

KARELIA UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES
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INTERNAL COMMUNICATION IN A GLOBAL TECHNOLOGY COMPANY: THE USE OF THE ENTERPRISE SOCIAL NETWORK TOOL YAMMER

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Internal communication is communication within the organization and occurs between leaders, managers and employees. At its best, internal communication increases employee commitment to the organization through improved collaboration, productivity and performance. Effective interaction in today's business world requires the ability to communicate in a way that people from diverse backgrounds can understand each other. Cross-cultural communication poses certain challenges and involves numerous potential verbal and non-verbal barriers. Interactivity in internal communication has gained more attention during the 21st century.

This thesis looks at international communication in a multicultural organization. The thesis is commissioned by a global technology company that has offices in 16 different countries, which creates challenges for effective internal communication. The empirical research is about the functionality of the internal communication tool Yammer in the case company. The functionality has not been examined since the service was taken into use. Thus, research is necessary. The primary data was collected through a quantitative internet survey and secondary data through literature research.

According to the survey results, communication in Yammer is reliable, open, interactive and appropriate for a workplace. The inability to find information, the amount of irrelevant information and lack of time were the biggest problems among the users. In addition, the lack of engagement towards the service from both employees and the management was criticized. Based on the research results, the company will start a project to develop Yammer into a more functional communication tool. The goal is to simplify the user-interface, to reduce the amount of irrelevant information, to target information more effectively and to engage personnel to use Yammer more actively.

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Sisäinen viestintä kansainvälisessä teknologiayrityksessä: Yksityisen sosiaalisen median työkalun Yammerin käyttö

Commissioned by Yritys X

Sisäinen viestintä on viestintää organisaation sisällä, ja se tapahtuu esimiesten ja työntekijöiden välillä. Parhaimmillaan sisäinen viestintä lisää työntekijöiden sitoutumista organisaatioon lisääntyneen yhteistyön, tuottavuuden ja tehokkuuden kautta. Tehokas vuorovaikutus nykyajan yritys-toimintamaailmassa vaatii taitoa kommunikoida tavalla, jolla ihmiset monimuotoisilla taustoilla ymmärtävät toisiaan. Kulttuurien välinen kommunikointi luo tiettyjä haasteita ja siihen liittyy lukuisia potentiaalisia sanallisia ja sanattomia esteitä. Huomio sisäisen viestinnän interaktiivisuuteen on lisääntynyt 2000 –luvulla.

Tämä opinnäytetyö käsittelee sisäistä viestintää kansainvälisessä organisaatiossa. Opinnäytetyön toimeksiantaja on kansainvälinen teknologiayritys jolla on toimipisteitä

16 eri maassa, mikä luo haasteita tehokkaaseen sisäiseen viestintään. Empiirinen tutkimus käsittelee yrityksen sisäisen sosiaalisen median työkalun Yammerin toimivuutta toimeksiantajayrityksessä. Yammerin toimivuutta ei ole tutkittu työkalun käyttöönoton jälkeen. Tästä johtuen tutkimus on tarpeellinen. Ensisijainen aineisto kerättiin kvantitatiivisen internetkyselyn avulla ja toissijainen aineisto haettiin kirjallisuudesta.

Tutkimustulosten mukaan viestintä Yammerissa on luotettavaa, avointa, interaktiivista ja työpaikalle soveliasta. Kyvyttömyys löytää tietoa, epäoleellinen tieto ja ajanpuute olivat suurimmat ongelmat käyttäjien keskuudessa. Lisäksi sekä työntekijöiden, että esimiesten palveluun sitoutumisen puute keräsi kritiikkiä. Perustuen tutkimustuloksiin, yritys aloittaa projektin, jonka tarkoitus on tehdä Yammerista toimivampi viestintätyökalu. Tavoitteena on yksinkertaistaa käyttöliittymää, vähentää epäoleellisen tiedon määrää, kohdistaa tieto tehokkaammin ja sitouttaa henkilökunta käyttämään Yammeria aktiivisemmin.

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Englanti

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Avainsanat

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Appendix 1 The research questions and relevant theory

1 Introduction

Communication is now more relevant than ever. In the 21st century everyday life is filled with messages. Communication is always more than a mere technical process; it is also about the relationships between people. Communication creates conditions for work and empowers individuality and culture. While the traditional face-to-face encounter is still important, social media has raised its importance both in private and corporate use.

In business, the effectiveness of a company's internal communication process is often very important to its overall success. As employees play a key role in a company's success, they must be kept up to date with most recent information about the company's operations. Additionally, interactivity in internal communication is increasingly recognized at work places. (Juholin 2013, 22–25.)

1.1 Background of the study

The topic of the thesis is international communication in a multicultural organization. The thesis is commissioned by a global technology company that employs over 200 persons in 16 different countries. The company describes its culture for example as collaborative, accountable, two way communicative and honest. The company has multicultural personnel that is divided into multiple locations globally. This poses challenges for effective internal communication. The empirical research is about the functionality of the internal communication tool Yammer in the case company. The functionality of Yammer in the case company has not been examined since the service was taken into use. Thus, research is necessary.

1.2 Research problem and scope of the study

The aim of the thesis is to investigate: 1) how members of the case company use Yammer, and 2) if Yammer is experienced as a functional communication tool in the case company. In addition, the managing director of the company's Finnish office added two more research questions: 3) are there notable differences in the use of Yammer between different offices of the case company? and 4) are there notable differences in the use of Yammer between different age groups? The thesis also investigates if the user feedback meets the expectations the management had when taking Yammer into use. The results of the research are used by the company's IT team to enhance the company's internal communication globally.

The emphasis of the theoretical part is on interactive communication, as this area of communication has gained more attention during the 21st century, and on the cultural factors that affect one's communication behavior as the case company is increasingly multicultural. The empirical part examines the functionality and possible problems of the social network tool Yammer in the case company.

The research part concentrates on communication via Yammer only, and does not take into account such factors as, for example, motivation or satisfaction towards work. The author investigates Yammer users' perceptions about the service in terms of usability, interactivity of communication, reliability and relevance of the information and possibilities to influence. Furthermore, the author will investigate what kind of information the users prefer to receive through Yammer and from whom.

1.3 Research approach and data collection

As the goal of the survey was to find out respondents' opinions about Yammer, the author collected the primary data through a quantitative internet survey. According to Hirsjärvi & Hurme (2009, 22), a quantitative research aims at describing causal relations and disclose attitudes and opinions of the respondents. In addition, Skype interviews were made. The survey was sent to all employees of the case company that have a Yammer account. The secondary data was collected through literature research.

As the participants of the research were in multiple locations globally, a quantitative internet survey was the most suitable option for data collection. The author used the questionnaire tool ZEF, which had been used earlier in the case company when conducting various surveys among the company's employees. Hence, the tool was already familiar to the respondents. In addition, the author interviewed the managing director of the case company's Finnish office about the reasons why Yammer was taken into use and what the managements' expectations towards the service were.

1.4 Yammer

Yammer is a private enterprise social network launched in 2008 and owned by Microsoft since 2012. Yammer is used by over 200,000 companies globally. Only the persons with verified company e-mail can access company's Yammer network. Yammer is designed to help employees collaborate across departments and locations. It enables employees to create groups to collaborate on projects and share and edit documents in real time. There is more discussion about enterprise social networks in Chapter 2.4.1.

The case company's Yammer network has approximately 180 members. During November-December 2015, 120 group members used Yammer. During that time span the company's network grew by 214 likes, 239 new messages and 13 files. In total, Yammer's network contains 1139 files and 4714 messages.

The company's network contains three different types of groups: public groups, visible private groups and hidden private groups. The network has 40 groups in total, of which 16 are public and 24 private. In public groups the used language is always English; in private groups the group members agree on the used language. The most active public groups during November-December 2015 were Products, Technology, and Developers. The users sent 215 messages in public groups and only 24 messages in private groups.

Yammer was taken into use at the case company in 2012. The management wanted to see if Yammer would improve communication globally across the whole company. The management expected Yammer to enhance communication across locations and to be a more interactive communication tool than e-mail.

However, as mentioned earlier in Chapter 1.1, the functionality of Yammer in the case company has not been examined since the service was taken into use.

Before taking Yammer into use, the company used intranet for company-wide communications and storing and sharing files and documents. At present, Yammer ought to be used for communication only and intranet is used as a storage space for files and documents.

2 Internal Communication

Internal communication is interaction that occurs between all members of the organization. Internal communication is essential for the success of a company, because without communication, an organization could not exist. At its best, internal communication is a key to increased productivity, stronger commitment to organizational goals and greater satisfaction towards work. (White 1997, 3).

Internal communication is both official communication, such as memos, guidelines and policies and “unofficial” communication – the exchange of ideas and opinions, relationship development and hallway discussions. Internal communication is the way in which all members of the organization get the needed information (Rabinowitz 2015). The direction of the communication flow can be top-down, bottom-up, or horizontal (Juholin 2009, 22). The initial objective of communication is to affect: to change, increase or empower the receiver’s knowledge, behavior, attitudes and opinions. (Siukosaari 2002, 11.)

According to Siukosaari (2002, 11), internal communication aims to strengthen co-operation, ensure productivity, improve work atmosphere and engage employees, build strong brand image and spread correct information inside an organization.

2.1 Communication process

Communication is the process of transmitting information between two or more people. The perceptions of the communication process has altered during decades. In the 1940’s it was commonly assumed that the communication process succeeded after a message was sent from one to another. Nowadays, this assumption is not valid anymore; the communication process is a more complex phenomenon and its impacts cannot be easily foreseen (Juholin 2013, 22–23).

Communication process theories are divided into two groups: the process school and the semiotics school (Fiske 1990, 14). The process school sees communication as a transmission of messages. The model below was introduced in 1949 by Shannon and Weaver in their article *A Mathematical Theory of Communication*.

According to the process school, to achieve successful communication one needs to go through the communication process. The communication process consists of four different components: 1) Sender, 2) Channel, 3) Receiver, 4) Feedback

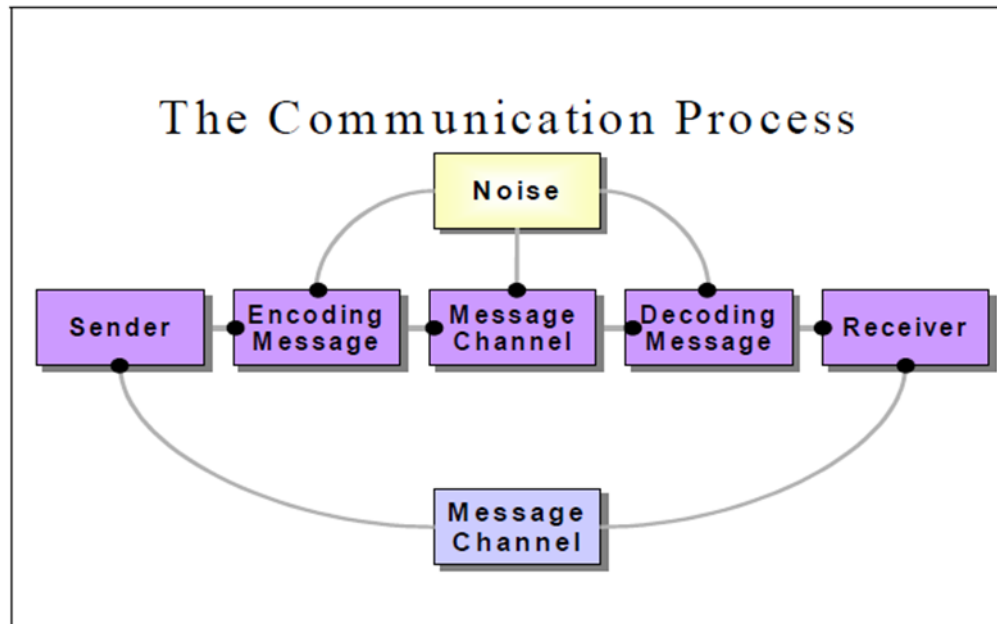


Figure 1. The communication process by Shannon & Weaver (1949).

The communication process starts from a sender. The sender is the body who initiates the conversation. The sender's message is influenced by the sender's cultural background, skills, attitudes, perceptions and experiences. However, the sender is responsible for the initial success of the message. The sender translates or encodes the conveyed information into a form that is understandable to the recipient, such as gestures, words or languages. (Lunenburg 2010, 3)

The message is sent through the chosen channel of communication, which is for example face-to-face, e-mail, or over a telephone. The environment in which the message is sent can be equally important as the content of the message (Juholin 2012, 23).

Decoding the message means that the recipient understands the content of the message. The message fails if the receiver cannot decode it, for example if the message is written in a foreign language.

The level of understanding also depends on the knowledge of the topic and the relationship between sender and recipient. The recipient's interpretation of the message depends on his culture, skills, and attitudes as the factors that influence to the sender's encoding. (Lunenburg 2010, 3–7.)

Lastly, feedback is the receiver's response to the message. Without feedback the sender cannot know if the message was received and understood, hence the communication is one-way. Two-way communication is more desirable and it happens when a receiver gives feedback or responds to the sender (Lunenburg 2010, 3). According to Finch, Hansen and Alexander (2010, 4) employees prefer to get new information from their managers face-to-face. This allows closing the communication loop: the supervisor is the sender of the message, employees are the receivers and their reaction or answer shows if the message was understood and accepted.

The process school and the semiotics school have a few major differences. Firstly, according to the semiotics school, communication is the generation and exchange of meanings. The semiotics school is interested in communication's role as a generator and maintainer of values. According to the semiotics school, social interaction makes an individual a part of a culture or society. Misinterpretations of meanings are not failures in communication, but differences in the cultures of the communicating parties. Hence, culture and the environment determine the communication, and narrowing the gap between different cultures increases the effectiveness of communication. Secondly, a sign is the center of the semiotics school. Semiotics have three main areas of study: the sign itself, the codes or systems into which the signs are organized and the culture in which the codes and signs function. The usage of the codes and signs is the foundation of culture's existence. Thirdly, semiotics focus primarily on the text while the process school does not pay significant attention to it. Semiotics see the role of the receiver more active than it is in the most process models, due this, semiotics use the concept "reader" instead of "receiver". (Fiske 1990, 14–15; 60–62; 245–246.)

According to Hurn and Tomalin (2013, 6–7), communication is divided into three different areas: verbal communication, non-verbal communication (body language) and written communication. The increased use of ICT-mediated communication has rapidly become the fourth area of communication. (Hurn and Tomalin 2013, 6–7.)

The internet and different communication devices, such as smartphones are changing the way people think and use language. As electronic communication channels are constantly changing, it is highly important to keep up to date regarding to technological development in computers, e-mails, mobile phones and video conference tools. The selection of appropriate technology must be compatible with the culture in which the communication occurs.

2.2 Challenges in communication process

Communication barriers are obstacles that prevent the effective flow of information in an organization (Zaineb 2010). According to Enki Village (2015), communication barriers are divided into two categories: internal and external barriers. An internal barrier includes emotions, lack of mutual experiences, negative attitudes, problems in personal life, past experiences, distrust or fear, lack of interest and poor listening skills. External barriers are usually related to the environment, such as poor phone connections, interruptions and noise. Unlike internal barriers, external barriers are not controlled by a sender or receiver.

Noise is either a physical or psychological type of disruption which prevents messages from being received. Guirdham (2011, 181) defines different types of noise: poor encoding by the sender, distortion by the medium, inaccurate decoding and distorted interpretation by the recipient. When communication is intended but none occurs, it becomes miscommunication.

As Guirdham (2011, 181) points out: "If persons are from different cultural backgrounds, there are a few additional sources of miscommunication." Those can be language barriers, perceptual barriers (differences in opinions and attitudes), and cultural barriers, such as different religion, region or country of origin (Zaineb 2010). Face-to-face communication reduces miscommunications by feedback; the sender finds out immediately how the receiver is understanding and responding to the message. On the other hand face-to-face communications reduce the time for thinking through how to reply (Guirdham 2011, 181).

In medium sized or bigger companies work is subdivided into different compartments and employees are in several locations; hence the natural flow of communication is suppressed. Due to this, leaders might make decisions without input from people who will be in charge of execution which will lower employees' commitment. To quote Sher:

“Without good communication, leaders make decisions in a vacuum. Crucial input is missing. The people who must execute the decision have not been asked for input and consequently have not bought in. Their potential resistance and slowed or poor execution all harm results.” (Sher 2014.)

Lack of openness is problematic for internal communication. In a less open work culture the information is used only by those who need it in their actual work, hence the information does not flow inside the organization. Organizational culture should encourage employees to share information and help each other both inside and across teams. Openness demands work: everyone within the organization is in charge of transmitting information. (Aalto 2012, 102–103.)

2.3 Internal communication as an asset

At its best, effective internal communication increases business performance. Firstly, good internal communication provides workforce the information they need to do their jobs effectively and makes sure they have clear standards and expectations for their work. In addition, it enables employees to understand an organization's overall situation and helps them to maintain a shared vision about the organization's goals and values. Furthermore, it allows people to give and receive feedback and provide support to each other, both practical and emotional, for demanding work. Finally, internal communication is the key factor that holds an organization together. Without communication, employees are disconnected from each other. (Rabinowitz 2015.)

Communication is a powerful tool when it is used right. Internal communication makes people:

- 1) understand why they belong to work community,
- 2) work for the community and to other people since they understand mutual goals and enjoy their work,
- 3) do more and better quality because they are motivated, and
- 4) change their attitudes and opinions (Siukosaari 2002, 77–78).

There is considerable evidence that the communication abilities of both employer and employees affect both individual achievements in organizations and organizational effectiveness (Guirdham 2011, 7). Star City's 2005 Employee Opinion Survey identified communications as an area of concern. Despite the actions the company took to communicate with employees, nearly half of the workforce was not satisfied with the level of information flow between managers and employees.

To improve the situation, the company launched an interactive communications program that aimed at making personnel feel part of the enterprise, improving customer service through increased employee engagement, instructing staff on main issues and improving communication. The campaign was successful: employee satisfaction towards company's communications rose 20%. In addition, positive customer service feedback increased 100% during 12 months. The program showed that by meeting the needs of employees, in this case making the communication more interactive, employee engagement rises, and customer benefits from a better work atmosphere (Grimshaw, 2006).

In addition, Åberg (2006) states that employees' satisfaction towards internal communication and satisfaction towards work have a clear link. Employees that are satisfied with communication between managers and employees enjoy their work more. They were also more motivated than employees who were dissatisfied with internal communications.

2.4 Interaction in internal communication

Interaction is the basis of humane behavior. Conversations and discourses between people generate new ideas. To quote Juholin (2008, 61–62): "Communication happens where

people work and where they create and exchange information and experiences.” Information should not be brought to the company separately through hierarchy but all the members of work environment should create content equally. Furthermore, the organizational atmosphere should allow subordinates to question manager’s decisions and vice versa. Employees are expected to be active and self-imposed seekers and creators of information. They are entitled to receive information but also obligated to seek it. (Åberg 2006, 110).

Communication takes place in different forums of which the most important is the physical workplace or a virtual environment (Juholin 2008, 62). Other forums are for example phone calls, text messages, e-mails and message boards. Research conducted by Infor Consulting shows that virtual networks have replaced some of the communication forums partly or entirely (Åberg 2006, 109). Virtual communication can never be as rich as communication face-to-face. However, virtual communication enables introducing oneself and one’s opinions in an optimal way. Senders and receivers have more control over their messages: virtual communication leaves time to shape the message and optimize the content. (Åberg 2006, 113–114.)

The purpose of communication is to maintain, empower and develop the work community, but also to educate individuals of the community through two-way interaction. Members of the work community shape the reputation of their organization with their working and communication both consciously and subconsciously. According to Juholin (2013, 19) communication is going through a paradigm shift. Social media and mass self-communication have made it possible for everyone to take part, effect and influence to conversations. User generated content (UGC) emphasizes that not everything needs to be created alone – social media users can borrow content, comment on each other and share links and other information. Juholin (2013, 19) states that there is an essential change in the direction of communication flow. In social media, communication flow is bottom-up, whereas in traditional media channels it is top-down. Furthermore, co-creation and produsage (combination of the words "production" and "usage"), are new terms referring to a crowd’s active part in content making.

2.4.1 Intranet and Enterprise Social Network as internal communication tools

An intranet is a computer network with restricted access to employees of the company only. An intranet can contain any work-related information, tools and areas for group work. It enables a more open environment as information is available for everyone. Information that used to be dispersed around the organization is found in one place. An intranet reduces the amount of work: employees can borrow and modify each other's output. The information is up to date since it is possible to comment on and modify it. (Siukosaari 2002, 210). The history of intranets is short; the first versions were used in the 1990's as information storages and link lists. Gradually, intranets have become an important tool for organizations to share and receive information inside the company. An intranet is a direct line from one employee to another in any situation. In the best cases it decreases distractions from the office while at the same time ensures the possibility to communicate in real time across the globe. (Juholin 2013, 323.)

An enterprise social network (ESN) is an organization's version of social media. ESN includes the use of in-house intranet software as well as a third party social media platform (Rouse 2012). In 2013 Gartner, the world's leading information technology research and advisory company (Gartner.com) predicted the rise of enterprise social networks in their research "Predicts 2013: Social and Collaboration Go Deeper and Wider": "By 2016, 50 percent of large organizations will have internal Facebook-like social networks, and that 30 percent of these will be considered as essential as email and telephones are today."

According to Miller (2012), using social media in internal communication has many benefits; it opens up new feedback channels, encourages communication and co-operation across teams and geographies and breaks down hierarchies by enabling horizontal networking. In addition, it increases internal brand awareness. McKinsey & Co (2012) states that using social media as an internal communication tool can bring additional value through faster and more effective collaboration within the organization.

Li (2015) argues that employers should engage with employees especially through social channels. Leaders who do not spend time using the company's enterprise social network unknowingly show an example that employees should not spend time on the ESN either.

Leaders are often afraid that engaging will decrease the power distance between them and their employees; however, an open-door policy helps to sustain a transparent, interactive communication with company leadership.

2.4.2 Usability

Excessive hierarchy can destroy the benefits of an intranet. An intranet should be user friendly so that users can quickly learn how to use the tools and content creators are able to publish information by themselves in real time. An intranet is useful only if the user is familiar with the tools it provides (Juholin 2013, 323–325).

Usability means making services or products easier to use and to match them to user needs and requirements. A company's intranet should be effective and efficient to use: users should be able to complete the desired tasks with little effort (Usabilitynet 2015). Siukosaari (2002) evaluates usability of a service by the following criteria:

- 1) Does the service tell where the user is, where he can go and where he has been?
- 2) How fast are the pages loading?
- 3) Is the text easily readable?
- 4) Is the content relevant to the user?
- 5) How fast does the user find what he is seeking?

Users of a webpage should fluently understand the structure and navigation of the site. The content should be relevant to the user, easily readable and memorable. The user should effortlessly learn how to complete basic tasks, be able to complete the tasks efficiently and to remember how the site is used when visiting the site again. In addition, the user should like to use the system and benefit from using it, in other words, the website should generate satisfaction for the user. For a company, the usability of the intranet is a matter of employee productivity. If a website is too difficult to use, operates slowly, or does not satisfy the user's needs, he or she will not continue using the website. (Nielsen Norman Group 2015.)

3 Cultural aspects in communication

At work two-way interaction, communication, between individuals and groups impacts everything. Communication often takes place between people from different backgrounds (Guirdham 2011, 3). Effective interaction in today's business world requires the ability to transfer a message in a way that people from different cultures can understand it as the sender intended. Communication can be interpreted very differently depending on cultures of both parties; hence cross-cultural communication poses certain challenges and involves numerous potential verbal and non-verbal barriers (Mor Barak 2011, 201–203). Guirdham (2011, 5) states: "Nearly half a century of cross-cultural research has firmly established that there are differences in the ways that members of different societal groups behave, both in private life and at work."

Today's workforce is increasingly diverse and its successful management is one of the biggest challenges faced by both corporate managers and human resource managers. Managing a workforce that does not have a shared language can be challenging for both managers and employees (Mor Barak 2011, 205). Guirdham (2011, 17) has gathered factors that increase the importance of cultural diversity at work: globalization, increased use of virtual communication, increase in offshoring, increased person-to-person international contact, growth of service sector, increased emphasis on individuals and teams instead of structures, changed social attitudes giving minorities more power and increased workforce diversity.

Individuals are rarely aware of their culture; however, culture affects all aspects of communication. Guirdham (2011, 18–24) introduces five different cultural theories based on different theoretical approaches: anthropological, communication perspective, cultural studies, social identity and cultural psychology. This section will discuss the communication perspective.

The communication perspective sees communication as the center of culture. According to communication perspective theory, the culture is co-created during interaction between members of the same group.

Groups cluster together according to their beliefs, values and behavior. In this approach, culture is purely about shared ways of thinking and acting.

Haslett (1989, in Guirdham 2011, 20) argues that culture and communication develop together: neither exists without the other. In addition, members of a culture share a mutual world view through communication. According to Hofstede (1991, 5) culture is always a collective phenomenon which is learned, not inherited.

The term “intercultural communication” was introduced in Edward T. Hall’s (1959) book *The Silent Language*. Intercultural communication is communication between individuals or groups from different linguistic or cultural origins. Hofstede (1991, 230–232) defined a three step process to learning intercultural communication abilities: awareness, knowledge and skills. Awareness is the recognition that people brought up in different environments carry a different “mental software”, patterns of thinking, feeling and acting. Knowledge follows awareness: one must learn about other culture’s symbols, rituals and values during interaction, even though one might disagree with those. After recognition and learning, one must apply the skills in practice to reach successful intercultural interaction.

As discussed in Section 1.2, communication differences increase in a multicultural environment. These differences can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts, hence it is important to understand the underlying factors that influence one’s communication behavior.

Hall (1959) divided cultural communication styles into *low-context* and *high-context* cultures. United States, Australia and Germany are examples of low-context cultures. In these cultures, communication is straightforward: the actual words contain the meaning of the message while the context is not as important. The message is direct and detailed, and the possibility of mistaking the intention of the message is minimal. Communication in a low-context workplace is formal: memos, legal documents and written statements are preferred (Hurn and Tomalin 2011, 22). For members of high-context cultures, such as Japan, China and Mexico the context is more important than the literal interpretation of the message. Mor Barak (2011, 225) states: “In such communications, the words convey only a small part of the message, and the receiver needs to fill in the gaps based on understanding the context and of the speaker.”

High-context people rely on symbols, body-language, intentions of speech and hidden messages that are often culturally based. A high-context communicator gives suggestions instead of direct instructions and comments. Communication in high-context cultures is fast, efficient and polite. (Hurn and Tomalin 2013, 21.)

In the late 1960's and early 1970's Geert Hofstede introduced four cultural dimensions – individualism and collectivism (IC), power distance (PD), uncertainty avoidance (UA) and masculinity and femininity (MAS) that differ across cultures. Mor Barak (2011) argues that there are links between high- and low-context cultures and individualism and collectivism. Collective cultures tend to have high-context orientation, whereas individualistic cultures prefer low-context interaction.

Individualism and collectivism (IC) measures the extent to which an individual's behavior is influenced by others. Individualists prefer self-sufficiency, and workers in an individualistic culture are expected to act according to their own interest. An employee's own interest should coincide with employer's interest. Countries, such as USA, Australia, Great Britain, Canada and most of the Europe are individualistic, task oriented societies. Collectivists think "we" instead of "I". They keep their obligations to their group, and personal relations are highly important. In collectivist cultures an employee acts according to the interest of the group, which might differ with the employee's personal interests. The majority of the world's population lives in a collectivist, relationship oriented society, including people from South-America and Asia. (Hofstede, 1991, 63–65.)

4 Results

The empirical research was conducted during two weeks' time in December 2015. The survey was sent through e-mail to 176 respondents globally. All respondents have a personal account in the company's Yammer network. From these respondents 51.1 %, ergo 90 persons answered the survey. Two persons did not finish the questionnaire; hence, the definitive number of answers was 88, which is 50 % of all Yammer users at the company. Among the respondents, there were 49 employees, 16 team leads, 20 directors or managers and five leadership team members. The questionnaire consisted of 23 questions, which were either multiple-choice questions or claims that respondents rated on a Likert scale from one to six. In addition, the respondents were able to freely describe the problems they have faced when using Yammer and leave open feedback about Yammer as a service. The results were analyzed by percentages and absolute average values. In addition, the respondents were clustered into different groups according to their answers and then compared with each other.

4.1 How the members of the case company use Yammer

The following information about the use of Yammer was collected with one multiple-choice question wherefrom the respondents could choose one option, and three multiple-choice questions wherefrom the respondents could choose as many options as they desired.

According to the study, slightly less than half of the respondents, 49%, logged into Yammer daily, 29% logged into Yammer once a week, and 10% used Yammer less than once in a month. The remaining 12% used Yammer once in two weeks or once in a month.

The vast majority, 95% of the respondents used Yammer to read company news while only 21% of the respondents created new content by posting company related news, information and updates to Yammer. In addition, 24% replied they share current news about the industry to Yammer, whereas over half of the respondents wanted to receive recent industry news.

While only 9% of the respondents shared non-work related information and news, 20% wanted to receive such information through Yammer. The balance between the users that created content and the users that were interested in the content is presented in Figure 1.

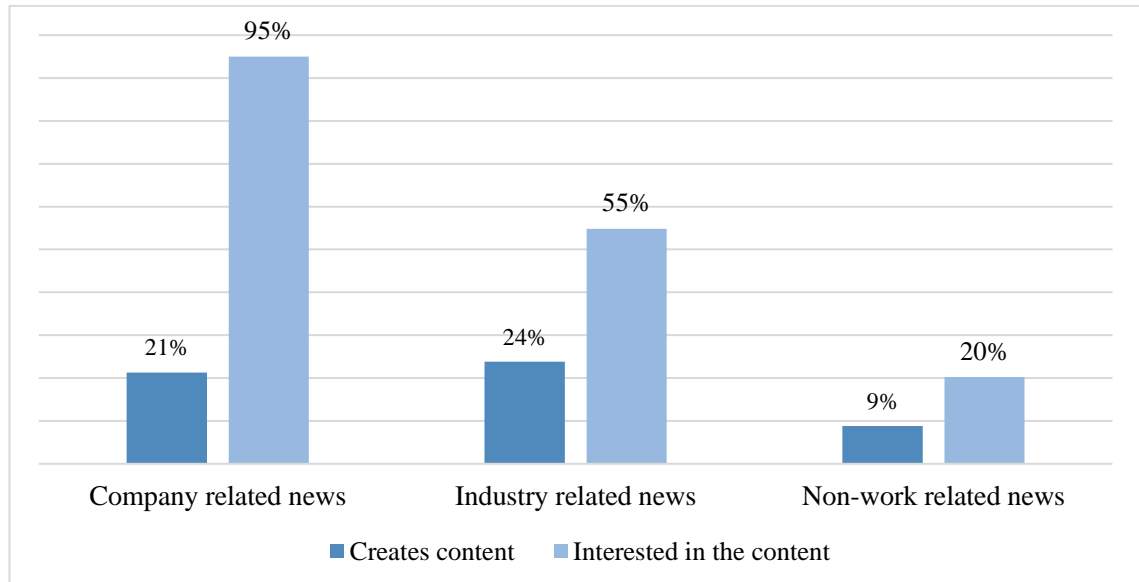


Figure 1. The balance between the users that create content and the users that are interested in it

Although Yammer is marketed as a communication tool across teams, only 15% of the respondents used Yammer to co-operate with other teams. However, 43% of the respondents wanted to receive information about other teams' actions. Almost 26% of the respondents used Yammer to communicate inside their own team. Only a fraction used Yammer to socialize or to tell about their own work. A small fraction of the respondents used Yammer to store and view files which was a positive result, as the files are supposed to be stored to the case company's intranet instead of the Yammer network.

The majority (73%) of the respondents equally desired to receive information about the company's actions and information about new products and features. About two-third of the respondents wanted to get information about organizational changes and receive information about the company's internal events. Over half of the respondents desired to receive information about competitors. The majority, 81%, desired peer-to-peer (horizontal) information flow; manager to employee (top-down) was the second most desired, and employee to manager (bottom-up) was the least desired direction of information flow.

The respondents evaluated on a Likert scale from one to six how active Yammer users they see themselves being (1 = not active at all, 6 = very active). The average score from 88 answers was 3. Only 4 respondents described themselves as very active, whereas 16 persons rated themselves as not active users at all.

4.2 Yammer as a communication tool

Yammer's functionality as a communication tool was measured with 10 claims that respondents evaluated on a Likert scale from one to six (1 = completely disagree, 6 = completely agree). An average score of the answers that is less than 3.5 on a Likert scale is considered as a negative answer (disagree), and averages over 3.5 are considered positive (agree). In addition, the respondents were able to leave open feedback about the service and its problems.

The majority of the respondents agreed that communication in Yammer is open, reliable, interactive and fast. Communication was also seen as appropriate for a workplace. In addition, the majority of the respondents felt that they can approach people regardless of the titles through Yammer.

However, some respondents strongly criticized the management for supervising what is posted to Yammer stating that the discussion culture is not open enough to express honest opinions. Moreover, the lack of open communication from the top management through Yammer was criticized, as the management should encourage employees to use Yammer actively by showing an example. A slight majority of the respondents felt that they could not influence work related matters through Yammer.

According to the respondents, the most common problem when using Yammer was an inability to find the information the user is looking for. The respondents claimed, that the information in Yammer is scattered into too many places, which makes it difficult to find formerly added information from the service. In addition, some respondents found it difficult to target the information to certain groups only, as well as reaching the right persons. Besides problems in finding the right information, only a fraction had problems with user-friendliness, such as compatibility with the web browser or the speed of the service.

Many respondents left open feedback about the irrelevancy of the information in Yammer as well as the lack of time to use the service. According to the respondents, the amount of information in Yammer can be overwhelming. In fact, one in three respondents saw that the information in Yammer is not relevant for them and that they do not have time to use Yammer. In addition, 17%, ergo 15 of the respondents did not see communication through Yammer essential for their work at all. The respondents disagreed to some extent with the claim “Communication in Yammer is essential for my work”. In addition, 8% saw inappropriate posting as a problem. The respondents also claimed that colleagues do not interact with the service enough, and that only the same individuals contributed to Yammer channels instead of everyone using it spontaneously.

According to the study, Yammer had not replaced other communication tools, such as e-mail or Skype. The average score of answers on a Likert scale to the claim “Communication in Yammer has replaced other communication tools (E.g. e-mail or Skype)” was 3. While 20 persons completely disagreed with the claim, only 5 persons completely agreed with it.

There was no notable differences between respondents who had or had not received Yammer training. Likewise, the time respondents had worked at the case company did not reflect in the results. In addition, only a small fraction (7%) had suffered from language barriers, and 21% of the respondents had not faced any problems when using Yammer. Yammer was seen as a handy tool for sharing and reading basic information, as well as organizing activities with colleagues and across teams. The grade for Yammer as a service on a scale from 1–6 was 4.

4.3 Differences in the use of Yammer between different offices

The survey answers were collected from 13 different countries. Due to small size and or low reply rate of some regional offices, certain offices are clustered together when analyzing the differences. The offices were clustered into following groups:

- Group A: United States of America, Canada, Mexico, Australia
- Group B: Finland
- Group C: France, Germany, The Netherlands, Sweden
- Group D: The United Kingdom
- Group E: Asia (Malaysia, South-Korea, Japan)

Group A includes offices from South- and North-America along with Australia since it is an english speaking country. Finland and The United Kingdom are analyzed individually because the number of replies from these countries was high. Group C consists of the rest of the European offices. Group E includes all offices from Asia.

All five groups used Yammer mostly to read company news. Horizontal communication was the most desired by all the groups. All groups agreed that communication in Yammer is open, reliable, interactive, fast and appropriate for a workplace. Group A and C agreed that communication in Yammer was essential for their work.

Group A was the most satisfied with Yammer as a service. They used Yammer daily or at least once a week. Group A wanted to get information about organizational changes, new products and features and about competitors. The biggest problem in the functionality of Yammer was finding the desired information.

Group B was the most critical towards the service. From the five groups Group B saw communication in Yammer as the least open, reliable and interactive. However, they used it daily to read company news, to share current news about the industry and to socialize. Group B wanted to receive information about company actions and internal events, and saw irrelevant information as the biggest problem in Yammer.

Group C used Yammer approximately once a week. They did not post non-work related information nor wanted to receive it through Yammer.

Instead, they wished to receive information about company actions. Group C feels that they could not influence work related matters through Yammer. As in group A, group C could not find the desired information from the service. Moreover, they did not have time to use the service.

Group D was the least active Yammer user and least satisfied with Yammer as a service. They used Yammer either daily or less than once in a month and wished to receive information about new products and features. Group D was not interested in reading or posting non-work related information, socializing nor co-operating between teams. Yammer was not essential tool for group D's work. The biggest problem in the use of Yammer for group D was the lack of time.

Group E rated themselves as the most active Yammer users. The group used Yammer daily or at least once a week. Group E was interested in information about new products and features and used Yammer to communicate with team members and for brainstorming. Group E saw communication in Yammer slightly less appropriate for the work place than other groups. Group E was also unable to find the information they were seeking.

The following figures present the differences between offices. The average grade for Yammer as a service and grade for activity by countries are presented in Figure 2 and most common problems in the use of Yammer by countries are presented in the Figure 3. Figure 4 presents the average grades from Likert scale questions by countries.

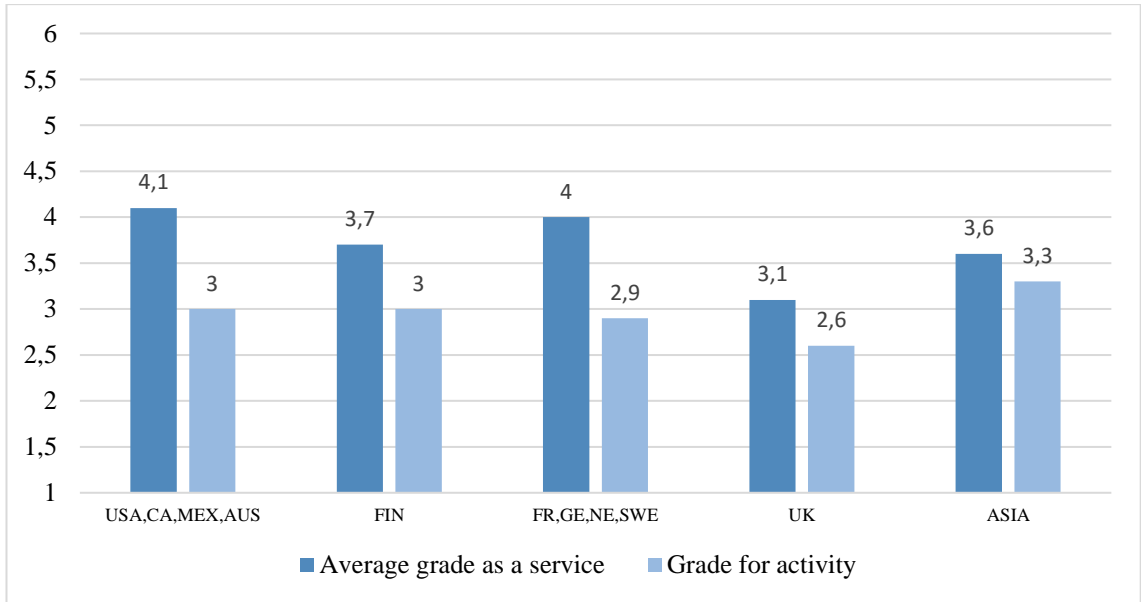


Figure 2. The average grade for Yammer as a service and grade for activity by countries on a scale from one to six.

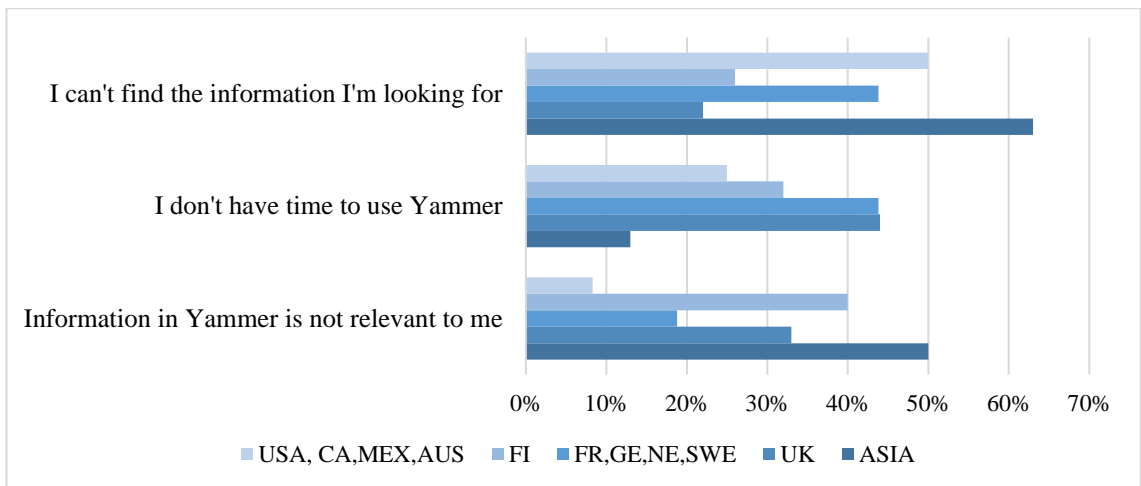


Figure 3. The most common problems in the use of Yammer by countries by percentages.

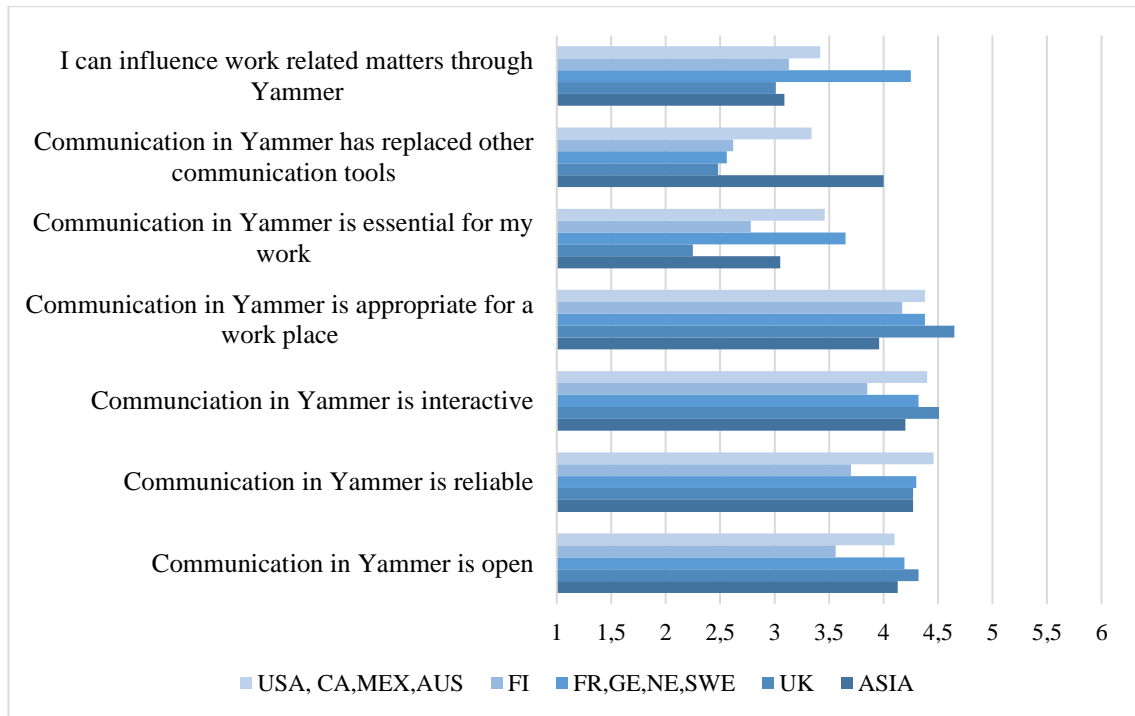


Figure 4. The average grades (scale 1-6) from Likert scale questions by countries.

There were some differences in the use of Yammer depending on if the majority (at least 50%) of respondent's team members were located at the same office with the respondents, in the same country but different office, in a different country but same time zone or in a different country and different time zone. Persons whose team members were mostly located in different countries and time zones were the most satisfied with Yammer as a communication tool.

They also agreed more strongly with the argument "Communication in Yammer has replaced other communication tools (E.g. e-mail or Skype)" and "I can influence work related matters through Yammer" than the other groups. Despite that, respondents who were in the same office with the majority of their team members were the most active Yammer users.

4.4 Differences in the use of Yammer between different age groups

The respondents were divided into four different age groups: 18–25, 26–35, 36–45, and 46 years old or more. All the age groups used Yammer mainly to read company news and preferred the horizontal direction of information flow. The most common activities in Yammer by different age groups are presented in Figure 5.

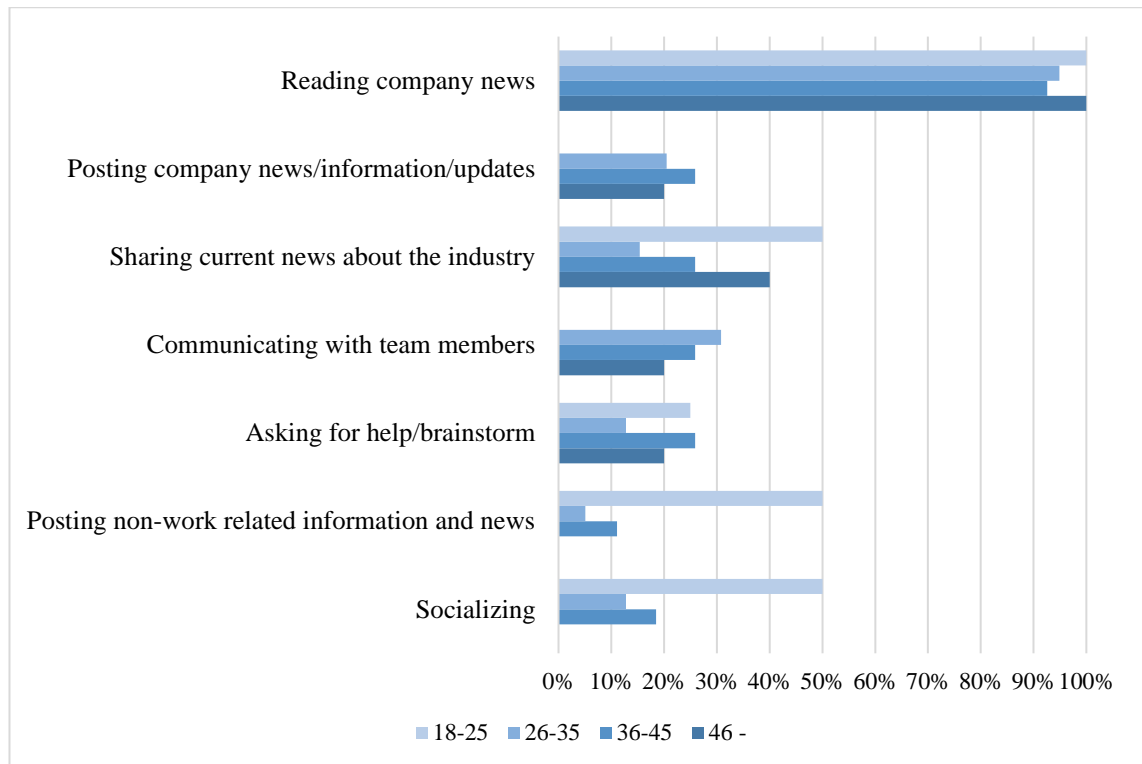


Figure 5. The most common activities in Yammer by age groups by percentages.

Respondents aged 18 to 25 years were the most active Yammer users and the most satisfied with the service. These respondents used Yammer daily. They shared work related and non-work related information and socialized with other users.

All respondents aged 18 to 25 wanted to receive information about organizational changes, and 80% wanted to receive current news about the industry through Yammer. This is the only age group that agreed communication through Yammer has replaced other communication tools.

Slightly less than half, 49%, of 26–35 year old respondents used Yammer daily, and 37% of them use it once a week. One-third used Yammer to communicate with team members. The respondents aged 26 to 35 years were interested in information about new products and features as well as information about company actions. The respondents of this age group felt that they do not have time to use Yammer, but wished that all members of the network used it more actively.

Respondents from 36 to 45 years were the least active Yammer users. However, 50% from the group used Yammer daily. In addition to reading company news, 36 to 45 year old respondents used Yammer to post company-related information and to brainstorm. They were interested in receiving information about company actions (80%), organizational changes (76%) and about internal events (72%). Yammer was a less essential tool for this age group than for the other groups.

The second most active Yammer users were aged 46 or more. This age group used Yammer daily, or at least once a week. Despite that, respondents aged 46 or more were not interested in posting or reading non-work related news or socializing through Yammer. However, 40% of the age group shared current industry news. In addition, they desired to receive information about company actions and new products and features. 37% of the respondents had not faced any problems or challenges in the use of Yammer, but 27% could not find the information they are looking for. Respondents aged 46 or more agreed that communication through Yammer was essential for their work.

5 Conclusion

Internal communication is essential for any organization as it is the factor that connects individuals into teams. Internal communication happens in different forums, of which the most important ones are physical workplace and virtual environments, such as the enterprise social network tool Yammer. Effective use of Yammer increases interactivity between employees and the management, opens the possibility for feedback and increases employer engagement. Hence, it can be an asset that improves an organization's overall success.

The first research question aimed to clarify how members of the case company use Yammer. Slightly less than half (49%) of the respondents used Yammer daily. Almost all the company's Yammer users used Yammer to read recent company news. The majority of the respondents wanted to receive information about the company's actions, new products and features, organizational changes and internal events. Peer-to-peer (horizontal) communication was the most desired. Indeed, the use of social media has changed the traditional top-down flow of communication into bottom-up and peer-to-peer (Chapter 2.4.).

According to the study, Yammer users were interested in receiving company and industry news, information about other teams' actions and also non-work-related information. However, less than one-fourth of the users created new content actively. The results show that Yammer was used as a company's pin board, where the communication is still mainly one-way instead of being an interactive social media. Chapter 2.1. discussed about two different communication theories, the process school and the semiotics school. The communication through Yammer reminded a technical process of transferring a message to the recipients (process school) instead of being social interaction that connects individuals together and enforces the company culture (semiotics school).

The second research question examined is Yammer seen as a functional communication tool in the case company. In addition, the research inspected, is Yammer has fulfilled the expectations that the management had when taking Yammer into use. The management expected Yammer to enhance communication across locations and to be a more interactive communication tool than e-mail.

According to the research, the majority of the respondents agreed that communication through Yammer had not replaced other communication tools, such as e-mail or Skype. However, Yammer was seen as a fast and interactive tool for company-wide communication. Communication in Yammer was reliable, open and appropriate for a workplace. As mentioned earlier, a network like Yammer can bring additional value to a company through faster and more collaborative communication inside and among teams and geographies.

The inability to find information, the amount of irrelevant information and lack of time were the biggest problems among the users. As discussed in Chapter 2.4.2, the usability of the intranet is a matter of employee productivity for a company. If a website is too difficult to use, or does not satisfy the user's needs, the user will leave the website. In addition, both employees and management should engage in the service more, and the management should provide an example to employees by using Yammer more actively. It is said in Chapter 2.4.1 that leaders who do not spend time using the company's enterprise social network unknowingly show an example that employees should not spend time on the ESN either.

The third research question was designed to find out the differences in the use of Yammer among the case company's different offices. The users from all offices used Yammer mostly to read company news and preferred horizontal communication. However, there were also notable differences in the use of Yammer among the offices. Malaysia, South Korea and Japan rated themselves as the most active Yammer users. They used Yammer for communicating with team members and for brainstorming. Users from the United Kingdom were not interested in socializing or reading or posting non-work related information. In addition, the users from the United Kingdom were the least active and least satisfied. As discussed in Chapter 3, Asian countries belong to collectivistic cultures that act upon the interest of the group whilst the culture in the United Kingdom is individualistic. In the individualistic cultures people are task-oriented and self-sufficient, which can explain the low activity in the use of enterprise social network. Users in the USA, Canada, Mexico and Australia were the most satisfied with Yammer as a service. Finns were the most critical towards Yammer, but still used it actively to read and share news and to socialize with other employees.

The last research question examined the differences in the use of Yammer among different age groups. All age groups used Yammer mainly to read company news and preferred horizontal information flow. The youngest Yammer users were the most active and satisfied with the service. They used Yammer for sharing work and non-work related news and to socialize. Contrarily, respondents aged 46 or more were not interested in non-work related news or socializing. However, they did not see irrelevant information as a problem and were satisfied with the service.

Persons aged 36 to 45 were the least active Yammer users and did not see communication through Yammer as essential for their work.

The author received plenty of open feedback about the use of Yammer through the questionnaire. The feedback will be used by the commissioning company to develop Yammer into more functional communication tool. The theoretical framework of the research questions is presented in Appendix 1.

5.1 Development ideas

According to the survey results, the main problem in the functionality of Yammer is the complicated user-interface, which makes it difficult to find the information that the user is seeking. In addition, irrelevant information and the lack of time keep respondents from using Yammer. The respondents also criticized the lack of engagement towards the service from both employees and the management. The management was criticized for monitoring what it posted on Yammer, which restricts the openness and reliability of the information. Moreover, only 49% of the respondents use Yammer daily while 10% use it less than once in a month. At the moment, Yammer is seen as a place for superficial information. The majority of users do not see that they can affect work related matters through Yammer.

Based on the results of the survey, open feedback from the Yammer users and on secondary data, the author has identified the main problems and possible solutions that the case company's IT team and management can use to improve Yammer as an internal communication tool. The problems and solutions are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Main problems in the use of Yammer and solutions

Problem	Solution
The user interface is too cluttered.	Deleting inoperative groups and uniting similar groups together simplifies the appearance. The groups should be hidden private groups, so that only the members of the groups see the information. Only groups that contain relevant information for the whole company should stay visible for everyone.
Information is not targeted effectively.	Groups should be correctly named, and the content of the group should be identified in the information box. The administrator of a group should send invitations to persons who benefit from being in the group.
Users do not log into Yammer daily.	The login should be integrated with Office e-mail login to avoid the inconvenience of logging in to multiple sites during the day and to bring users that do not usually use Yammer on a daily basis. Management should provide an example to others by using Yammer actively.
The atmosphere is not open enough.	Management should encourage employees to express their opinions and brainstorm openly.

5.2 Value for the company

Based on research results, the company will start a project to develop Yammer into a more functional communication tool. The goal is to simplify the user-interface, to reduce the amount of irrelevant information and to target information more effectively. In addition, the goal is to encourage the members to use Yammer more actively and to make Yammer a more essential part of their everyday work.

Firstly, the company will delete and re-arrange inoperative groups. In addition, most of the groups will be changed into hidden private groups. This way, only the persons that are affected by or interested in the group's content will be able to see it. Furthermore, some of the groups will be re-named or the description of the group is to be updated according to the content of the group to help users to find the most relevant channels of information.

Lastly, the country managers, starting from Finland, will be advised to use Yammer as their main communication channel. After the research was conducted, the company integrated Yammer login with Office tools. The company will repeat the survey after six months to see if any development has happened.

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The research questions and relevant theory

Table 1: Overlay matrix of research questions and relevant theory

Research question	Relevant theory
1) How members of the case company use Yammer?	Chapters 2.1, 2.4, 2.4.1
2) Is Yammer experienced as a functional communication tool in the case company?	Chapters 2.2, 2.3, 2.4.1, 2.4.2
3) Are there notable differences in the use of Yammer between the case company's different offices?	Chapter 3
4) Are there notable differences in the use of Yammer between different age groups?	Chapter 3