiry.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...is timely.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...is accurate.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...cannot be found.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Professional networking websites are just one of many renderings of social networking media. They are geared toward industry professionals looking to network for a myriad of business related reasons. The following questions will concern professional networking sites and your usage in and outside of the workplace.

What professional networking sites are you currently using?

- ☐ LinkedIn
- ☐ Ecademy
- ☐ Focus
- ☐ Xing
- ☐ Plaxo
- ☐ Other
- ☐ I do not use professional networking sites

How often do you log into your professional networking site account?

- ☐ Daily
- ☐ Once a Week
- ☐ 1-3 Times a Month
- ☐ Less than Once a Month

For what reasons do you utilize professional networking sites?

- ☐ Business Deals
- ☐ Career Opportunities
- ☐ Consulting Offers
- ☐ Expertise Requests
- ☐ Job Inquiries
- ☐ New Ventures
- ☐ Reconnecting with past Employers or Employees
- ☐ Other

Where do you access professional networking sites?

- ☐ Work
- ☐ Home
- ☐ Other

How often do you seek out job-related information via professional networking sites?

- ☐ Daily
☐ Once a Week
☐ 1-3 Times a Month
☐ Less than Once a Month
☐ Never

Please rate the following statements on a scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Professional networking sites provide access to individuals that have job-related information not accessible through my organization.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Professional networking sites are faster conveyors of job-related information than those methods offered by my organization.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When locating job-related information, I prefer to utilize professional networking sites over methods offered by my organization.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I trust the individuals that I have contacted on professional networking sites.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel comfortable collaborating with individuals through professional networking sites.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I discuss personal matters, or those issues not directly related to my position, when utilizing professional networking sites.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please rate the following statements on a scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Job-related information accessed through professional networking sites...

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
...satisfies my inquiry.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

...is timely.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...is accurate.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...cannot be found.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

To what extent do you use professional networking sites to obtain job-related information?

On average, approximately how long does it take to acquire job-related information utilizing professional networking sites?

- ☐ 1 hour or less
- ☐ 4 hours or less
- ☐ 1 Day
- ☐ 2-3 Days
- ☐ 1 week
- ☐ More than 1 week

Please rate the following statements on a scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
My workplace supports the use of professional networking sites.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In my organization, job-related information has been lost through layoffs or retiring employees.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would feel comfortable contacting employees from competing organizations for information that I need to complete my job.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Professional networking sites serve as a social outlet.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would purposefully share privileged information through professional networking sites.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would feel inclined to reciprocate information exchange if someone on a professional networking site were to provide me with useful job-related information.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Professional networking					

sites are a distraction in the workplace.



Why don't you use professional networking sites?

☐ Time

☐ Accessibility

☐ Don't know how

☐ Not valuable

☐ Other