

# The Social Media Garden

## A Digital Era Research Study into Social Media at Work



### Executive Summary

The Social Media Garden is an open-access research project that uses the wisdom of crowds to generate insight about the barriers organisations face in adopting social media practices in the workplace – and solutions to overcome them. It is, in itself, an effective demonstration of how social technologies are changing the way we engage in conversations and exchange knowledge about our opinions, experiences and ideas.

These advances are making organisations slowly wake up to a harsh reality: the control they have enjoyed over communications for so long is diminishing and this poses some difficult challenges.

Progressive organisations have embraced these new technologies and they are rightfully reaping the rewards. However, many organisations are simply not facing up to these challenges and they will continue to live in the dark ages because they think they know what's best for their people.

The research indicates that most participants believe that social media at work does not make people less productive. However, many organisations are still yet to fully embrace social media for use inside organisations. Leadership is evidently more important than technology in implementing social media, but there is a lack of agreement about which function should lead the use of social media internally.

In addition to identifying top-rated comments, text analysis identified 16 barriers that prevent organisations from embracing social media practices. Four barriers are identified as particularly important: Difficulties in creating a robust business case, lack of knowledge and understanding about social media, a failure of leadership to accept new ways of working and fear of the unknown.

Each of these barriers is explored and practical suggestions are provided to facilitate the introduction, and development, of social media in organisations.

# 1. Why we conducted this study



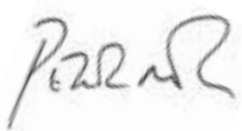
Unilever is certainly adept at using social media as a marketing channel. Indeed, we have some of the best marketers in the world. But I believe that there is even more to be gained from mass community collaboration inside, as well as outside, organisations.

The question for us then becomes: how can we best use social technologies to generate better value for our employees, as well as our consumers?

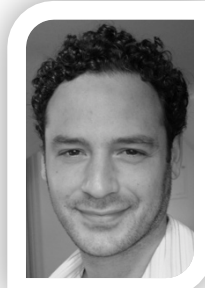
To answer this question, where better to turn than to the power of social media itself. We are pleased to be involved with this study, not only to generate insight and recommendations in pushing forward the social media agenda, but also to build on our efforts to social mediatize the way we work across the company.

There is already a mounting body of research on the use of social media in organisations – however, none of these studies have been conducted using social media methodologies. For all the big consultancies, research agencies and academics espousing the benefits of social media, it's unfortunate that many have stuck to a standard survey approach in attempting to glean insight into this area.

The Social Media Garden is one the few research studies on social media in organisations to employ social media thinking. I hope the benefits of this approach, in terms of user experience and the quality of insight produced, are clear.



**Peter Newhouse**  
Senior Vice President  
Unilever PLC



Social technologies are offering some truly pioneering ways of enhancing collaboration and generating feedback. This is exciting not only because it provides participants with a more engaging experience, but also because it creates broader opportunities for using their input. Capturing people's interactions through social

technology, and applying the latest text analytics, offers a new and rich source of insight.

The motivation for this approach comes from a personal loathing of surveys (especially the employee type): they're boring, they typically disregard text data, they ignore the all-important interconnectivity between people and, despite what you might think, they do not give people a 'voice'. The anti-social nature of surveys is at odds with a world of work that's becoming increasingly social.

I hope that the conclusions presented in this report will be helpful to people who are introducing, or expanding, the use of social media in organisations. Moreover, as the approach has wide-ranging implications elsewhere, I also hope I have explained the method and analysis in simple terms.

I would like to thank the 644 people, from over 30 countries, who gave their time to participate in the research. As an open-access study, the project was publicised in various Social Business, HR and Communications media. A convenience sampling approach was appropriate given the question asked in the study could be adequately answered by people with an interest in, or experience of, the use of social media. The Garden was open from February to April 2012.

I'd also like to thank David Wong at Hybrid Wisdom Labs, Ken Goldberg at UC Berkeley, Darren Jaffrey at Clarabridge, Sara Gilmore at the CIPD, Gareth Jones, John Ingham and Courtney Hunt.



**Michael Silverman**  
Managing Director  
Silverman Research

## 2. How it Works

The Garden is a collaborative environment that displays comments using data visualisation instead of a traditional list-based format. Conversations displayed in lists can quickly lead to information overload, so the Garden employs advanced statistics to produce an intuitive graphical map. In addition to allowing participants to navigate the discussion more easily, the visualisation also ensures that each participant has an equal chance of being heard. Participants' ratings of each others' comments are used to give prominence to the most insightful comments without the need for a moderator.

1. Participants use sliders to express their opinion on five 'positioning' statements about social media in organisations – this determines the location of their bloom in the Garden.

2. Participants are then prompted to respond to the discussion question: *"What do you think are the main barriers for organisations in embracing social media practices and what ideas do you have for overcoming them?"*

3. The Garden's visualisation (see understanding the visualisation overleaf) allows participants to see where they stand relative to other participants – those with similar opinions are located closer to one another.

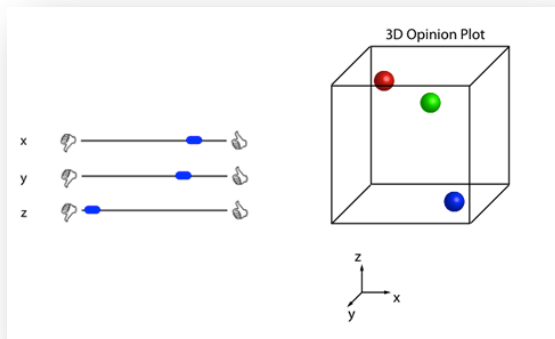
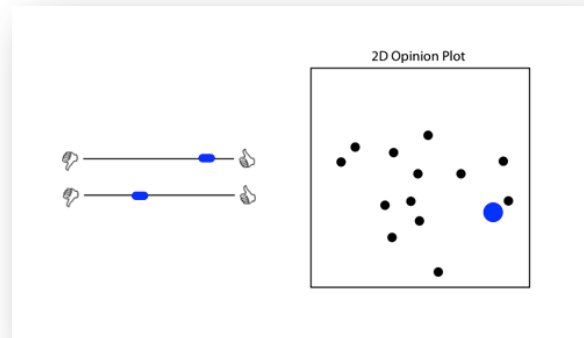


4. Participants can then read, rate and respond to the suggestions of other participants - this allows the best insights to be identified and the authentic voice of the community to be heard.



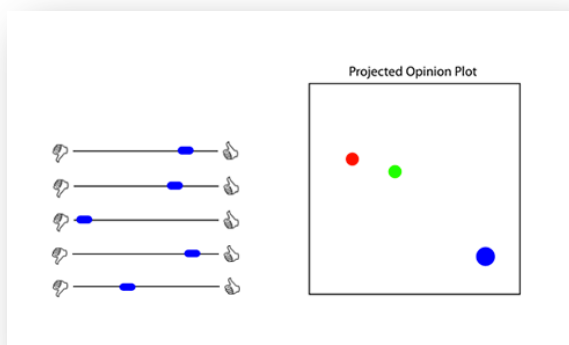
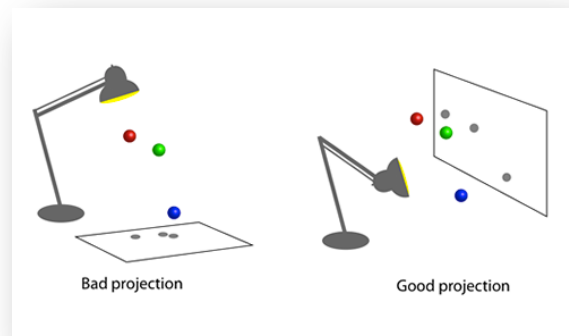
### 3. Understanding the Visualisation

1. Opinions on two statements can easily be plotted on a two-dimensional graph. Here, the more a person agrees with the first proposition, the further the point is to the right and the more a person agrees with the second proposition, the higher the point. Therefore, a user who rated two statements as illustrated by the sliders opposite would be plotted as shown.



2. Opinions on three statements can be plotted in a similar manner in three dimensions. Notice, however, that it's difficult to interpret just how far away data points are from each other because the three-dimensional image is only shown in two dimensions. In other words, since you can't walk around the illustration there is no depth perception.

3. Using statistics, multiple opinions can be projected onto two dimensions while maintaining distance relationship between the resulting points. It's like shining a light onto a set of balls and observing their shadows. In the bad projection, from looking at the shadows, the blue ball looks closer to the green ball. Yet in reality, the green ball is closer to the red ball. In the good projection, however, the distance relationships are better preserved because the angle of the light was adjusted.



4. Similarly, the Garden's algorithms use the information provided on the five positioning statements to find the best projection of data points in two dimensions. In this way, participants can interpret points near them as people who are similar to them and points that are far away as people who are different from them.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Positioning statements

In total, the study achieved 644 participants. Responses to the five positioning statements are shown in Chart 1. The data for these questions was collected using sliders (a visual analogue scale). Each bar shows a histogram of responses, as well as the distribution curve, so that both the spread of opinion and percentage agree/disagree can be seen.

**Chart 1: Overall responses to positioning statements (n=644)**



In terms of productivity, only a quarter (23%) of participants agree that allowing the use of social media sites at work makes people less productive. It is common for organisations to have concerns in this area, but participants do not share this view (this is perhaps unsurprising given that participants are more likely to be involved with social media than the population at large). It would follow that participants are more likely to see employee abuse as a manifestation of deeper performance issues rather than as a consequence of social media itself. In any case, the increasing prevalence of smartphones and tablets is making it difficult to control access to social media. Therefore, attempts to combat such behaviours should focus on the causes, as opposed to the symptoms, of poor performance.

With regard to participants' experience of social media, there is a roughly equal split for both the extent to which participants feel heavily involved with social media (57% agree vs 40% disagree) and the extent to which participants' organisations have embraced social technologies for use in people practices (51% agree vs 45% disagree). The latter demonstrating that a reluctance to fully embrace social technologies in the workplace is still highly prevalent.

In many organisations, there is still disagreement about which functional specialism is best placed to lead the use of social technologies internally. Perhaps worryingly for the HR community, only 31% of participants agreed that the HR function is best placed to lead the use of social media in organisations. This would suggest that the HR community has a lot of work to do if it is to fully exploit the opportunities provided by social technologies. Related to this, only 13% of people agreed that the successful implementation of social media in organisations is an issue of technology rather leadership. So, although there is strong consensus that leadership is important, it would appear that there is still uncertainty about exactly who should be taking the lead.

## 4.2 Top comments

Each participant receives an author score that reflects how other participants have evaluated their response to the discussion question. The score is based on four measures:

- the extent to which other participants agree with their comment
- the extent to which other participants think their comment is insightful
- a confidence score (the comment must have received enough ratings to be statistically reliable)
- a measure of the distance between the rater's and author's blooms (we especially want to identify consensus comments – responses that are highly rated irrespective of difference in underlying opinions of author and rater).

The outcome is that we are able to rank each author in terms of how much their comment has resonated with the community. The top four comments are shown below. Congratulations to Phil Woodford, who was the Social Media Garden's top-rated author:



**Phil Woodford**  
Company Director

*The two biggest factors preventing organisations embracing social media are: (1) Difficulty in measuring return on investment, and (2) Fear of loss of control.*

*Using social media successfully requires an investment of time and human resources. If organisations cannot see or quantify an immediate and obvious return, they get nervous. Social media is profoundly democratic. This takes power away from managers, marketers, HR professionals and others within the organisation who might be expected to sponsor its growth.*

*Both these factors will become less of an issue with each passing year, as social media becomes more and more embedded in the fabric of business and society as a whole. Business owners and managers who are resistant to change probably won't be convinced and there's little that can be done to shape their attitudes. The world will simply change around them.*

*Why do organisations need to embrace social media? I believe it is to encourage communication & collaboration to help businesses deliver more with less. It's not a nice to have & certainly isn't just to keep Generation Y happy at work. It should have a real business benefit if implemented effectively.*

*Too many organisations think that technology is the 'be all & end all' for encouraging successful collaboration. Whilst technology is a key ingredient, so too is strong leadership role modelling the right behaviours, empowering their people to be involved in creating successful collaboration etc...Without this social media will not create successful collaboration.*

*I think leaders need to let go & allow those who are more used to seeing the benefits of social media try new ways in organisations, don't be afraid of trying new things and if these don't work don't punish people...move on and try something else.*



**Kate Henwood**  
HR Business Partner





**Delegate3076**  
Anonymous

*The barriers are largely influenced by what is happening with social media externally. The biggest example of this is that the whole issue of "Social Recruitment" has become one of the main pillars social media in HR. The reason it has become so big is that the drivers are external – unless organisations keep up with what is going on externally – they are really going to have an immediate struggle on their hands. If organisations can't recruit people – that's a disaster. On the other hand, the consequences of not embracing social media for other internal practices will not be felt immediately. That is why recruitment is so big on the social media agenda.*

*In terms of using it for business, it is a lack of overall strategy. Without defining what it is you want to do and how the organisation will not embrace it and therefore it will be seen as a failure by Senior Management who will ultimately decide its fate. And remember that SM is much more than FB and Twitter. By not exploring all the possibilities for your organisation you'll select the wrong tools.*

*To overcome:*

- 1) Define a strategy. Identify the purposes you want to use SM for and develop the vision.*
- 2) Build clear tactical plans for success. Rarely will SM 'take off' on it's own. It needs clear and meaningful boundaries that everyone can work within and towards.*
- 3) Enable (with guidance on company policies, developing skills) and importantly TRUST employees to work with SM - suspicion will drive the wrong behaviours.*
- 4) Embrace failure and keep learning. Fear of failure will lead to failure. SM isn't standing still and neither should your org.*



**GB2012**  
Anonymous

The benefit of being able to identify the top authors (as rated by the community) is that the most important issues can be distinguished simply by reading their comments. This can be thought of as a form of 'crowd-sourced text analysis': instead of using text analysis software (as we do in the next stage of the analysis), the analysis itself is done by participants at source.

In reading through these comments, we can quickly identify that the barriers organisations face in embracing social media practices relate to difficulties in measuring return on investment, fear of loss of control, a lack of collaborative leadership and a deficient overall strategy/vision.

Without doing any analysis, we are able to get a good handle on the issues that are resonating with the community. The next stage delves deeper into participants' comments by conducting a full text analysis.

## 4.3 Text Analysis

Text analysis is all about efficiently extracting meaning and sentiment from large amounts written data. The expansion of the text analytics industry is, in a large part, due to social media producing vast amounts of written data that organisations are eager to understand. The following analysis was conducted using Clarabridge's 'Navigator' software. Categorisation of comments was done using a combination of automated theme detection and manual word categorisation.

### 4.3.1 Overall Themes

Sixteen themes emerged from the text analysis. These are shown in Chart 2 and described below.

**Chart 2: Main barriers for organisations in embracing social media practices:**



**1. Knowledge and Understanding:** A lack of knowledge and understanding about the wider uses of social media, how online communities can be effectively mobilized and what can be done in practical terms to facilitate implementation.

**2. Leadership:** Senior management lacking skills and awareness about social media that stifles their view of tangible organisational benefits, prevents leaders from driving change and makes them dismissive and distrusting.

**3. Loss of Control:** The inability to control the communication process and dealing with the increased transparency that comes with transitioning power away from managers to employees.

**4. Fear:** Apprehension caused by uncertainty – fear of failure, fear of change, fear of employee abuse, fear of reputational damage, fear of merging work and personal lives, fear of security violations, fear of intellectual property leakage and fear of breaking down functional barriers.

**5. Resources:** Limited understanding about the resources required and an unwillingness (or inability) to commit sufficient and sustained resources to seemingly intangible/long-term outcomes.

**6. Business Benefits:** Ignorance surrounding the value that social media can deliver and uncertainty about the benefits that can be accrued in areas of organisational practice in which social technologies are starting to permeate.

**7. Security:** Risks associated with intellectual property, liability and data protection issues in allowing discussions in an open forum.

**8. Culture:** The cultural shift required in moving from a top-down hierarchical culture to a transparent culture that fosters openness and honesty.



**9. Communication:** Issues associated with moving to new ways of communicating (especially in managing the flow of information when communication becomes multi-directional as opposed to one-way or two-way) and properly communicating the purpose of social media tools.

**10. Change:** A reluctance to embrace far-reaching organisational change: technological change, cultural change and individual behavioural change.

**11. Business Case:** Absence of a well-grounded business case or rationale for implementing social technologies and difficulty in measuring return on investment.

**12. Employee Engagement:** Insufficient attention given to engaging employees when implementing social technologies, especially in maintaining engagement post-implementation, and presenting in a way that is digestible to people who lack familiarity.

**13. Strategy:** Failure to embrace social media as a strategic priority and an absence of a comprehensive social media strategy defining clear objectives and plans for implementation and preservation.

**14. Employee Abuse:** Concerns about loss of productivity through people wasting time on social media or using open forums to make inappropriate or offensive comments.

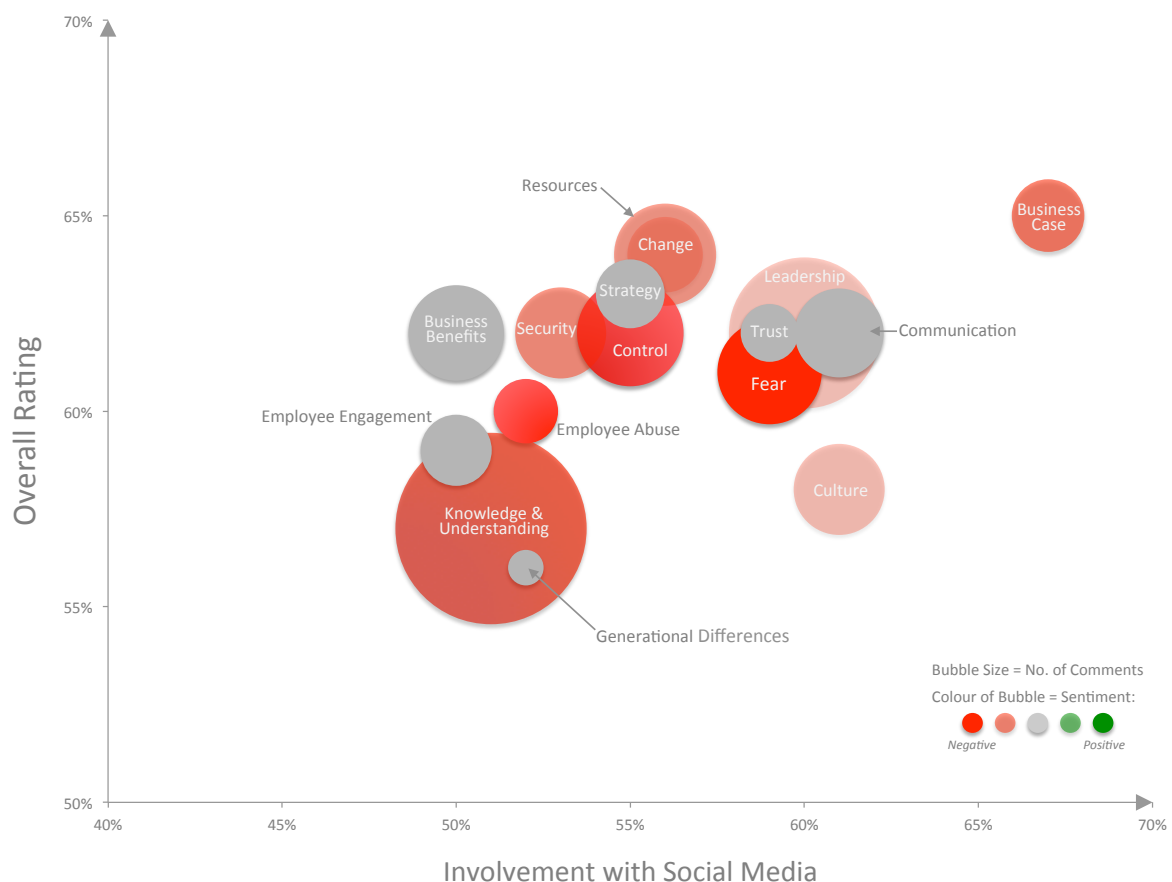
**15. Trust:** Organisations not trusting employees to use social media responsibly and preventing employees taking forward social media initiatives.

**16. Generational Differences:** Skill issues and a lack of enthusiasm for social media in organisations where demographics are skewed towards older age groups.

#### 4.3.2 Combining text data with structured data

The advantage of using modern text analysis software is the ability to group participants based on the content of their written comments and then look at how those groups score on various quantitative measures. A visual representation of this is shown in Chart 3 and explained overleaf.

**Chart 3: Prevalence of barriers by overall rating, involvement with social media and sentiment**



Each bubble in the chart represents one of the 16 barriers organisations face in embracing social media practices. The size of the bubble relates to the number of comments about that barrier. For example, knowledge and understanding is the most prevalent barrier mentioned by participants, so it is the largest bubble. Conversely, generational differences is the least talked about barrier, so it is the smallest bubble in the chart.

The colour of each bubble reflects the sentiment with which comments about each barrier are written. In its simplest form, sentiment analysis can be used to determine *polarity* – the extent to which the attitudes expressed in a written comment are positive, neutral or negative. The deeper the shade of red, the more negative the sentiment contained within comments in that category. Barriers with neutral sentiment are shown in grey. There are no green bubbles because there was very little positive sentiment within the comments. This can be explained by the fact that the discussion question asked participants to talk about *barriers* – so negative sentiment is to be expected. As a result, we are concerned with how negative the sentiment attached to a category is (as opposed to how negative or positive it is).

The vertical axis – Overall Rating – shows, on average, how highly the community has rated the comments that fall within each category in terms of insightfulness and agreeableness (see section 4.2).

The horizontal axis – Involvement with Social Media – displays the scores from the positioning statement: “I feel heavily involved with social media: I contribute to blogs/comments etc.” The rationale for using this statement in the analysis is that we are able to see which barriers are referred to by people who have the most experience of using social media compared to those with less experience.

The reason it’s so important to look at text data alongside quantitative data is because it allows us to identify which of the 16 barriers should be explored in more detail. This report is only going to select four barriers to discuss in more detail – but which four should be selected? Inspecting the text data in isolation shows which barriers are the most frequently talked about, however, just because a lot of participants talk about a particular barrier does not necessarily mean that it is the most important.

Firstly, looking at the top right of the chart, it can be seen that comments referring to the absence of a well-grounded business case were most highly rated by the community. Moreover, participants who talk about the business case are much more likely to be involved with social media compared to participants who talk about other barriers. It seems sensible to pay attention to what those with the most experience have to say – especially when their comments resonate highly with the community. The fact that only 13% of comments mentioned the business case, compared to 35% of comments that mentioned knowledge and understanding (see Chart 2), provides an effective illustration of the argument that simply looking at the quantity of comments about a particular issue does not always give the full picture.

Secondly, as the most frequently occurring theme, knowledge and understanding is clearly an issue that participants feel is important. However, it is worth noting that although it is the most frequently cited barrier (and is worthy of further exploration for that reason alone) these comments are not rated as highly by the community. In addition, comments about knowledge and understanding are more likely to be made by people with less direct involvement with social media.

Thirdly, lack of effective leadership is the second most frequently mentioned barrier. Chart 3 shows that comments about leadership are also rated highly by the community and are more likely to be mentioned by those who were heavily involved with social media.

Fourthly, the category that contains the most negative sentiment (as shown by the deepest shade of red in Chart 3) is the issue of fear. This is also one of the facets of the top comment made by Phil Woodford and is the fourth most frequently mentioned barriers. As well as being deeply fascinating, it’s also a broad category that is a likely antecedent of many of the other barriers. For these reasons it is worth of further scrutiny.

## 5. Overcoming the Barriers

Taking all the stages of the analysis together, the research has identified four important barriers that warrant further exploration. These are: Business Case, Knowledge and Understanding, Leadership and Fear. In addition to assessing the barriers to adopting social media, the research question also asked participants to suggest ideas about how these barriers could be overcome. This allows us to report highly rated practical suggestions as well as outlining each issue in more detail.

### 5.1 Business Case

***"No business case will sell social software to a firm that doesn't already value collaboration in its culture...If the ROI is needed to convince an organisation that collaboration is a good thing - then ROI is the least of your problems." Larry Hawes***

Many of the comments in this category refer to the difficulties associated with developing a strong business case or rationale for implementing social technologies and difficulty in measuring return on investment.

*The main barrier is the inability to create a line of sight between social media and profitability. Business leaders see SM as a 'nice to have', a 'gen Y' issue and not one that can increase market share, revenues, brand awareness, and ultimately business success.*

*Building a business case that includes quantitative, qualitative, and case study evidence that the effort can create business return is important. This should also include measures of success and how the success metrics will be monitored.*

There is a strong feeling that although having a business case is clearly important, it's not something that should stand in the way of progress – it's just sensible to spend time up-front thinking things through. Some participants state that internal social media metrics, including ROI, can be ethereal and hard to benchmark externally – meaning that sometimes it's necessary to forge ahead with a business case that is less than robust. It's also clear that it's not possible to build a credible business case around collaboration from an organisation-wide perspective because it's just too general. As a consequence, the business case must be created around a specific rationale.

*It is often hard to quantify the real return on investment and it is easy to undermine any achievements gained through social media as a result of inactivity, poorly planned/executed activity or ineffective alignment to the wider organisation brand/value set. Social media adds value to most, but not all. Value is gained through both hard and soft value measures - this isn't just about PR, marketing or brand value - it delivers or provides access to new communications and sales channels.*

It is suggested that the issue of cost should be confronted head on: be honest when budgeting for initiatives that creating and maintaining a collaborative community is not cheap (although most seem to think it is). The costs go beyond immediate technology: Project management, promotion, maintenance and, of course, participants' time. The business case needs to justify these costs. When costs are hard to predict – control them closely. Also bear in mind that people holding the purse strings may be unfamiliar with the fresh model being proposed.

*Difficulties in seeing the return of the investments in advance. Undeveloped organization, too few people working with social media, with lack of mandate to make decisions. It's important to provide good social media examples, as well as bad examples to learn from. Create smaller, well measurable cases to start with and learn from and upscale from there. Missionize and educate with never ending energy.*

## 5.2 Knowledge and Understanding

*"The only source of knowledge is experience."*

**Albert Einstein**

Knowledge can refer to the theoretical or practical understanding of a subject – and participants think that both are important – people need practical knowledge and understanding to be able to participate and leaders need a broad understanding of how it can add value.

*The reality is unfortunately one of access, knowledge and power. As with any other area of business, the more knowledge you have, usually the more experience you have, which equates to greater power and ease of access to voice your opinion. Unfortunately though, too often the people with experience in creating a powerful message, lack understanding of social media.*

*In my experience, the main barrier is lack of understanding of new technologies and their applications and implications, especially among organizational leaders. That lack of understanding leads to all the other challenges people note, including concerns about ROI, fear, cultural shifts, and lack of resources/support.*

*People see social media tools as social, fun tools, that they use for personal use only. I don't think people can understand how beneficial they can be for business purposes too. The thought of moving away from Outlook, shared drives and clear ownership of ideas and work and into a truly collaborative space is so alien that people cannot visualise it*

*Encourage experimentation with social media (e.g. one department starts a project to enhance their reputation externally via social media), embed social media experts into teams or departments and give them room to champion the use of social media, ensure the leadership are bought-in and understand the importance of creating and retaining client and customer relationships through social media (so they can truly lead) and finally incentivise creativity and performance through social media 'award' (e.g. publishing employee's achievements from the organisation's social media accounts - with permission of course).*

The issue of generational differences is closely related to this. Skills issues and a lack of enthusiasm for social media in organisations where demographics are skewed towards older age groups are both commonplace and difficult to overcome. A focus on effectively engaging people and, more importantly, giving participants a good user experience are crucial in this regard.

*The main barrier is a generational one. The people who 'get' social media in an organisation are often the younger, junior employees who lack the influence to change things. Conversely the ones who have the power to change the behaviour of others (ie senior managers) often aren't engaged with social media, or if they are, only use it in a token way. Tackling this requires willingness on the part of senior managers but one solution could be 'reverse mentoring' with senior managers taking advice from more junior members of staff.*

*Generational gap between those who have grown up with social media and those who have not, the latter often don't get the point of it and lack knowledge and experience of using it and lack an understanding of the benefits of using it which can lead to reluctance to embrace the change in approach required.*

## 5.3 Leadership

*"I suppose leadership at one time meant muscles; but today it means getting along with people."*  
**Mahatma Gandhi**

A common theme to emerge is that leadership in the digital era necessitates a different way of doing things. However, as noted previously, leaders often lack skills and awareness about social media that stifles their view of tangible organisational benefits, prevents them from driving change and makes them dismissive and distrusting.

*In order for social media to be adopted, there has to be someone in an organisation - someone influential who actually uses social media in their personal life - and I'm talking about more than just having a facebook profile etc. My idea is to get the CEO, board members etc to have a 2 week complete immersion in social media - relevant to their job/role/industry/markets - so, someone who is a social media specialist can follow them around - a sort of temporary executive. I reckon that there would be something beneficial to come out of that 2 week period that would change the perspectives of senior leaders. That would surely encourage a greater push for social media developments."*

*Leadership not understanding the benefits Social Media Practices can bring especially in smaller, more traditional organisations. Lean organisations not having sufficient resources to devote to something that has value but the value is not seen as tangible or valid.*

There was agreement among participants that social media should be led by the business and this means that leaders must be involved. Yet, unlike many organisational initiatives, leaders do not necessarily need to own or champion community collaboration, they just need to "get it", maintain a close eye on the business benefits and support the approach.

*Organizational leaders don't need to become social media or digital technology mavens, but they do need to obtain a big picture understanding of the technological advances that are taking place. Armed with that, they can then make informed decisions about when and how to incorporate initiatives related to those technologies a strategic priority, as well as the kinds and amounts of resources they need to dedicate to those initiatives. That brings us back to challenges: How do you get leaders to recognize they need to educate themselves and pursue the*

*I think in the end it's not about designating one person from a team over another but about collaborating and getting the support from Senior Leadership. If the CEO isn't supporting SM then it needs to start there. Convince Senior Mgmt and the rest will fall into place thanks to their support and them engaging the employees.*

In terms of leadership, this means finding an approach that fits with the concept of Leadership 2.0 (eg embracing change, being open to experimenting, demonstrating transparency, working collaboratively and creating dialogue).

*The use of web 2.0 Technology will only be successful in an organisation if Leadership 2.0 is in place. The old-economy model of leadership is obsolete. Leadership 2.0 means mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges, together, using today's technology. Central to running a Web 2.0 business is a mindset that puts the user, rather than the advertiser, at the centre. Leadership 2.0 must foster an innovative culture. Keeping Web 2.0 staff engaged. Leadership 2.0 Means: open to the voice of the people, stimulating sharing, and acknowledgement of expertise.*

## 5.4 Fear

***“Inaction breeds doubt and fear. Action breeds confidence and courage. If you want to conquer fear, do not sit home and think about it. Go out and get busy.” Dale Carnegie***

Although fear in organisations is collective, it emanates from individuals. What is fear? Fear is as “a distressing negative sensation induced by a perceived threat...fear is the ability to recognise danger leading to an urge to confront it or flee from it (also known as the fight-or-flight response).” This is fitting because that’s exactly what organisations have done when faced with these new technologies. Indeed, responses to the positioning statement: “My organisation has embraced social media technologies for use in people practices” showed that there was a roughly equal split between those organisations that had chosen to fight, as opposed to take flight.

It’s clear from the Garden that embracing social media requires trying new approaches and this can be intimidating. Fear exists because people perceive it as a threat: to the status quo, to leadership authority, to security, to productivity and to confidentiality. It has to be said that the perceived threat is somewhat exacerbated by relevant industry media, who seem to revel in the “Employee Fired for Twitter Outburst” headlines that, in reality, are extremely rare.

*I think the main barrier is fear. Fear that people will become less productive at work, fear of brand reputation, fear of the time that gets invested into the monitoring & upkeep, fear of blending personal with work, fear of what to do when there are no policies or procedures in place, fear of the unknown, etc.*

A word relationship analysis was conducted on the fear category and this is presented in a word cloud (see below) to obtain a quick overview of what people are talking about when they mention fear. The word cloud shows pairs of words that relate grammatically to fear (and words similar to fear). The colour of the pairing reflects sentiment and the size reflects frequency of occurrence.

The analysis picks up on three clear and meaningful pairs: a lack of understanding (perhaps caused by fear), fear of loss of control and a fear of the unknown. Also relevant are fear of change and management fear. This gives a good indication of what participants mean when they talk about the barrier of fear.



Faced with a threat, organisations typically bury their heads in the sand, or even worse, take steps toward prohibition. Although this decreases the risk of unwelcome behaviour, it does so at detriment to the business benefit that could have been accrued through social media.

*I believe the companies who shut their eyes and ears to the social world risk their ability to recruit and retain great people and are more likely to suffer from reputational damage. They miss an abundance of feedback and the co-creative power of communities.*

*Fear is the main one. This is a product of the fact that whilst Social Media is on the radar for most organisations and HR professionals, very few of them are active in social media - they don't use the tools. In my experience, those that don't use the tools themselves only see the limitations and those that do use them see the opportunities.*



Organisations that only see the limitations of social media have a distorted view and convince themselves that the risks outweigh the benefits. This is perhaps unsurprising given that leaders are typically advised by doom-mongering corporate people (such information controllers, lawyers or regulators) whose job it is to be over-anxious about these issues. A suggested remedy is to start off with initiatives that have a clear business benefit, but for which the associated risks are small.

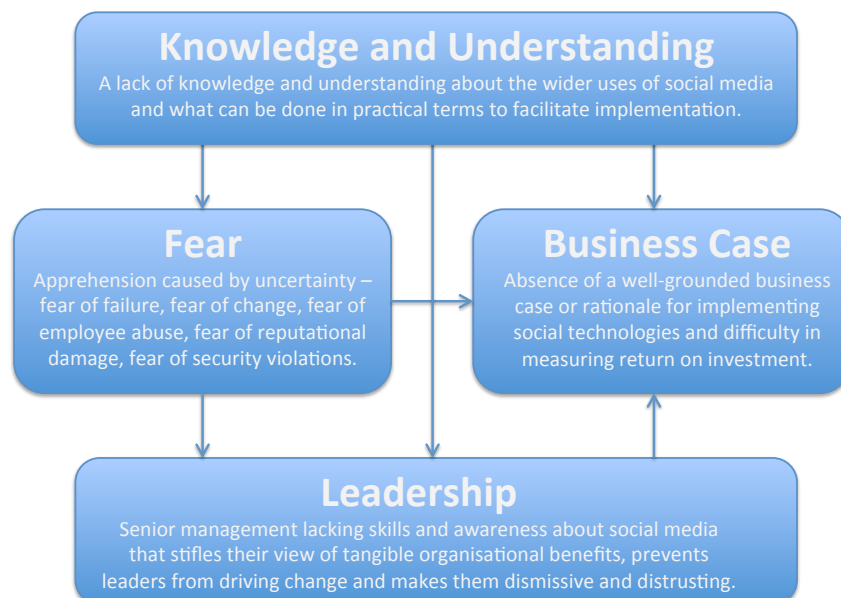
*For overcoming these fears, I would recommend: awareness raising tactics for all employees to learn about the potential & opportunities of social media, skill building opportunities for employees at all levels of management who have an interest in learning/doing more, environmental supports like access to social media sites at work, a workplace policy, support from management. I would also suggest starting with a few controlled quick wins (a Facebook page for a program, a Twitter account for organizational news, senior mgt blogs, management presence on LinkedIn, Slideshare). Build on those successes & experiences.*

Similarly, develop a plan to address the concerns of nervous leaders that includes a risk/benefit analysis. Furthermore, don't forget to include the risks associated with not embracing social media which, when coupled with competitor analysis, can be especially effective in dispelling fear.

## 5.5 Relationships between barriers

It must also be recognized that there is overlap and interconnectivity between the barriers. For example, in the four barriers outlined above, a lack of knowledge and understanding might well be considered an antecedent of fear, leadership apprehension and business case shortcomings. Likewise, leaders can lack knowledge and understanding which makes them overestimate risk and become dismissive of, otherwise, valid business cases.

**Chart 4: Interconnectivity between the four main barriers**



The same thinking should also be applied to the 16 barriers outlined previously. People who are looking for support in facilitating the adoption of social technologies should review these barriers and consider the relationships between them with regard to their specific purpose and organisational context. It's important to note that none of the barriers work in isolation.

## 6. Conclusion

It's clear that social technologies are rapidly changing the way work gets done in organisations and this has the potential to drastically change our working lives. In many ways, these technologies are allowing organisations to rediscover many of the benefits of social interaction that existed before we started staring into a computer screen all day – and more.

The research identified 16 barriers that organisations face in embracing social media practices. The four most important of these were explored in more detail: Difficulties in creating a robust business case, lack of knowledge and understanding about social media, a failure of leadership to accept new ways of working and fear of the unknown.

All of these barriers appear to have one thing in common: a resistance to change (or put more bluntly, excuses for maintaining the status quo). With the occasional exception of resources and security issues, perhaps the only genuine barrier to embracing social technologies is leadership. The barriers identified in this study exert their influence either as causes or consequences of leadership inaction – it is, therefore, with leadership that opportunity knocks. To make strategic decisions, leaders must grasp the wider implications of these technological advances. In the same way that machine technology forced the rise of mass production in the industrial revolution, social technology is driving us headlong into the age of mass collaboration and mass transparency. For most organisations, this is hard to swallow. However, the ability of leaders to recognise organisational and environmental shifts, and educate themselves accordingly, can help organisations to deal with these sociocultural changes.

The most exciting (and frightening) aspect of all this is that the rise of the social organisation is still very much in its infancy. Collaboration and transparency will be the vital business characteristics that will make all the difference in the digital era. Within organisations, co-operation, as opposed to rivalry, will be the main determinant of business success.

Yet, it seems that many organisations are yet to be convinced of the potential value that openness and honesty can deliver. This is because the perils associated with an open approach, and the benefits of more traditional closed systems, are often overrated. We are entering an age of mass transparency, where the expectation is that information should be accessible to all. Indeed, whether leaders like it or not, information about their organisations is already available through various discussion forums and review sites. In the future, this will be exacerbated as hardware developments, such as smart phones and tablets, allow even more people to assemble around shared interests and make themselves heard online.

Organisations that have shunned social technologies are lucky that, at least presently, these people are not as organised as they will be in the future. The increased organisation of these communities might well give employees more weight to throw about in the organisations of the future and this should not be seen as a bad thing. “Social Swarms,” of which the Social Media Garden is a case in point, where people congregate temporarily online around a shared objective and then disperse, will become more common within organisations. Those that have taken a collaborative and transparent approach to heart will not only benefit from social swarms, they will create them.

This warrants another important point: there will always be, for whatever reason, people who are not as involved in social media as others. However, just because someone doesn't have a Facebook or Twitter profile doesn't mean that they won't participate in social swarms if the user experience of that particular technology is simple, intuitive and doesn't require long-term maintenance.

As developments like these become more widespread there will continue to be plenty of pitfalls to avoid and leadership challenges to overcome. But much more fundamentally, an open-minded approach that fosters community collaboration is a pre-requisite for organisations embracing social media. By getting to grips with this first, it will be easier for organisations to navigate the imminent changes ahead and to cope with humanity's growing social complexity at work.

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## Other collaborative social media experiments from Silverman Research and Unilever

### Opinion Space

Unilever found that its reward policy was lacking and wanted to gather employee feedback to help shape it. However, rather than use traditional surveys, they wanted to collate and analyse data more efficiently and with greater impact. The solution: Opinion Space – an interactive social media tool that innovatively examines and displays feedback.



### The Hive

It's not often that the procurement function blazes a trail in using social media for generating insight and collaboration – but then not all procurement functions are like Unilever's. The Hive is an interactive visual environment that mixes collaborative opinion research with social network analysis to allow Unilever's 600-strong procurement function to develop a deeper understanding about the way they work.

Silverman Research would like to thank the following organisations for their support with the Social Media Garden:



Unilever is one of the largest consumer goods businesses in the world. 150 million times a day, someone somewhere chooses a Unilever product. With a turnover of €44 billion, it employs 163,000 people in 100 countries. They invest €1 billion every year in cutting edge research and development, and have five laboratories around the world that explore new thinking and techniques to help develop both their organisation and their products. ([www.unilever.com](http://www.unilever.com))



The University of California's Berkeley Center for New Media (BCNM) is a focal point for research and teaching about new media. Led by a highly trans-disciplinary community of 120 affiliated faculty, advisors, and scholars, from 35 UC Berkeley departments, their mission is to critically analyze and help shape developments in new media. They use cross-disciplinary and global perspectives that emphasize humanities and the public interest. ([www.bcnm.berkeley.edu](http://www.bcnm.berkeley.edu))



Hybrid Wisdom Labs is a tech start-up emerging from more than a decade of robotics and new media research at UC Berkeley. Hybrid Wisdom offers a next generation approach to data visualization and reputation algorithms. Hybrid Wisdom Labs is based in Berkeley, California. ([www.hybridwisdom.com](http://www.hybridwisdom.com))



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Social Media in Organizations (SMinOrgs) is a professional community whose mission is to provide information and guidance about the organizational implications of social media. Going beyond marketing/branding, sales, public relations and customer service, we focus on how social media will impact employees and organizational functioning, as well as general social and economic trends. ([www.sminorgs.net](http://www.sminorgs.net))



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