

# Research Paper

## Going Digital? Harnessing Social Media for Employee Voice

Ref: 03/16

2016

Joe Dromey (The Involvement and Participation Association)

## **Disclaimer**

The views in this Research Paper are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect those of Acas or the Acas Council. Any errors or inaccuracies are the responsibility of the author alone.

For any further information on this study, or other aspects of the Acas Research and Evaluation programme, please telephone 020 7210 3673 or email [research@acas.org.uk](mailto:research@acas.org.uk)

Acas research publications can be found at  
[www.acas.org.uk/researchpapers](http://www.acas.org.uk/researchpapers)

## Going Digital? Harnessing Social Media for Employee Voice

Joe Dromey

Head of Policy and Research

The Involvement and Participation Association (IPA)



Prepared for Acas by:

The Involvement and Participation Association

Somerset House

Strand

London

WC2R 1LA

Copyright © 2016 Acas

### **About the contractor**

The IPA exists to promote the involvement and participation of employees in their places of work, and through doing so improve the quality of working lives. The IPA is Britain's leading organisation delivering partnership, consultation and employee engagement in the workplace. Through our research and practice we develop new ways of working, based on trust and collaboration that deliver better workplaces and better outcomes – employee wellbeing, increased productivity and improved services. The IPA is a not-for-profit organisation, funded by membership subscriptions and fee income from consultancy, training and research services. We are one of the few 'open spaces' in the UK where employers, trade unionists and other workplace representatives, academics, legal experts, human resource and employment specialists can come together with politicians and policy makers to discuss and debate employment issues and policy.

[www.ipa-involve.com](http://www.ipa-involve.com)

### **Acknowledgements**

The author would like to thank Acas for their support with the project, particularly Rachel Pinto, Adrian Wakeling and Gill Dix. Special thanks also go to Sir Brendan Barber. We would also like to thank all our case study employers (Nampak, Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust, Lloyds Register, The London Borough of Lewisham, and Southeastern). Finally, thanks to Ramya Yarlagadda and Sarah Dawson of the IPA for support with editing the report.

### **Disclaimer**

This report contains the views of the authors and does not represent the views of the Acas Council. Any errors or inaccuracies are the responsibility of the authors alone.

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

|                                                                                                     |           |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>                                                                            | <b>1</b>  |
| <b>1 INTRODUCTION – DEFINITIONS, CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY</b>                                        | <b>4</b>  |
| 1.1 What is employee voice?                                                                         | 4         |
| 1.2 The impact of employee voice                                                                    | 4         |
| 1.3 How does the UK perform on employee voice?                                                      | 5         |
| 1.4 What is social media?                                                                           | 6         |
| 1.5 Can social media be effective in releasing employee voice?                                      | 7         |
| <b>2 TO WHAT EXTENT ARE EMPLOYERS USING SOCIAL MEDIA FOR EMPLOYEE VOICE?</b>                        | <b>9</b>  |
| 2.1 Social media and employee voice – usage by employers                                            | 9         |
| 2.2 Social media and employee voice - usage by employees                                            | 12        |
| 2.3 Employee perceptions of social media at work                                                    | 14        |
| 2.4 Is social media seen as a legitimate form of voice?                                             | 15        |
| <b>3 THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA – NEW INSIGHT</b>                                                     | <b>18</b> |
| 3.1 As a driver for insight, innovation, and collaboration                                          | 18        |
| 3.2 Improving corporate communications and operational agility                                      | 21        |
| 3.3 Promoting employee engagement and camaraderie                                                   | 24        |
| 3.4 Enabling a richer and multi-directional employee voice                                          | 27        |
| 3.5 Delivering a more distributed, shared and visible leadership                                    | 29        |
| <b>4 CONCLUSION: GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR USING SOCIAL MEDIA TO PROMOTE EMPLOYEE VOICE</b> | <b>33</b> |
| 4.1 Have a positive culture of employee voice                                                       | 34        |
| 4.2 Integrate with other voice platforms                                                            | 34        |
| 4.3 Show leadership – the role of senior managers and champions                                     | 35        |
| 4.4 Trust your employees                                                                            | 36        |
| 4.5 Develop a social media policy                                                                   | 36        |
| 4.6 Create a safe space                                                                             | 37        |
| 4.7 Act on employees' contributions                                                                 | 38        |
| 4.8 Deal positively with negative comments                                                          | 38        |
| 4.9 Focus on the purpose of the organisation                                                        | 39        |
| 4.10 Work towards achieving critical mass                                                           | 39        |
| <b>5 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND SOURCES</b>                                                                   | <b>41</b> |
| <b>ANNEX 1 – CASE STUDY PARTICIPANTS</b>                                                            | <b>43</b> |
| <b>ANNEX 2 – SAMPLE QUESTION GUIDE</b>                                                              | <b>44</b> |

## **Executive summary**

This report examines the extent to which employers are making use of social media to promote and access employee voice. Social media describes online platforms that allow for user-generated content, interaction and collaboration. It is a relatively new phenomenon, linked to the emergence of 'web 2.0' and the move from a static to an interactive internet. This report is largely focused on enterprise social networks. These have the common features of other social media platforms, but they are closed and exclusive, with membership restricted to an individual organisation.

The use of social media has grown exponentially in the last decade. Currently around one employer in two makes use of a social media tool. Use of social media is largely focused externally on marketing and engaging with customers. Fewer employers – only around one in six – use an enterprise social network internally to engage with employees and promote employee voice. Larger organisations and certain sectors such as information and communication are more likely to use social media in this way. Where employers do use an enterprise social network, they do so more to provide updates on the organisation and HR issues, rather than to collaborate or collect employee views.

Whereas three in four employees use social media in their personal life, just one in three do so as part of their work. Nevertheless, the high levels of personal usage might be driving the organisational take-up of social media in the form of enterprise social networks. Where enterprise social networks are used at work, few employees say it is done so effectively, to share knowledge or ideas or to access voice. There is little evidence that employees at organisations which do use enterprise social networks have a stronger sense of voice; indeed there is some evidence that while they feel managers seek their views more, they feel less able to influence decisions than at other organisations which don't use enterprise social networks.

However, enterprise social networks are potentially a very powerful tool for employee voice. There is certainly evidence that more needs to be done to promote voice, with just one UK employee in three saying their managers are good at allowing them to influence decision-making.

The types of enterprise social networks described in this report can potentially help to promote a richer employee voice, allowing organisations to go beyond monologue and one-way communication to two-way and indeed multi-directional communication. Using such networks for employee voice provides the opportunity for organisations to drive insight and innovation. It also has immense potential to support collaboration, allowing employers to access 'the wisdom of crowds' – where, rather than an individual, groups of people work together to reach a solution or an outcome.

Enterprise social networks can also help to:

- build networks and communities across organisations
- engage with remote workers
- improve the visibility and accessibility of senior managers
- make corporate communications more effective and support real-time communication.

Despite these potential benefits, and some examples of good practice in our case studies, the wider evidence suggests that employers are far from exploiting the full potential of enterprise social networks as a form of voice.

There are however some notable barriers which can help explain the relatively slow uptake and limited use. First, many employers – and indeed many employees – do not yet see the relevance of enterprise social networks in the workplace. Related to this, many managers are concerned that using these networks at work could lead to time-wasting and impact on productivity. There are big concerns around the potential misuse of social media at work. The perception of a fear of loss of control seems to be a concern to employers, as enterprise social networks allow for interaction between staff and fewer opportunities to control the conversation. Some employers are also sceptical about the demand for enterprise social networks within organisations and the extent to which it would be used.

Many of these concerns seem to be more relevant to the use of open social networks – such as Twitter and Facebook – rather than the use of enterprise social networks. Additionally, they may be due to employer preconceptions and a lack of awareness of the potential platforms.

Our case studies and the wider research identified some clear good practice for employers looking to make effective use of enterprise social networks for employee voice:

- As with any voice channel, in order for enterprise social networks to be effective, there needs to be an **organisational culture that supports employee voice**. Employees should be encouraged to speak up and their views should be listened to and, where possible, acted on. An enterprise social network will not change the culture of an organisation on its own, but it does need a supportive environment to work effectively.
- Organisations should **go with the grain** of the technology. This means being open to a loss of some control, trusting staff and resisting the temptation to restrict the conversation.
- **Senior leaders** play an essential role in helping to create the culture of employee voice, by promoting the tools, encouraging employees to use them, and by using them themselves. Having champions across the organisation who encourage others to use the technology can also be effective.
- Using an enterprise social network is most effective when it's goals are explicit and it is clearly seen as a tool for **work related discussions**. For this to happen it needs to be designed to improve organisational

performance and working life. However, permitting some non-work usage can be helpful in encouraging use and building a sense of community.

- Organisations should have a robust **social media policy** – developed with staff involvement – which sets expectations for use. This should be based on common sense, clearly communicating to staff that the same rules apply online as offline. Such policies can help prevent misuse and protect employers in rare cases where this does happen.
- An enterprise social network should be **integrated with other voice platforms** rather than being used to replace them. Having a variety of voice channels will suit different circumstances and different personal preferences.

Enterprise social networks are very promising tools which offer huge potential for employee voice. They could help transform how organisations communicate with staff and access their voice, how they involve them, how they collaborate and innovate.

But this potential seems to be largely under-used. Few employers are using social media internally – in the form of an enterprise social network - for voice, and where they are, success has been limited. There are strong signs that where employers are using enterprise social networks, they are doing so in a way which doesn't go with the grain of the technology. They are using a modern tool, designed for networking and open-communication, bottom-up, user-generated content, in a more traditional way, which is top-down and controlled. If employers wish to get the best out of social media and unleash its potential, they should use it in a way that matches the technology's capabilities, and ensure it is part of a wider approach to supporting voice at work.



## 1 Introduction – definitions, context and methodology

In this chapter we define employee voice and social media, and look briefly at the UK's performance relating to employee voice, before introducing the aims and objectives of this research report.

### 1.1 What is employee voice?

Employee voice refers to the ability of employees to express their views, opinions, concerns and suggestions, and for these to influence decisions at work. Wilkinson and Fay describe voice as the ability *"to have a say regarding work activities and decision-making issues within the organisation in which they work."* (Wilkinson and Fay, 2011). MacLeod and Clarke identified employee voice as one of the four 'enablers' of employee engagement in their influential report on the subject. They defined voice as follows:

*"Employees' views are sought out; they are listened to and see that their opinions count and make a difference. They speak out and challenge when appropriate. A strong sense of listening and responsiveness permeates the organisation."* (MacLeod and Clarke, 2009).

As Silverman argued in a recent study of social media and voice, conceptualisations and practices of voice are not static but instead *"evolve alongside technological and cultural developments."*

*"Voice is not just about providing the opportunity to have a say, but also about encouraging participation using the insight obtained and about providing genuine transparency."* (Silverman et al., 2013).

These definitions were broadly reflected in discussions with six case study organisations which form the basis of this report, where managers generally displayed a good understanding of the concept of employee voice. However, it must be noted that these case studies are not representative of all organisations.

### 1.2 The impact of employee voice

All of these definitions emphasise the **impact** of voice. Beyond just enabling employees to have a say, voice refers to a situation wherein the views, opinions, concerns and suggestions make a difference within an organisation.

Voice has been identified as a driver in promoting employee involvement and participation, employee empowerment, and employee engagement. Voice has also been linked to (Dromey, 2014):

- Employee satisfaction and wellbeing
- Innovation, performance and productivity
- Improved decision-making and conflict-resolution

These benefits were broadly reflected in our case studies. At **Nampak**, the Managing Director drew a link to performance; *"no matter what job you're doing, if you feel involved, you feel you have autonomy, a role in decision-making...you'll care more about what you're doing and hence the company will have better*

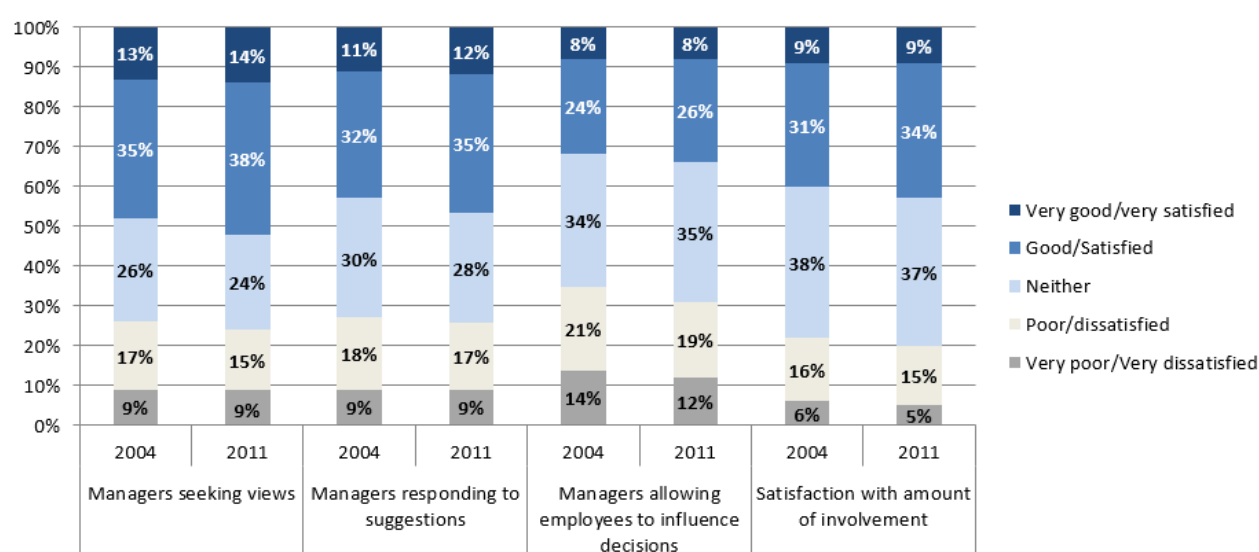
results.” A member of the sales team highlighted the importance of voice for innovation and change; “*you do need to listen to the staff underneath you as they’re actually doing the job. So management do need to listen to staff if there is a problem or something that could be done better.*”

### 1.3 How does the UK perform on employee voice?

There seems to be some room for improvement in terms of employee voice in Great Britain. The Workplace Employment Relations Study (WERS, 2011) shows that one in two employees (52 per cent) say their manager is good or very good at seeking their views (see figure 1.3.1). While this seems positive, far fewer – just one in three (34 per cent) - say their manager is good or very good at allowing employees or their representatives to influence decisions at work. This is important because, as we explained above, voice is not just about giving employees the opportunity to speak up, but actually listening and allowing them to shape and influence decisions both regarding their own role and the wider organisation.

There is some evidence of an unmet desire for voice too; just under half of employees (43 per cent) are satisfied or very satisfied with the amount of involvement in decision-making (Dromey, 2014).

**Figure 1.3.1 Employee voice in the Workplace Employment Relations Study (WERS) 2004 and 2011**



Source: Workplace Employee Relations Study, 2004 and 2011. Analysis from Dromey, 2014.

\*Statistical significance at the 95 per cent confidence level. Base: between 20,126 and 22,277

(2004); 20,299 and 21,878 (2011). Different bases are given because multiple questions are used.

In terms of accessing employee voice, recent decades have seen a shift from indirect and representative voice towards direct and individual voice. This is in part due to a decline in union membership which has fallen from over 13 million in 1979 to just 7 million today, but it is also related to “*changing managerial attitudes and changes in technolog*” (Dromey, 2015). The latest WERS showed a statistically significant rise in the use of email to all employees as a voice channel,

rising from 35 per cent of workplaces in 2004 to 49 per cent in 2011, and a notable preference for direct employee voice, with four in five employers (80 per cent) preferring to consult directly with staff, rather than through trade unions (van Wanrooy et al., 2013). As Chair of Acas, Sir Brendan Barber argues, this is part of a trend away from negotiation and consultation towards “a *preoccupation with communication*,” a trend he sees as concerning (Barber, 2015).

Employee surveys have also become relatively widespread, with one third of private sector employers with more than five staff (33 per cent) and three in four (75 per cent) public sector employers using them according to the latest WERS (van Wanrooy et al., 2013). Staff surveys do have some notable advantages. They allow employers to gather large-scale data on employee perceptions across the organisation. They provide for comparisons across teams, across staff groups, and across time, as well as in benchmarking with similar organisations. However, Silverman argues that they have limitations, including that they are “*management-led, they often lack open-ended questions and they are not real-time.....*” (Silverman et al., 2013).

The popularity of direct engagement, and the prevalence and growth of digital communication and online staff surveys would suggest there is openness among employers for the use of enterprise social networks.

## 1.4 What is social media?

Social media refers to “*websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or participate in social networking*” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2013).

Whereas the internet was created in 1989 and has been used extensively for many years, social media remains relatively new. It is bound up in the concept of ‘Web 2.0’ or ‘the social web’ which saw the internet move from static pages to a dynamic place where people could interact, share information and content (CIPD, 2014). The difference between Web 2.0 and the traditional internet is that the former is designed for interaction and dialogue, whereas the latter is more based on broadcast and monologue.

The most used social media sites are Facebook (40.7m unique users in April 2015), Twitter (21.6m), LinkedIn (20.7m) and Google+ (20.2m) (Ofcom, 2015).

### **Social Media – Acas definition:**

*“A platform that allows user-generated content to emerge through interactions and collaborations in a virtual community.”*  
(Smith and Harwood, 2011).

### **Enterprise Social Network – CIPD definition:**

*An internal social media platform which is a ‘gated community, creating a safe place for open discussions between named colleagues’* (CIPD, 2014).

**In this report, the term ‘social media’ describes enterprise social networks that organisations use internally as channels for employee voice.**

However, as this study looks at the use of social media for employee voice, it focuses mainly on enterprise social networks – internal social media platforms for use within an organisation, such as Yammer, Jive, Socialtext etc. Enterprise social networks combine the functions of external social networks – such as posting announcements, micro-blogging (short, character-limited blog posts), questions, special interest groups, following others, and taking part in discussions – but they are closed and exclusive to members of the organisation.

Another notable aspect of social media is the pace of change. As Broughton et al. noted, it is *“difficult to predict the future of any given tool – in five years’ time, the sites which are currently household names may have been supplanted by media that have yet to be invented.”* (Broughton et al., 2013). Google + for example, launched under five years ago, now has 418m users globally and 20.2m in the UK, almost one in three of the population (Ofcom, 2015).

The growth of social media has been stimulated by the use of smart phones in recent years. For example, whereas just one in five (20 per cent) people accessed the internet from their mobiles in 2009, this had risen to three in five (61 per cent) by 2015. More people now use mobile devices to access social media than desktop computers (Ofcom, 2015).

### **1.5 Can social media be effective in releasing employee voice?**

Genuine voice is not just about the speed of communication or the number of those involved. Whilst enterprise social networks can generate a high volume of communications, Gill Dix questions the depth of some of these interactions:

*“how do we assess the impact of communication which managers may deem as ‘two way in nature’ when the format is either electronic, or largely about passing down messages?”* (Gill Dix, Acas Blog May 2014)

Adam, Purcell and Hall, refer to ‘an integrated approach’ to employee involvement, in which a variety of techniques go hand in hand. (Adam et al., 2014). Enterprise social networks may form an important part of such an integrated approach.

Building on the work of Adam, Purcell & Hall, and in order to find out how effective enterprise social networks can be in harnessing genuine employee voice, this research asks the following questions:

- How is social media changing how employers engage employees with workplace issues?
- How and to what extent are employers using social media platforms to promote employee voice?
- What are the advantages and challenges of using social media to promote employee voice in the workplace?
- What represents good practice in using social media to promote employee voice?

This report is based on six case studies conducted at:

- Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust
- Lloyds Register
- The London Borough of Lewisham
- Nampak
- Oxfam GB
- Southeastern Trains

Case studies included semi-structured interviews with senior managers and HR staff. A sample question guide is included in annex 1. These organisations include public, private and third sector employers spread across the country. We also conducted focus groups or interviews with employees as well as analysis of relevant company information.

The research also included:

- An evidence review of existing literature and survey data
- Semi-structured interviews with experts including academics and social media providers. Interviewees included:
  - Adrian Wakeling, Acas
  - Dr Emma Parry, Cranfield School of Management
  - Jonny Gifford, CIPD
  - Michael Silverman, Silverman Research
- A roundtable discussion with academics, employers, social media providers, trade union representatives and others on the advantages of using enterprise social networks internally for employee voice, and examining some of the barriers and challenges in doing so. The experts also discussed whether there is scope for organisations to learn from each other and share best practice in this field. Attendees included:

|                                                     |                                                 |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| • Sir Brendan Barber, Acas                          | • Sally Otter, Oxfam GB                         |
| • Nita Clarke OBE, IPA                              | • Dr Emma Parry, Cranfield School of Management |
| • Joe Dromey, IPA                                   | • Rachel Pinto, Acas                            |
| • Andrea Broughton, Institute of Employment Studies | • Adrian Wakeling, Acas                         |
| • David D'Souza, CIPD                               | • Dr Richard Saundry, University of Plymouth    |
| • Prof Graeme Smith, University of Dundee           | • Michael Silverman, Silverman Research         |
| • Harriet Molyneaux, Hotspots Movement              | • Greg Ward, Nampak                             |
|                                                     | • Janet Williamson, TUC                         |
- A webinar introducing attendees to the research and sharing initial findings. A live poll was carried out during the webinar to help better understand social media practices within the organisations taking part.

It is important to note that while the qualitative research included in this study is not representative of all employers, it does provide the opportunity to drill down and provide insights on people's views and experiences.

## 2 To what extent are employers using social media for employee voice?

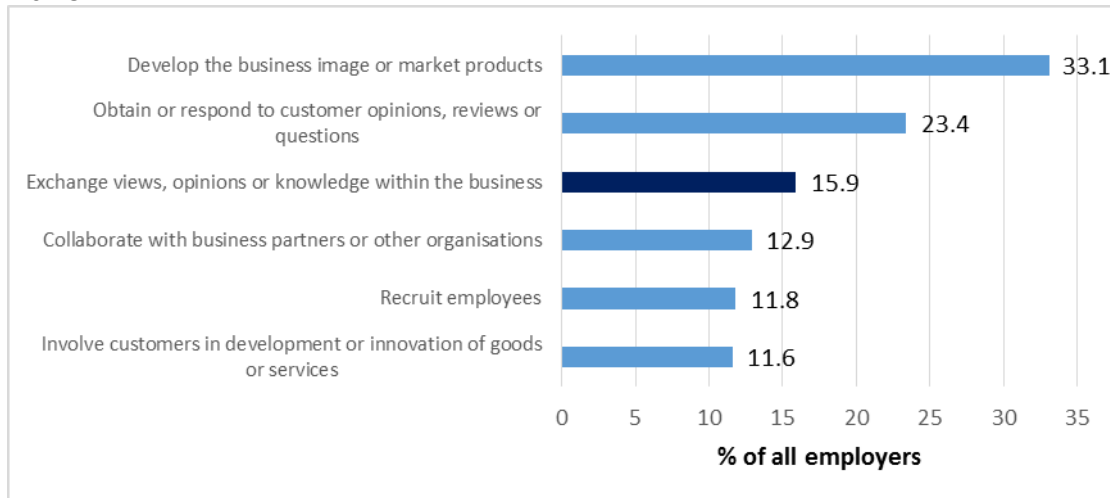
In this chapter, we look at the extent to which employers are using social media, and enterprise social networks specifically, and how they are doing so, including the extent to which it is being used to promote voice. It is worth noting that both the main surveys used in this chapter (ONS and CIPD) are from 2012 and 2013. Whilst the data is still useful, given the pace of change with this technology, it's likely that usage has grown and evolved since this period. Further such surveys would be helpful to examine the extent to which the picture has changed.

### 2.1 Social media and employee voice – usage by employers

The latest comprehensive nationwide survey of social media use by employers was carried out by ONS in 2013. It showed that 44.5 per cent of employers used social media in some way (ONS, 2013). It can be safely assumed that by now, given the substantial growth in usage of social media, a majority of employers use the technology.

Among employers who do use social media, more tend to use it externally – to engage with customers and other stakeholders – rather than internally to engage with employees. ONS data featured in figure 2.1.1 below shows that in 2012, whereas one in three (33.1 per cent) employers used social media to develop the business image or market products, one in four (23.4 per cent) used it to obtain or respond to customer opinions, reviews or questions, and just one in six (15.9 per cent) used it to exchange views, opinions or knowledge within the business (ONS, 2013). This is demonstrated in the graph below.

**Figure 2.1.1 Reasons for use of social media by employers, ONS, 2013**



Source: ONS ICT Activity of UK Businesses 2012. Base: all employers (n=7,700)

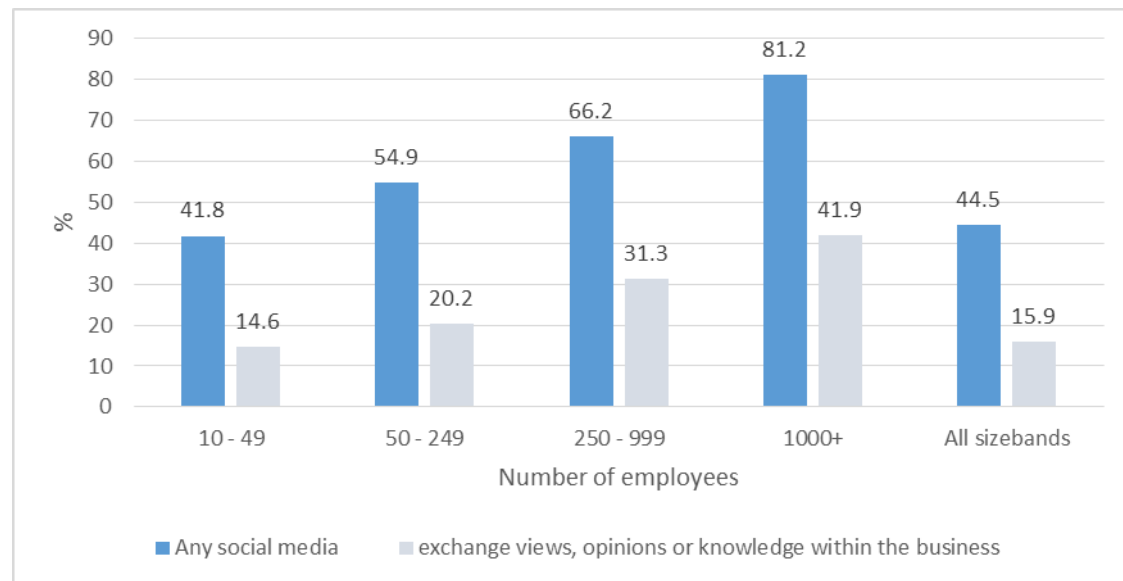
CIPD argue that:

*“Organisations are relatively advanced and effective in using social media externally, in particular through communications functions with customers; it is internally with employees where less is being done.”* (CIPD, 2014).

There is some variation by industry. Employers in the information and communication sector are much more likely to use social media (77.0 per cent compared to 44.5 per cent of all employers) and are more than twice as likely to use social media to exchange views, opinions or knowledge within the business (37.6 per cent compared to 15.9 per cent of all employers) (ONS, 2013). This is perhaps due to the greater level of familiarity with digital technology among the workforce in this sector, and the importance of innovation in the sector. CIPD also found a big difference in use by sector, with employees in the voluntary sector more likely to use social media (38 per cent) compared to the private sector (27 per cent) and the public sector (23 per cent).

There is also variation by size, with larger employers being far more likely to use social media, and to use it internally, than smaller organisations. Employers with over 1,000 staff are twice as likely to use social media as those with 10 – 49 staff (81.2 per cent compared to 41.8 per cent) and nearly three times as likely to use social media to exchange views, opinions and knowledge within the business (41.9 per cent compared to 14.6 per cent) (ONS, 2013). This is shown in figure 2.1.2 below.

**Figure 2.1.2 Social media usage by employer size, ONS, 2013**



Source: ONS ICT Activity of UK Businesses 2012. Base: all employers (n=7,700)

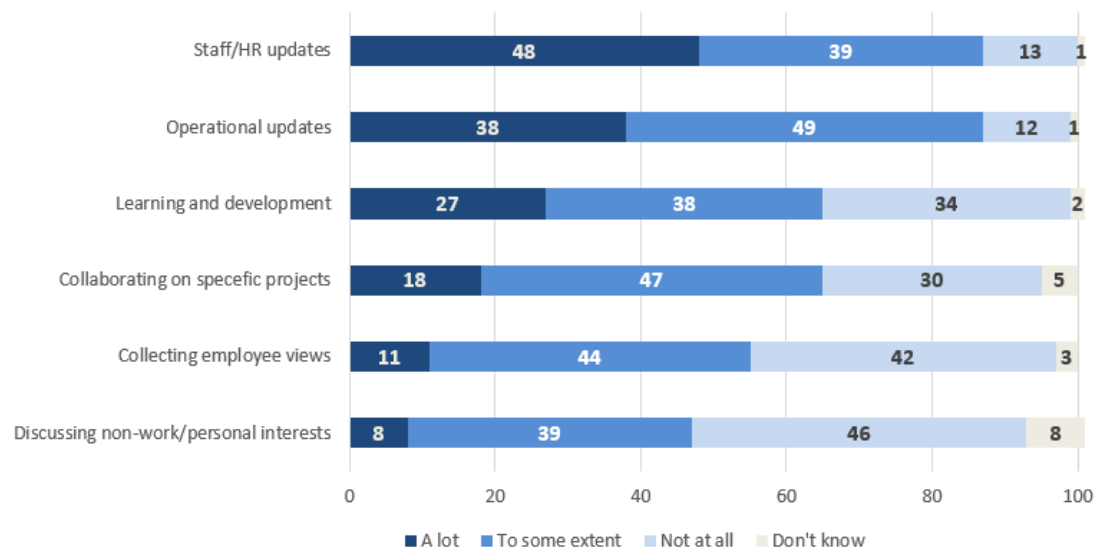
These findings were reflected in both our interviews and case studies where enterprise social networks were seen as both more relevant and effective in larger organisations, particularly those with multiple sites, as they were less able to bring their staff together in person.

A survey of large and midsize organisations across Europe, North America and Asia found that just over half (56 per cent) were using social media tools (enterprise social networks) as part of their internal communications (Towers Watson, 2013). This is far higher than the ONS survey, but that may be accounted for by the fact that the survey is with larger organisations and a non-representative sample.

In terms of how employers are using enterprise social networks, there is some evidence that it is being used more as a top-down communication tool to share organisational updates, rather than as a bottom-up tool for collaboration, innovation and voice. CIPD asked HR managers at organisations which use enterprise social networks how they do so. As figure 2.1.3 shows, 87 per cent did so for staff or HR updates, with the same proportion doing so for operational updates. However, just 65 per cent used the platform for collaborating on projects, and just 55 per cent used it for collecting employee views. Even among the 55 per cent who do claim to use enterprise social networks to collect employee views, most (44 per cent) do so 'a little' rather than 'a lot' (CIPD, 2013 – Fig 2.1.3).



**Figure 2.1.3 How employers are using social media (CIPD, 2013)**



Source: CIPD HR Survey 2013. Base: Respondents whose organisations have internal social media (n=338)

This was reflected in some of our case studies. The organisations we looked at tended to be relatively advanced in their use of enterprise social networks. However, at some of them, their enterprise social networks seemed to be more used for updates to staff, rather than for genuine collaboration and voice.

The Managing Director at one of the case study organisations we interviewed, **Nampak**, has been the driving force behind introducing Yammer and a leading advocate and user of the tool, but recognises that it needs to be more employee-led; *“I want it to be totally interactive so it’s coming from the bottom-up as well as top-down.”* Employees reflected this, with one saying that they would be more likely to use Yammer if it was more about asking them for their views and suggestions rather than communicating organisational news.

Given the above it is fair to conclude that employers have been ‘slow to harness the power of the conversations that take place on social media every day.’ (CIPD, 2013). We shall examine the factors explaining this slow take up in Chapter 3.

## 2.2 Social media and employee voice - usage by employees

Turning to employees, the usage of social media in the workplace context seems to be far lower at work than in people’s personal lives.

CIPD found that while three in four (76 per cent) use social media in their personal lives, with over half (51 per cent) doing so once a day, just one in four (27 per cent) use it at all for work purposes and just 8 per cent use it daily (CIPD, 2013). As CIPD argue, this is a ‘marked shift from years gone by’ where the use of new technology, for example the use of computers, would normally take place in the workplace first, before moving into the home. It also suggests that the growing use of social media at work may in part be driven by the high levels of

usage in people's personal lives. Silverman argues that the growing personal use of social media has got people used to being able to voice their opinions, and that *"in turn, this has also raised people's expectations of how they should be heard inside organisations."* (Silverman et al., 2013).

CIPD concur:

*"Social technology has been driven by our personal access to it and habits in our personal lives, rather than by organisational strategy. It is being led by employees' expectations and understanding of the value that these technologies represent and employers may have some catching up to do."* (CIPD, 2013).

CIPD found large differences by age, with two in five (42 per cent) of those aged 18 – 24 using social media for work purposes, compared to just one in five (18 per cent) of over 55s.

Those who do use social media for work tend to do so for a relatively small part of their working day. Most users (53 per cent) do so for less than 30 minutes, and only one in five (18 per cent) do so for over an hour (CIPD, 2013). Again, this was demonstrated in our case studies where those employees who did use social media tended to do so for relatively limited amounts of time.

Data on employee use of social media, demonstrated in figure 2.2.1 below, seems to mirror the data from CIPD and ONS on employer use. Employees who do use social media at work seem more likely to do so with an external audience rather than within the organisation. Among employees who did use social media for work, just three in ten (29 per cent) did so to keep in touch with people inside the organisation, compared to four in ten (38 per cent) who use it to keep in touch with people outside of the organisation. Employees who use social media were also more likely to say that it helps them collaborate with people outside their organisation (net agree +34 per cent) and that it helps them be more responsive to customers (+4 per cent), but less likely to say that it helps them collaborate (-12 per cent), be influential in the organisation (-12 per cent) and, least of all, give employees a voice (-17 per cent) (CIPD, 2013).

**Figure 2.2.1 Main reasons for using social media for work (CIPD, 2013)**



Source: CIPD employee survey. Base: employees who use social media for work (n=617)

Aside from using social media for professional purposes, many employees also use external social media tools such as Twitter and Facebook at work for personal purposes. This usage is out of the scope of this report, as it is focused on the use of social media internally for employee voice.

However, it is worth noting that many of the concerns around employee use of social media we identify in Chapter 3 seem to be related more to personal rather than professional use. For example, fears of misuse relating to reputational damage and data security are more pressing for external social networks rather than internal enterprise social networks. As we have seen in the case study organisations, internal social media tools have rarely been misused by employees. A large number of staff use them to connect with colleagues or share ideas.

It is also worth noting that some have identified a risk of social media leading to a 'blurring between employees' working and private lives.' (Broughton et al., 2009). However, again this seems to be more of a risk for work-related use of external social media rather than internal social media, used for professional purposes.

## **2.3 Employee perceptions of social media at work**

As well as social media being less used in people's work lives than in their personal lives, employees also have mixed views about using social media for professional purposes.

Most employees who use social media see it as being valuable. Just one in four (23 per cent) see it as a waste of time, with half (53 per cent) disagreeing. It was seen as providing meaningful connections with new people (net agree of +35 per cent) and helping to get the right information to the right people (+32 per cent).

However, just 13 per cent of social media users agree that they need access to it during work time to do their job effectively, with most (57 per cent) disagreeing.

Similarly, just one in five (18 per cent) agree that social media has an important place in the work they do, while half (49 per cent) disagree, and a third (36 per cent) strongly disagree. Employees also identify some risks with social media including information overload (net agree of +25 per cent) (CIPD, 2013).

In our case study organisations, these perceptions were generally reflected with employees largely saying that social media at work was useful but not essential to the work they do.

As explained above, some have argued that the growing use of social media at work is being driven by employees who are used to having a say on social media in their personal lives – also demanding a voice at work. The CIPD survey raises some questions about this though, as appetite for social media at work remains mixed.

Furthermore, in most of our case studies, an enterprise social network was introduced by senior managers or HR spontaneously with the aim of improving internal communication, collaboration and innovation, rather than in response to overwhelming demand from employees for voice. **Oxfam GB** is perhaps the exception here as employees themselves set up Yammer, prompting the organisation to investigate how they could better use social media.

## **2.4 Is social media seen as a legitimate form of voice?**

The definitions of employee voice we refer to in section 1.1 emphasise the importance of the impact of voice. As stated, voice is not just about enabling employees to have a say. Genuine voice refers to a more active participation in decision-making. However, there is some debate over the extent to which social media are enabling or restricting genuine voice.

Sir Brendan Barber sees the *“optimum voice mechanism as one that embraces communication, consultation and negotiation.”* He notes a narrowing of the agenda in recent years – illustrated in WERS – with a move from consultation to communication, and a rise in the usage of email. While he notes the benefits of communication in preventing the *“bolt from the blue”*, he is *“less sure it holds quite the same value as the kind of two-way communication and engagement that perhaps we envisaged under the ICE Regs.”* (Barber, 2015).

Silverman is very positive about the impact of social media on the workplace. He argues that enterprise social networks allow employees to initiate discussion and enables them to be heard by their colleagues:

*“hopefully it’s allowing people to feel like they are being heard, as they’re having their comments heard in an open forum, not behind closed doors, because it’s less controlled by management”* (Silverman et al., 2013).

There is a consequent shift in the power balance from managers – who could previously control the agenda – to employees. Silverman therefore describes social media as *“extremely democratic – it really gives people a voice who wouldn’t before have had one.”*

The evidence in this report suggests that while social media in the form of enterprise social networks does have the potential to support the growth of two-

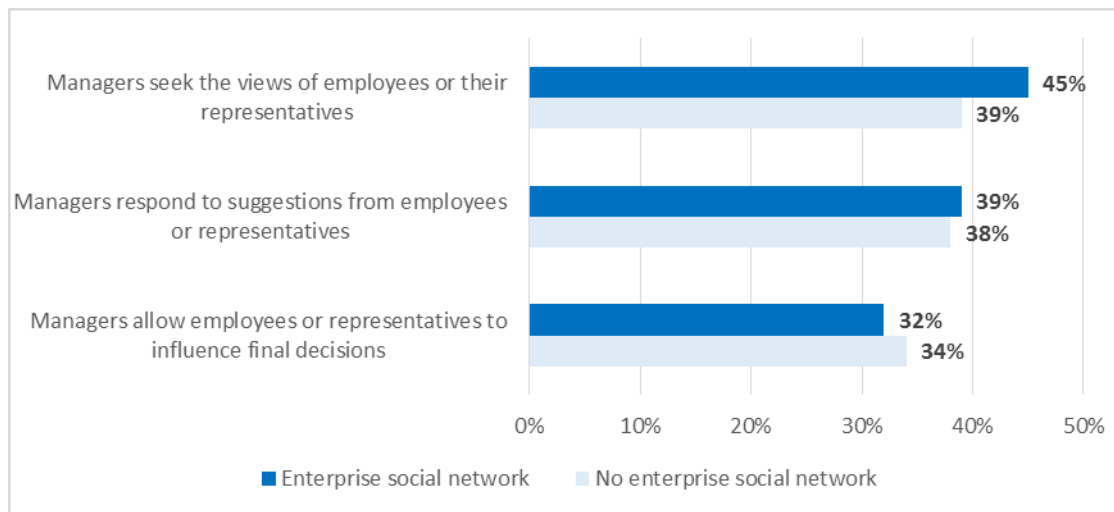
way dialogue and employee voice, it is not yet being used extensively in this way. It also suggests that enterprise social networks alone will not change organisational cultures and strengthen employee voice. In fact, a strong and supportive culture of employee voice is necessary in order for enterprise social networks to be effective.

While the growth of social media seems to be occurring at the same time as the decline of some forms of consultation and negotiation, there seems to be little evidence that the former is contributing to the latter. From our case studies, there is no evidence that enterprise social networks are being used to replace other forms of employee voice, notably those that involve collective voice and consultation. But as Acas' Deputy Chief Conciliator, John Woods has said:

*"Part of the problem may be that many employers were beginning to accommodate new social media platforms at a time when employee voice had been weakened by declining numbers of representative structures (particularly those that provide genuine opportunities for consultation) and, also, when the impact of the recession had partially stifled the expression of employee voice. But as the economy starts to grow, employers may have to respond to employee expectations for a more participatory dialogue with their employees – particularly around issues like pay and quality of working life."* (John Woods, Acas/CIPD 'Workplace Trends' report 2015)

There is no clear evidence that employees in organisations which use enterprise social networks do feel they have a stronger employee voice. CIPD repeated the questions from WERS on employee voice in a survey of employees with the results shown in figure 2.4.1. They found that while workers at organisations which used enterprise social networks were more likely to say that managers sought their views, they were actually less likely to say that they allowed for employees or representatives to influence decision-making (CIPD, 2014 – Figure 2.4.1).

**Figure 2.4.1: Perceptions of employee voice and presence of enterprise social networks, CIPD, 2013**



Source: CIPD employee survey. Base:  $n=617$ ;  $n=1,239$

### 3 The role of social media – new insights

#### 3.1 As a driver for insight, innovation, and collaboration

Research shows that ‘the wisdom of crowds’ – the concept that a group of people can make better decisions, and exhibit more intelligence than an individual or a smaller group of people - is often key to driving insight and innovation. (Surowiecki, 2004). Employees have a detailed understanding of the organisation, its processes, its products and services, and its customers:

*“They are therefore well placed to identify how to improve products and services, to identify new markets, and/or drive efficiency and reduce costs. Voice helps realise this potential for innovation; by encouraging the sharing of ideas for the benefit of all.” (IPA, 2012).*

Surowiecki identifies four conditions for the wisdom of crowds to operate effectively (Silverman et al., 2013);

- Diversity of opinion – each member having some private information
- Independence – opinions not affected by those of others
- Decentralisation – capacity to specialise and extract from local knowledge
- Aggregation – mechanism to transform private judgements to collective decisions.

Harriet Molyneaux, Head of Digital Engagement at Hot Spots Movement sees diversity as the key to accessing the wisdom of crowds and supporting effective innovation. As she explained:

*“When you need people to innovate and create, you need ‘many to many’ communication models with different job titles, seniority and specialisms, and when they all come together, that’s when innovation and creativity can really happen... If you have people of the same job title, area, seniority, you’re going to come up with the same answers so you don’t get that innovation...So I think the multi-directional dialogue piece is a really important advantage there.”*

A key benefit of enterprise social networks for employee voice is its ability to support this. Enterprise social networks allow large groups of individuals to take part, engage in a discussion, enable aggregation, and support collective decision-making.

This view was echoed by Laura Buckthorpe, Engagement Advisor at **Nampak**, who said that using social media tools to drive innovation and collaboration *“is like crowd brain-storming. You put a proposal out there, you get people commenting on it. Naturally, they bring fresh eyes and new ideas. You can go from what starts as a fresh idea, to a fully developed one and a new product. So it does encourage that conversation.”*

**Nampak** have started using Yammer to encourage employees to identify and share ideas to improve products or processes. When ideas are successfully implemented, employees are given a share of the net savings delivered. As their Head of HR put it *“it’s all about trying to make things more efficient and to improve, and the best way to do that is to ask the person doing the job, day in, day out.”*

Social media has also been used effectively at **Lloyds Register** and **London Borough of Lewisham** to support employee-led innovation and improvement.

#### **Case study: Lloyds Register**

In 2015, the energy team at Lloyds Register – constituting 2,500 employees globally – embarked on a major business transformation programme to a global service line structure. Whilst there was an urgency to deliver the change, there was a recognition that they needed to involve staff extensively.

Given the need to involve a large and geographically dispersed workforce in a timely way, Lloyds Register opted to use a Jam. The Future of Work Lab (FoWlab) Jam is a social research tool which allows large groups of employees to collaborate in developing solutions to identified business issues. Harriet Molyneaux, Head of Digital Engagement at Hot Spots Movement who operate the Jams explained that their purpose is *“to raise the voice of the employee and make sure that people feel engaged and included in the major decisions being made in the organisation.”*

A Jam is live constantly for 72 hours and trained facilitators post ‘provocations’ to encourage and facilitate the debate and draw out the key insights. Jams are intended to be a way of getting intensive involvement and collaboration on a specific challenge, offering greater structure and an output focus. Annette Holmes, Change and Engagement Manager at Lloyds Register recalled how as conversations developed *“it was fascinating to watch the momentum build on specific topics and to see genuine collaboration and innovation of ideas across boundaries and in real time.”* Staff were seen to be co-creating ideas and projects together, identifying valuable insights for the organisation and the change process that were then captured and utilised.

This collaboration from employees across the organisation was seen as supporting innovation. As Harriet Molyneaux explained, *“when you have many different voices from different capabilities, different countries, different job titles, different levels of seniority, when they all come together, that’s when that innovation and creativity can really happen.”*

The full case study on Lloyds Register is available from <http://www.ipa-involve.com/resources/publications/case-studies/going-digital-harnessing-social-media-for-employee-voice-lloyds-register/>



### Case study: London Borough of Lewisham

In March 2014, the London Borough of Lewisham launched its 'We.Create' social media tool to "crowdsource ideas from staff" on re-designing services and reducing costs while preserving service quality and outcomes to residents.

We.Create has been championed by the Lewisham Future Programme Board and has been used by Heads of Service from across the Council to canvass the ideas of staff for improving the workings of the Council. These ideas have fed directly into the savings process.

As Geeta Subramaniam-Mooney, Head of Service, Crime Reduction and Supporting People at the Council explained: *"We set up a challenge [in We.Create] and staff can login and comment. The idea is for people to have a conversation about the challenge and generate ideas."*

As well as suggesting ideas, staff can also vote and comment on other people's ideas, enabling staff to shape suggestions collaboratively, and managers to identify which suggestions resonate with employees. Geeta Subramaniam-Mooney described it as being *"very much an iterative process"* which allowed for solutions to emerge through discussion and interaction on We.Create. Employees who identify practical and implementable ideas are invited to get involved with the transformation team on their delivery. The process was supported by the Transformation Team who monitored the discussion and took off inappropriate comments where they did appear, but this was rare.

*The full case study on the London Borough of Lewisham is available from <http://www.ipa-involve.com/resources/publications/case-studies/going-digital-harnessing-social-media-for-employee-voice-london-borough-of-lewisham/>*

Such innovation seems to be most effective when it is focused on organisational priorities and when employers:

- ask employees what issues are important to them
- identify the issues that might most benefit from employee insight and innovation.

This approach is visible in the **Lloyds Register** Jam where a series of 'provocations' were set around key priorities for the business. The **London Borough of Lewisham** has used We.Create to set employees challenges relating to key organisational issues, encouraging them to innovate and develop solutions collaboratively.

### Risks and Concerns

One of the common barriers to making better use of social media tools and ensuring employee participation to drive innovation and collaboration is the lack of perceived relevance of the technology at the organisational level. As we explain below, for enterprise social networks to work effectively within organisations, it needs to be relevant to the workplace and aligned with the organisation's purpose. However, it seems that some organisations struggle to see a place for internal social media.

This was evident at some of the case study organisations in different ways. At **Southeastern**, their enterprise social network WorkMate is often used for non-work-related discussion and, as a result opinions among operational managers are split, with some seeing it as useful, and others as not relevant or even a waste of time. Similarly, there has so far been only a limited engagement with the platform from senior managers.

This may be in part due to generational differences in the perceptions of usage of social media at work or that staff do not currently see social media as part of business strategy, helping to solve organisational issues.

Poor employee uptake of the technology has been identified as one of the other barriers to effective usage of the tools. Harriet Molyneaux of Hot Spots Movement argued that *“the biggest barrier to social media in organisations is people just not using it.”* Jonny Gifford explained the importance of having a large proportion of employees using the platform, and suggested there is a *“tipping point... where you get a certain proportion of your workforce using an enterprise social network”* which makes the platform sustainable and worth using.

Some of the case studies we looked at had struggled to get widespread use of social media platforms. At **Oxfam GB** for example, Yammer was introduced without visible corporate support, and the technology did not achieve large take-up and seems to have petered out. At **Nampak**, take-up of Yammer has been relatively limited, but they have only recently rolled it out and it is hoped that usage will increase.

Many of them also tended to have a high number of passive users – sometimes called ‘lurkers’ – who read but do not post or interact. This was evident at **Nampak** and **Southeastern** for instance where many employees seem to use their enterprise social networks to access information but not to post.

There are a number of factors that can account for a lack of take-up of enterprise social networks. These can include low levels of trust on behalf of employees that their voice will be listened to and acted on, insufficient support from senior managers, and an insufficient link between the use of the platform and the organisation’s priorities. In Section 4, we consider what employers can do to ensure that enterprise social networks are well-used and successful.

### **3.2 Improving corporate communications and operational agility**

A notable advantage of social networks is that they provide real time communication. It allows organisations to ‘take the pulse’ of their workforce, and engage in ‘pull’ style of communication rather than simply broadcasting messages in a top-down approach.

Some argue that enterprise social networks by their very nature are more engaging than traditional forms of interaction, and that this ensures that messages get across more effectively. As CIPD argue, this can contribute to *“an understanding of what’s happening in the organisation now, as opposed to analyses of failings or pressure points last month.”* (CIPD, 2014).

By identifying issues early and providing employee voice in real time, enterprise social networks can support organisational agility. As Li et al. (2014) argue, this

*“huge influx of constant, new data, means that an organisation can now gather intelligence and make decisions at a faster rate”*. In addition to being able to identify issues in real time, enterprise social networks allows employers to respond promptly. As Jonny Gifford put it *“you can tap into more quickly what is a current issue, and also help resolve these.”* Harriet Molyneaux of Hot Spots Movement explained the importance of this, arguing *“people want feedback to be in real time.”*

Many of our case studies bore this out, with enterprise social networks being seen as more effective at supporting corporate communications than static intranets or email updates for example. At **Nampak**, part of the thinking behind introducing Yammer was to have a platform that was engaging for employees. As their Managing Director, Eric Collins explained, they wanted something *“compelling enough that people can access every day.”*

#### **Case study: Nampak**

One of the key factors in introducing Yammer at Nampak was the desire to have a tool that was engaging for employees and was readily used. As Eric Collins, Managing Director at Nampak described, *“it’s got to be compelling enough that people could access it every day, just as they might do with Facebook.”* Eric is a passionate advocate of social media. He uses Yammer regularly himself, updating employees on his own activities and the latest developments in the business, as well as engaging with other users and thanking staff for good work.

Yammer is used to share updates on the business - including new customers and contracts, changes in manufacturing processes, and other developments. Staff are kept up to date with ongoing construction at two new factory sites, including through a time lapse camera. As Laura Buckthorpe, Engagement Advisor at Nampak explained, *“people have seen the site going up in Sterling – our future if you like – and they’re part of that journey.”*

As well as making regular use of Yammer, Eric also encourages colleagues to use it. He promotes Yammer at staff conferences so he *“can guarantee that every colleague will have been made aware of it personally by me, with my endorsement and encouragement to sign up.”* He also personally messages all new members, welcoming them to Yammer and encouraging them to share their views. As one recent joiner explained, *“I think it gives you a bit of a buzz and it makes you feel more than just a number and makes you feel valued.”*

The full case study on Nampak is available from <http://www.ipa-involve.com/resources/publications/case-studies/copy-of-going-digital-harnessing-social-media-for-employee-voice-nampak/>

Enterprise social networks are also seen as an effective tool to interact and engage with employees remotely, wherever they are based.

As Kathryn Yates of Towers Watson argues, *“for employers to effectively engage and retain remote workers, they will need to connect them with their leaders, managers and colleagues. We think social media tools can be a real help in making this connection.”* (Towers Watson, 2013). Dr Emma Parry echoed this, saying:

*“The beauty of social media is you don't need people to be co-located. You can have these conversations and dialogues without needing people to be in the room, in a relatively informal way. The real advantage of social media is that it can connect people – to use a cliché – that are dispersed in terms of time and geography.”*

This factor is seen as being particularly important at **Southeastern** where their 4,000 employees work across hundreds of stations, depots and offices (see case study below). WorkMate, their enterprise social network, is seen as being important in bringing the workforce together, connecting people, combatting a sense of isolation for those working alone on stations, and building a sense of community across the organisation.

### **Case Study: Southeastern**

At Southeastern, the remote nature of the workforce is seen as a challenge to accessing employee voice effectively and engaging with all employees. Social media was seen as offering the potential to overcome this. After looking at a number of options, Southeastern decided to opt for Socialtext – an enterprise social network – which they branded as WorkMate. This was trialled in 2011, initially running alongside their existing intranet.

In the first three months, the intranet received just 550 visits whereas WorkMate received over 52,000. As a result, Southeastern decided to scrap the intranet and officially launch WorkMate in April 2012.

WorkMate is seen as allowing Southeastern to share real-time information across the organisation and build a sense of community. Miriam Ryan who works in the Internal Communications Team and runs WorkMate explained that instantaneous communication meant that *“as soon as something happens you can put it up and update it as it progresses. It's real time... it's just having that instant information.”*

Employees often post questions or requests on WorkMate, allowing them to get suggestions from colleagues across the organisation. As Claire Walker, Policies and Procedures Manager explained, *“often if there's a problem, people will post it up to alert others or get answers, and people will provide solutions and solve a problem for themselves.”* Employees tended to see this as the key benefit of WorkMate, alongside the ability to network a remote workforce.

WorkMate is also used to get employee views and opinions. Comments from staff were invited around a change in the uniform policy, something which was seen as a *“big talking point.”* Employees were also asked to decide which colour a new fleet of trains should be painted.

The full case study on Southeastern is available <http://www.ipa-involve.com/resources/publications/case-studies/copy-of-going-digital-harnessing-social-media-for-employee-voice-southeastern/>

However, it's worth noting that corporate communications is not the same thing as employee voice. Whilst enterprise social networks might be seen as an effective tool for communicating updates to employees, it appears to be less effectively used to feed information back up the other way from employees to managers.

## **Risks and concerns**

Some employers remain concerned about the accessibility of social media tools and the risk of differential access.

Miller argues that there is a need to ensure "*equal access and opportunities*" to the technology (Miller, 2013). Acas warn that there "*might be generational issues at play, with younger employees being more conversant with social networking sites*" (Broughton et al., 2009). There is some truth in this. Younger employees are twice as likely to use social media for work as older colleagues. This was evident in some of our case studies too, with younger employees being more likely to use the platforms than their older colleagues. However, exposure to social media is very widespread with a large majority of employees across all age groups using social media in their personal lives.

Some have argued that lack of experience of using social media or lack of digital skills may be a factor in limiting the take up. However, at our case study organisations, employees who had not used social media before were able to use the enterprise social networks given their relatively intuitive design.

Others highlight access to technology as a potential barrier. This was seen to some extent in our case studies. At **Nampak** for example, factory floor workers were less likely to use Yammer than managers and other office-based colleagues, despite the technology being mobile-enabled. "*We seem to be having difficulty getting down to the guys operating machines on shift work*" said Eric Collins, Managing Director at **Nampak**.

### **3.3 Promoting employee engagement and camaraderie**

Li et al. found what they dubbed as 'socially engaged companies' – those that systematically used digital and social media, "*were able to see tangible results.*" Their survey showed that employees at organisations which used social media internally had substantially higher scores across numerous areas including feeling informed, feeling connected to colleagues, feeling proud and inspired, and perceptions of leadership (Li et al., 2014).

Using social media internally also offers the opportunity for employees to build networks across their organisation, something that "*lies at the core of most uses of enterprise social networks.*" (CIPD, 2014). As Harriet Molyneaux said, "*if organisations have strong relationships, people are more likely to stay there,*" and social media can contribute to building these links.

Enterprise social networks are seen as particularly effective in building networks between employees who might not normally interact due to organisational barriers or geography. The technology is seen by some as supporting the breaking down of silos across organisations. As Jonny Gifford of CIPD explained when interviewed as part of this research, *“if you’ve got stronger networks, there may be better flows of information.”* He also argues that stronger social networks within an organisation can lead to greater buy-in to shared goals and higher levels of engagement. He explained how at CIPD, their enterprise social network was helping encourage networked working across the organisation:

*“With numerous different functions, there’s the potential for us to be quite siloed even though we’re relatively small. So using social media as an in house tool is as much as anything about encouraging our employees to be more networked, to create and build relationships with colleagues across the organisation, regardless of which team they’re sat in, as a way of building our social capital and to become more networked. And at a fundamental level, being able to communicate more effectively across the organisation.”*

At **Southeastern**, their enterprise social network WorkMate is used extensively by employees from across their network of stations, depots and offices, and is seen as an effective way of building community. WorkMate includes both work-related and non-work-related discussions. The latter are seen as still being useful as they serve to build networks and a sense of community across the organisation, as well as encouraging the use of the tool.

WorkMate has helped bring staff together, allow for communication across the organisation and build a sense of community. As a Booking Office Clerk explained, *“I used to sell tickets, and back then, you’d feel very alone, very solitary. Now, WorkMate brings us all together. It also lets everyone see what the company goals and values are.”*

## **Risks and concerns**

Although social media has the ability to build relationships across the organisation, some employers are concerned about misuse and inappropriate behaviour on behalf of employees. This can come in a number of forms, including cyber-bullying, inappropriate or excessive criticism of the employer or colleagues, sharing inappropriate material, or violation of confidentiality or data security. Acas argue that the use of social networks *“creates challenges for managing risks to individual and organisational reputations alike”* (Broughton et al., 2009)

At the IPA roundtable on social media and voice, Professor Richard Saundry shared new insights from his report on managing individual conflict at work, which shows that social media is *“playing an increasingly important role in conflict escalation”*. One employment lawyer interviewed as part of the research said that social media played a part in nearly three-quarters of the disputes that they dealt with.

Of course, inappropriate behaviour often manifests itself in the form of bullying. Research commissioned by Acas last year revealed that there is often a lack of clarity in organisations about what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable behaviour – an accusation that is often made of social media, particularly where there is an overlap between personal and work use.

Evidence is as yet inconclusive as to whether cyber-bullying is contributing to the rise in inappropriate behaviour reported in UK workplaces, although earlier Acas research shows that staff who have suffered from cyber bullying at work also tend to have suffered from conventional bullying, and the response should be to deal with them in similar ways (Broughton et al., 2009).

In our case studies, we found that managers' fear of the misuse of social media by employees was a very common theme. However, in most cases, the fear has been far greater than the reality. Dean Royles, Director of HR and OD at **Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust** suggested that there was a "conservatism" on the part of many managers who have not embraced social media as they are "*anxious that it could all go wrong.*" However, he sees the potential benefits as substantially outweighing the possible risks.

**Lloyds Register** did not encounter any incidences of misuse or inappropriate behaviour in their Jam. Harriet Molyneaux, Head of Digital Engagement at Hot Spots Movement who run the Jams, explained that misuse was very rare, "*in all the Jams we have run over the past four years and the tens of thousands of comments, we have removed only two.*"

At **Oxfam GB** they wanted to give staff a "*greater sense of self management*" with their internal use of social media. Instead of having one person moderating the comments, all employees are able to moderate and take down comments which are deemed inappropriate. This has happened on very few occasions but it has been seen as helping to "*solve all the paranoia about how it was going to work*" about how social media can operate in the workplace; "*it has made people grown-up about the process.*"

There have been a few incidences of inappropriate use of WorkMate at **Southeastern**, but these have been managed and they retain a largely self-regulating approach, rather than controlling or censoring the discussion.

Case study organisations tended to find that having named accounts and basic guidance mitigated against any misuse and inappropriate comments. Similarly, David D'Souza from CIPD noted at the IPA roundtable that another way to tackle misuse or inappropriateness is through employers ensuring a 'duty of care' on their social media platforms. This means having practical guidelines for employees to follow, for example making sure 'posts' are suitable for everyone to see.

In section 4, we look in more detail at how the risk of misuse of enterprise social networks can be minimised.

### 3.4 Enabling a richer and multi-directional employee voice

Some argue that one of the advantages of social media is that it is ‘multi-directional.’ Harriet Molyneaux of Hot Spots Movement describes it as “*many to many communication.*” Thus communication within organisations that use the technology is “*no longer a monologue, but rather a conversation over which the organisation has less control*” (Silverman et al., 2013).

At **Leeds Teaching Hospital NHS Trust**, the senior management team firmly believe that having effective communication mechanisms in place which empower staff and let them collaborate and ‘co-create’ is crucial to staff engagement.

Central to delivering this vision is their online collaboration tool called WayFinder, which enables the Trust to crowdsource ideas from staff, patients and other stakeholders. Dean Royles, director of HR and OD believes that social media is a “*fantastic tool*” for innovation and voice.

#### **Case study: Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust**

The Trust is one of the largest acute NHS Trusts in the country with around 16,000 staff at seven different sites, managing a budget of £1bn and treating approximately 1.5m patients every year.

The Trust have recently implemented a new staff engagement strategy called ‘The Leeds Way’ to help change the culture of the organisation. The senior management team at the Trust firmly believe that having effective communication mechanisms in place which empower staff and let them collaborate and ‘co-create’ is crucial to staff engagement.

Central to delivering this vision is their online collaboration tool called WayFinder, which enables the Trust to crowdsource ideas from staff, patients and other stakeholders.

The Trust uses WayFinder as an addition to the numerous channels for employee voice they already have, including face-to-face communication, emails, the NHS Staff Survey and the trade unions. This enterprise social network is seen as complementing, not replacing these established channels.

To date, the Trust has received over 45,000 contributions on how to shape the vision, values and goals of the Trust. Senior managers at the Trust believe that WayFinder has helped to deliver service improvements. Getting ideas from people who are experiencing the work day in and day out “*in a very democratic way*” is seen as helping the Trust to improve and innovate services.

The full case study is available <http://www.ipa-involve.com/resources/publications/case-studies/going-digital-harnessing-social-media-for-employee-voice-leeds-teaching-hospitals-nhs-trust/>

This was also the case at the **London Borough of Lewisham** where their ‘We.Create’ social media tool aims to “*crowdsource ideas from staff*” on re-designing services and reducing costs while preserving service quality and outcomes to residents. For Adrian Wardle, Head of Communications We.Create is



seen as an effective way of supporting cross-team working and breaking down organisational siloes.

## **Risks and concerns**

Although it is true that social technology enables multi-directional communication, there is some evidence that this capability hasn't been fully exploited in many organisations using social media. As we explained previously, employers seem to be using social media more for external communications and marketing than for voice, and when they are using it internally, it seems to be more for updates from senior leaders and HR, rather than involving employees and accessing voice.

This was also reflected to a certain extent in our case studies. In some of them, the enterprise social networks were used more by senior managers and internal communications or HR teams to distribute updates and information, rather than to gather the views of staff, collaborate and encourage voice.

Sally Otter, at **Oxfam GB** identified this as a concern, *"It feels a bit too siloed and top-down sometimes. That definitely has its place for certain topics. But we need to work across the organisation much more. We need to be much more agile in connecting with each other"*.

According to survey data collected by CIPD, in terms of the impact of enterprise social networks in organisations using them, employees in these organisations were least likely to agree that it helps them be influential within their organisation (24 per cent agree; 36 per cent disagree) and that it gives them a voice in their organisation (23 per cent agree; 40 per cent disagree) (CIPD, 2014).

It is not clear why this might be. It could be that the way enterprise social networks are being used raises expectations – by asking for views – but fails to deliver by not acting on them. Or it could be that enterprise social networks are more used in larger organisations, and that perceptions of voice and the ability to influence decisions are lower within these organisations. There is evidence to show that employee engagement is lower among large organisations (Dromey, 2014). Whatever the explanation, it is clear that while social media offers the opportunity for a richer and multi-directional employee voice, that potential is not being fully exploited even by the organisations which are using social media internally.

### 3.5 Delivering a more distributed, shared and visible leadership

Social media has the potential to enable a more distributed form of leadership and a more decentralised and democratic culture within organisations.

Distributed and shared leadership refer to systems where leadership is broadly distributed, with people responsible for leading collectively and leading each other. It is contrasted with traditional hierarchical forms of leadership and “*command and control*” approaches. Instead of focusing on hierarchy and the characteristics of those in senior positions, distributed and shared leadership focuses on the wider system and on what people across the organisation can offer, irrespective of their position in a hierarchy. Greg Ward, Head of HR at **Nampak** describes how the use of social media makes this work in practice:

*“It’s all about trying to make things more efficient and to improve. And the best way to do that is to ask the person doing the job day in, day out. And that’s where managers need to be able to understand the employee side of things and their views.”*

Sally Otter, Internal Communications Adviser at **Oxfam GB** explained that the greater use of enterprise social networks at the organisation was part of a move away from a “*top down approach*” towards a more inclusive and “*networked way of working*.” At **Southeastern**, WorkMate is used extensively by employees to seek advice and ask and answer each other’s questions. One member of **Southeastern** booking office staff described how it worked for him:

*“I can pose a question, and a lot of members of staff can post the answers. So I actually feel a lot more knowledgeable and more confident, more professional if you like.”*

Some also argue that enterprise social networks are good for leadership development and succession planning as it can “*help the organisation identify leadership talent*” and allow employees informally to step forward as leaders (CIPD, 2014). This was visible at **Lloyds Register** who used their Jam to identify “*situational leaders*” who were influential amongst colleagues. They then rolled out a network of Change Champions to support organisational change:

*“I guess we are a very hierarchical organisation, so we don’t really have sight below two or three levels of the organisation. This was just so refreshing as it was people just popping up and appearing on the radar who you otherwise might not have seen.”*

In addition, enterprise social networks offer organisations the opportunity to improve perceptions of senior manager visibility and accessibility through communicating with and engaging directly with frontline staff. It can allow senior managers to interact with staff, to discuss issues with them and to ask them questions.

Dr Emma Parry who was interviewed as part of this research sees social media as potentially very effective at promoting voice as it allows for two-way communication between employees and management; “*social media is perfect for that, because it’s all about two-way conversation without taking any notice of hierarchy.*”

This can be particularly important at large, multi-site organisations where employees might not otherwise get the opportunity to engage regularly with senior managers.

**Oxfam GB** see social media as enabling greater visibility of senior managers across their large and widely dispersed workforce. They recently used their interactive intranet Karl to run an 'Ask Me Anything' session where employees were able to suggest questions to senior leaders, with colleagues able to vote on them to identify the most popular ones which were then responded to in a video from the CEO Mark Goldring and other senior managers.

### **Case Study - Oxfam GB**

Oxfam GB has been using social media for some time. Yammer was introduced a number of years ago, but was done so relatively informally and without central direction or support from HR or senior leaders, or a communication strategy. As a consequence, it never really took off and usage has remained low. Despite these early challenges, Oxfam GB are working with other Oxfam affiliates to develop a coordinated approach to using social media internally to promote voice.

Oxfam GB use an intranet called Karl which provides updates on relevant news and changes in the organisation, as well as allowing staff to access key documents and policies. Karl also has a number of interactive features, allowing staff to connect with each other and to share information.

Karl is used to promote other voice channels, including promoting the staff survey and sharing the results. Oxfam GB recently held an 'Ask Me Anything' session on Karl, with employees able to suggest questions to senior leaders, which their colleagues could vote questions up or down. The top questions were posed to the senior leaders, with a video of the answers posted on Karl. Mark Goldring, the CEO of Oxfam GB took part in the session and is very keen to push this agenda and support greater use of social technology.

Karl is seen as being relatively effective, simple, and well-used. Sally Otter, Internal Communications Adviser at Oxfam GB described Karl as being *"quite chatty and informal... it does allow staff to engage with each other. It has that level of interaction."*

Oxfam GB are currently working along with the other Oxfam affiliates to develop a more rationalised and comprehensive approach to social media within the organisation. This is aiming to develop common tools across all of Oxfam that will support greater employee voice, and greater collaboration, communication and innovation.

The full case study on Oxfam GB is available <http://www.ipa-involve.com/resources/publications/case-studies/copy-of-going-digital-harnessing-social-media-for-employee-voice-oxfam-gb/>

## Risks and concerns

However, there is some evidence that organisations using enterprise social networks aren't fully exploiting the potential of social media in this area. At organisations which do use enterprise social networks, just one in ten employees say that senior leaders make good use of it to understand employee views, with half (49 per cent) disagreeing (CIPD, 2013). Dr Emma Parry argues that while many senior managers have started to use social media internally:

*"In a lot of cases, I've seen, organisations and managers begin to use this as a form of propaganda, it becomes very one-way, senior management giving information – and much less about employee voice."*

Senior managers also play an important role in making enterprise social networks a success, as we explore further in section 4.3 below. As Harriet Molyneux of Hot Spots Movement explained: *"I think it has to be top down initially. I think it needs to have senior leadership involvement....there has to be permission given to people. Once you have created the environment, hopefully, that encourages it"*.

At **Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust**, senior managers have played an important role in promoting the use of social media. Dean Royles, Director of HR and OD highlighted the important role the senior management team play in making an enterprise social network a success, both in terms of rolling it out, and building and sustaining use.

Unless senior leaders get actively involved and *"become advocates"* of social media platforms, he argues, they can never fully take off within organisations. When senior managers clearly back the platform, and indeed use it themselves, staff will feel more comfortable using it and *"it will become a perpetuating success factor"*.

One of the most prominent barriers to wider use of social media seems to be a fear among managers of loss of control. In many other voice and communication channels, managers can set and shape the agenda. With staff surveys, they can set the questions. But social media allows greater opportunity for employees to initiate and lead conversations.

As described above, social media allows for peer-to-peer networking, spontaneous organising and for user generated content. This poses a concern to some employers as the technology allows employees to speak up spontaneously, to raise issues and concerns, and to interact with colleagues and share their views. As well as allowing employees to raise issues, the technology can make it less easy for employers to manage or control the conversation.

As Silverman argues, among employers, there is some degree of *"fear and apprehension caused by uncertainty, an inability to control the communication process and dealing with the increased transparency that comes with transitioning power away from managers to employees."* Adrian Wakeling echoes this, saying *"it's that thing of control really. It's hard to let go. Where's your safety net? I think that's what people worry about."*

This fear and apprehension of losing control may be partly due to a lack of trust in employees. It is also partly related to fear of misuse and fear of time-wasting which we explored earlier.

Our case study organisations tended to recognise that social media implied less control over communication and voice than other channels. However, they also tended to approach this as a positive, recognising the benefits of more open communication and a freer employee voice. They also tended to have simple and light-touch rules for its use which we outline in chapter 4.

#### **4 Conclusion: good practice recommendations for using social media to promote employee voice**

Social media is a very promising and indeed exciting tool for employee voice. It offers the opportunity of promoting and accessing employee voice, of encouraging collaboration, and of supporting networking and innovation.

However, while employers are alive to the opportunities of using social media externally for marketing and communications, the use of it internally for employee voice has been much more limited. There are a range of factors which account for the limited use, including the lack of perceived relevance to the workplace, a fear of a loss of control, and fear of misuse. It seems that for many, a fear of misuse is leading to no use.

Even where social media is being used internally, it is often being used more as a corporate communications tool to provide updates to staff, rather than a tool to support voice and engage employees in conversation and collaboration.

The impact of social media on the world of work, and the benefits it has delivered so far, may have been overstated. Some of the claims appear utopian and not backed up by evidence of what's going on in workplaces. While a small number of enthusiastic early-adopters have made good use of the technology, others have only engaged in a more limited way.

It seems both the fears of some and the hopes of others around social media are unfounded. We did not come across evidence that enterprise social networks are replacing existing voice channels and driving a move from collective voice and consultation towards narrower communication. Instead, enterprise social networks are being introduced to complement existing voice channels. But equally, there is little evidence to suggest that social media has introduced a new age of richer employee voice and bottom-up multi-directional communication.

It seems that many employers are not fully exploiting the potential of social media. Too many employers are using a modern tool, designed to be user-generated, open, networked, and bottom-up, in a more traditional way which is top-down and controlled. This risks limiting the potential impact and success of the technology. If it is not used in the way the technology is designed, it will not deliver its full potential.

Using enterprise social networks will not change an organisation and its culture. Employers need to be willing to engage with their staff openly, to trust them, and to respond to their suggestions in order to get the most out of social media. Organisations should also look to use enterprise social networks as part of a wider approach to voice, including other channels, and combining communication, consultation and negotiation, rather than relying only on the former. Perhaps getting the best out of social media requires employers to truly 'go digital' by embracing the opportunities of social media and going with the grain of the technology – being open, letting go of control and not constraining conversations.

#### **4.1 Have a positive culture of employee voice**

***For social media to be used effectively within organisations, there needs to be a positive culture of employee voice already in place.***

Whilst social media does offer the possibility of multi-directional and networked employee voice in which the workforce is more empowered to have a say, as Nita Clarke explained during the roundtable discussion, culture is “*really important*” when it comes to how social media will work within an organisation:

*“Suddenly trying to introduce something like this, when actually the rest of the organisation is pretty buttoned up, it just won’t work.....”*

Dr Emma Parry echoed this, saying;

*‘I don’t think it’s like a magic spell. I don’t think you can introduce social media and suddenly the culture will change to one that’s much more open and participative and much more two-way communication,’*

Similarly, Professor Richard Saundry of Plymouth University explained during the roundtable discussion that “*having those basic building blocks in place, having a culture which supports voice in general, is also a pre-requisite*” to the effective use of enterprise social networks. It is culture that shapes the use of the technology, more than the other way round.

#### **4.2 Integrate with other voice platforms**

***Enterprise social networks are most effective when they are used alongside complementary channels of employee voice, and integrated into these.***

There have long been claims that enterprise social networks will reduce the need for or indeed replace other forms of employee voice; whether that be employee surveys, emails, meetings, staff forums and even trade unions. These claims appear to be misplaced. While enterprise social networks offer the potential to promote employee voice, this potential is yet to be fully realised and as with all voice channels, it has some limitations. As CIPD argue, social media should “*complement, rather than replace the mix of channels previously used in internal communications.*” (CIPD, 2014).

Indeed, there may be a need for a variety of social media channels within an organisation to fulfil different roles. Harriet Molyneaux of Hot Spots Movement explained how many of the organisations they work with use both enterprise social networks such as Yammer, but also use Jams for more focused work on key business issues; “*actually you need the right social technology for what you’re trying to achieve.*”

Furthermore, employee voice is most effective when there are a variety of complementary voice channels in place to suit both different organisational needs and different individual preferences on the part of employees (IPA and Tomorrow’s Company, 2012). Some argue that as current use of social media tends to be more focused on communication, other channels need to be used to ensure that consultation and negotiation also takes place. Adrian Wakeling for

example suggests that the use of social media at work “needs to develop in a way which involves some of these deeper conversations.”

As our case studies show, enterprise social networks are most effective when it is used alongside and integrated with a variety of complementary voice channels. At **Southeastern**, WorkMate is one of many voice channels. One member of the HR team described how it “*folds in nicely with other ways of communicating.*” They have a weekly phone in to senior managers called Open Line; it is advertised on WorkMate and employees are invited to send in questions. The results are then fed back through WorkMate. **Southeastern** still have a staff survey which is promoted on WorkMate, and the results shared through it. The recognised trade unions have pages on WorkMate where they keep employees up to date on their work and can stay in touch.

Likewise, **Nampak** has introduced Yammer to complement its established voice channels. These include twice yearly employee conferences, regular team briefings, twice yearly staff surveys, and trade union recognition. All will continue alongside the use of Yammer.

#### **4.3 Show leadership – the role of senior managers and champions**

***Senior leaders play a central role in ensuring social media is effective in promoting employee voice.***

First, as referred to previously senior leaders need to help create a culture of employee voice. They need to encourage employees to speak up, seek out their views, respond to them, and act on them, before feeding back. Beyond the general culture of voice, senior leaders also play an important role in relation to social media in particular. Our case studies showed that enterprise social networks worked best where senior managers:

- Promote the tool and raise awareness among the workforce
- Legitimise use of the tool and encourage employees to get involved
- Use the tool themselves to interact with staff, solicit their views and respond
- Clearly commit to acting upon the suggestions where possible and feed back

At **Nampak**, Eric Collins the Managing Director has played a prominent role in pushing Yammer. He has told staff about the tool in person at team meetings and in his email updates, encouraging them to sign up; “*I can guarantee that every colleague will have been made aware of it personally by me, with my endorsement and encouragement to sign up.*” He also uses the tool regularly himself to keep in touch with employees and update them.

At **Southeastern** on the other hand, senior managers have yet to readily engage with WorkMate which has been seen to limit the effectiveness and the wider uptake of the tool. However, they are now starting to get more involved. Similarly, when Yammer was introduced at **Oxfam GB**, it lacked both corporate direction and senior management support. As a result it never took off and usage has petered out.



Silverman argues that social media requires a change in style from leaders. He identifies what he calls “*Digital Era Leadership*” which includes embracing change, being open to experimenting, demonstrating transparency, working collaboratively and creating dialogue (Silverman et al., 2013).

Although senior leaders play an important role, they also need to ensure that employees have the space to speak up. There is a balance to be struck here; managers should push their enterprise social network and make good use of it themselves, but they should take care not to crowd employees out.

Beyond senior leaders, our case study organisations have shown the importance of having “*champions*” who can drive participation. This approach was demonstrated at **Lloyds Register** where, ahead of their Jam, they had a planned marketing strategy to push the tool, with advocates raising awareness across the team and driving involvement. At **Nampak**, social media champions are being introduced at each of their nine factory sites to support the take up of Yammer which has been recently rolled out.

#### **4.4 Trust your employees**

***As well as having a culture that supports employee voice, employers also need to go with the grain of social technology, to adopt an open approach, to be willing to trust staff and let go of some control.***

As social media allows for user-generated content and networking, it is by its very nature decentralised, bottom-up and empowering. As we have explained earlier, it is less easy for managers to control than more traditional voice mechanisms such as staff surveys.

It appears that some senior leaders see this as a challenge. Fear over loss of control and potential employee misuse were identified in chapter 3 as barriers to greater use of social media. Where employers do use social media such as enterprise social networks, they often seem to do so in a way which reflects these concerns. As Adrian Wakeling from Acas argues, “*the challenge for many employers is to resist the temptation to control the channels too rigidly and to constrain the conversation.*” (Wakeling, 2014). Dr Emma Parry echoed this, saying that many employers were “*scared*” of social media and that they are “*looking to try and control this, rather than take advantage of it.*”

This requires employers to trust their employees in their use of enterprise social networks. Managers should as far as is practical allow for self-management. As our case study organisations found, enterprise social networks can be self-regulating, with misinformation being corrected and inappropriate comments being challenged by other users.

#### **4.5 Develop a social media policy**

***Having a simple and clear social media policy is important to avoid some of the potential risks of social media and ensuring that it is used appropriately.***

An effective social media policy can help by setting out expectations clearly. As Acas argue, such a policy *“will help both the employer and the employee to understand where the boundaries between acceptable and non-acceptable use lie”* as well as referring to the consequences of breaching the rules (Broughton et al., 2009). By setting out expectations and sanctions, such a policy should help minimise misuse by employees, to some extent addressing the fear of misuse identified in chapter 3. In addition to this, a clear social media policy can help protect employers and provide legal grounds to cover them in the event that action needs to be taken against an employee who seriously misuses social media at work.

All of the case studies we looked at had social media policies in place. These clearly set out what was not acceptable on social media. The employers tended to emphasise that similar rules applied online as offline. As Acas put it *“the policy on internet/social media use need not be complicated – the main message that online conduct should not differ from offline conduct, with reference to existing conduct guidelines, may suffice.”* (Broughton et al., 2009).

Policies should look to address the variety of potential misuse identified in chapter 3 including cyber-bullying, data security and confidentiality. They should be simple and based on common sense. They should also be proportionate; balancing the need to avoid misuse with the need to be open and encouraging of usage.

There is also some evidence that employees expect and indeed welcome clarification on how social media should be used. As CIPD found, *‘employees generally appreciate this and do not expect absolute freedom. This is understandable, as faced with new territory (using social media for work) we tend to feel supported rather than constrained by guidance.’* (CIPD, 2013).

In drawing up social media policies, organisations should look to involve staff and their representatives (where present) in the process (Broughton et al., 2009). This will ensure that the policy is reasonable, that staff buy-in to it, and promote awareness of it. They should also look to review the policies periodically in response to the rapidly developing technology.

## **4.6 Create a safe space**

***Employees need to feel that their concerns and suggestions will be listened to, and they need to feel safe to speak up.***

As Silverman argues, employees are more likely to speak up if they can do so anonymously. There is a tension here; named accounts can help prevent misuse, they can help strengthen relationships within the organisations, and they allow employers to feed back to named individuals and involve them in subsequent work. However, they might make people less likely to raise concerns if they fear the consequences of doing so. As Dr Emma Parry put it; anonymous voice mechanisms *“allow people to speak up, but allow them to moan incessantly without being accountable for it.”* Perhaps including provision for both would be most effective; with named accounts for most of the interaction but the facility to raise concerns anonymously. **Oxfam GB** do this, allowing employees using their interactive intranet both to post in their own name but also to post comments anonymously if they do not feel safe to speak up.

It also has implications for how enterprise social networks are managed. As Adrian Wakeling argues, organisations need to “*empower people to have their own way to use it [social media] rather than it being tied to the centre. It’s part of the whole spirit of social media.*” Employees should be given ownership over enterprise social networks, rather than having them tightly controlled and seen merely as a corporate communications channel.

#### **4.7 Act on employees’ contributions**

***Employees need to see that their contributions through the enterprise social network are having influence in the organisation.***

As Adrian Wakeling argues “*it’s good to get people’s ideas, but you’ve got to do something with them.*” It is important that organisations involve staff in important organisational decisions, as well as giving them discretion in their everyday role. Organisations also need to feed back to staff on how their views have affected decisions. Dr Emma Parry summarised this, saying;

*“Impact is really important. We know that to ask people for their views and to not act on it, they start to feel that’s a complete waste of time, and if you ask them again, they won’t bother ... if there’s no mechanism by which that’s picked up and that something’s done about it, then that’s a waste of time.....”*

This is partly about having senior leaders who emphasise the importance of employee voice, who seek out employee views and act on them. Listening to voice and acting on it is absolutely crucial too. If employees are asked their views but they feel the organisation hasn’t listened or responded, this can lead to cynicism and a reluctance to speak up in the future (IPA and Tomorrow’s Company, 2012).

#### **4.8 Deal positively with negative comments**

***How employers respond to negative comments is important. One of the benefits of a strong employee voice is being able to identify concerns and issues so they can be addressed.***

If organisations are too dismissive and employees feel that concerns are not listened too or, worse, if they feel that raising concerns leads to retribution, they will be less willing to speak up. Concerns will instead be bottled up or discussed only among employees.

At **Nampak** for example, the organisation is very open to criticism, As their Engagement Advisor explained; “*we’re quite an open company. We encourage everybody to have a voice, whether that be negative or positive, and we believe that will help us go forward. So we weren’t very apprehensive about it.*” Similarly, their Managing Director argued it’s important not to “*knock anyone down*” if they express concerns or negative comments:

*“I wouldn’t criticise anyone for having a view on there... if it’s someone saying ‘I don’t agree with this’ or ‘I don’t think this is working’, that’s exactly what we want to see, so we can pick that up and build on it.”*

While there is a risk of misuse, as we have shown, the fear seems to be greater than the reality. Any risks of misuse are minimised by having named accounts, so people cannot post inappropriate comments anonymously; five out of our six case studies had named profiles on their enterprise social networks. As we explain below, an effective social media policy can mitigate against these risks.

#### **4.9 Focus on the purpose of the organisation**

***The use of social media for employee voice seems to be most impactful when it is work-relevant and embedded in the purpose of the organisation.***

Organisations should ensure that the use of social media is focused on the organisation's purpose. Enterprise social networks work best when they engage and involve staff in improving the organisation's performance, and the lived experience of the staff.

This was clear from our case studies. Where the use of social media was focused clearly on key organisational issues and on making things better for employees, the tools seemed to be more successful, both in terms of employee participation, and the actual impact delivered. **Lloyds Register** was one such example, where the conversation at the Jam was clearly focused on business critical issues, leading to a high level of engagement with the tool and some practical, implementable outcomes. The **London Borough of Lewisham** and **Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust** both used enterprise social networks successfully to access employee voice around key business issues. However, if there is going to be a specific focus, organisations need to ensure that the issues addressed resonate with the workforce, and that employees can also shape the agenda themselves.

This does not mean that non-work and personal discussion on enterprise social networks should not be allowed. Some of the case studies – notably **Southeastern** – did have a level of non-work discussion. This was seen by them as encouraging usage of the platform, and of building connections between employees and a sense of belonging and community. As Eugene McConlough, Head of Engagement and Inclusion at **Southeastern** explained, “*I would argue [that you should] allow the use of it for social stuff to get the familiarity and regular use. The fact that people use it daily allows them to use it in a business context.*” However, this approach was not uncontroversial as the relatively high levels of non-work usage led some to see the tool as “*a poor man's Facebook.*”

#### **4.10 Work towards achieving critical mass**

***The experience of our case study organisations showed that for enterprise social networks to work effectively, they need a critical mass of employees using them.***

At **Oxfam GB**, the use of social media internally grew organically across the many different affiliates internationally. This led to a complex picture with different Oxfam affiliates using different systems that were not able to integrate. Yammer was introduced in **Oxfam GB** by employees themselves but without corporate support, its use has petered out. Oxfam International are now working to coordinate and consolidate their use of social media so that they can use the same systems and allow for collaboration within and indeed across affiliates.

Dean Royles at **Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust** argues that unless senior leaders get actively involved and “*become advocates*” of social media platforms, they can never fully take off within organisations. When senior managers clearly back the platform, and indeed use it themselves, staff will feel more comfortable using it and “*it will become a perpetuating success factor*”.

One of the concerns at **Lloyds Register** was getting sufficient employee participation in the Future of Work Lab Jam to make the process worthwhile and the results meaningful. The Jam was widely promoted using a range of communication channels; had strong commitment from the senior leadership team – including commitment to act on the outcomes from the Jam; and was carefully designed to be relevant to employees’ work. 41 per cent of employees invited to take part were active users, posting 1,400 comments, an outcome identified by John Nicholson, Energy HR Director as “*absolutely fantastic*”.

## 5 Bibliography and sources

- Adam, D., Purcell, J. and Hall, M. (2014) *Joint consultative committees under the Information and Consultation of Employees Regulations: A WERS analysis*. Acas.
- Barber, B. (2015) 'The ICE Regulations 10 years on', *IPA Bulletin*, No. 145, Nov 2015.
- Broughton, B., Higgins, T., Hicks, B. and Cox, A. (2009) *Workplaces and social networking – The implications for employment relations*. Acas research paper 11/11.
- Broughton, A., Foley, B., Ledermaier, S. and Cox, A. (2013) *The use of social media in the recruitment process*. Acas research paper 03/13.
- CIPD (2013) *Social technology, social business*. Survey Report.
- CIPD (2014) *Putting social media to work – Lessons for employers*. Research Report.
- Dix, Gill., (2014) 'Consultation at work - time to clarify the meaning and purpose', *Acas Blog 23 May 2014*. Acas
- Dromey, J. (2014) *MacLeod and Clarke's Concept of Employee Engagement - An analysis based on the Workplace Employment Relations Study*. Acas.
- Dromey, J. (2015) *ICE and voice ten years on – The Information and Consultation of Employees Regulations in the UK and Europe*. IPA.
- Evesson, J., Oxenbridge, S., Taylor, D. *Seeking better solutions: tackling bullying and ill-treatment in Britain's workplaces*. Acas Policy Paper. November 2015
- Harvard Business Review (2010) *The new conversation – Taking social media from talk to action*. August 2010.
- IPA and Tomorrow's Company (2012) *Releasing voice for sustainable business success*. IPA.
- Miles, J., Mangold G. (2014) 'Employee voice: Untapped resource or social media timebomb?' *Business Horizons* Vol. 57: pp. 401–411.
- Li, C. ,Cifuentes, J. and Solis, B. (2014) *Strengthening employee relationships in the digital era – How digital employee engagement and advocacy transforms organisations*. Altimeter.
- MacLeod, D., and Clarke, N. (2009) *Engaging for Success*. Department of Business, Innovation and Skills.
- Martin, G., Parry E., and Flowers P. (2015) 'Do social media enhance constructive employee voice all of the time or just some of the time?' *Human Resource Management Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 4: pp. 541 – 562.
- Miller, R. (2013) 'How employees find their voice through social media' . *Maximisesocialbusiness.com*, June 11, 2013.

- NHS Staff Survey (2014). The Picker Institute Europe.
- Ofcom (2015) *The Communications Market 2015*. Ofcom.
- ONS (2013) *E-commerce and ICT Activity of UK Businesses*: Statistical Bulletin 2012. Office of National Statistics.
- Saundry, R. et al. *Managing individual conflict in the contemporary British workplace*. Acas Research Paper. March 2016.
- Silverman, M., Bakhshalian, E. and Hillman, L. (2013) *Social media and employee voice – the current landscape*. CIPD.
- Smith, S. and Harwood, P. (2011) *Social media and its impact on employers and trade unions*. Acas employment relations comment.
- Surowiecki, J., (2004) *The Wisdom of Crowds: Why the Many Are Smarter Than the Few and How Collective Wisdom Shapes Business, Economies, Societies and Nations*.
- towerswatson.com (2013) *Just Over Half of Employers Using Social Media Tools for Internal Communication, Towers Watson Change and Communication ROI survey finds*. Towerswatson.com May 23 2013.  
<https://www.towerswatson.com/en/Press/2013/05/just-over-half-of-employers-using-social-media-tools-for-internal-communication>
- van Wanrooy, B., Bewley, H., Bryson, A., Forth, J., Freeth, S., Stokes, L. and Wood, S. (2013) *Employment relations in the shadow of the recession – Findings from the 2011 Workplace Employment Relations Study*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Wakeling, A. (2014) *Does social media strengthen or weaken employee voice?* Acas employment relations comment.
- Wilkinson, A. and Fay, C. (2011) 'New times for employee voice?' *Human Resource Management*. Vol. 40, Issue 1: pp 65 – 74.
- Woods, J. 'What role will social media play in promoting employee voice?'. *Workplace trends of 2015*. Acas/CIPD.

## **Annex 1 – Case Study Participants**

### **1. Lloyds Register**

- Annette Holmes, Change and Engagement Manager
- Harriet Molyneaux, Hotspots Movement
- John Nicholson, Energy HR Director

### **2. Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust**

- Dean Royles, Executive Director of HR and OD

### **3. Nampak**

- Eric Collins, Managing Director
- Laura Buckthorpe, Engagement Advisor
- Greg Ward, Head of HR
  - o Focus Group Participants
    - Darren Pell, CQ Manager
    - Sally Reed, Sales Administrator
    - Doreen Scully, Credit Control
    - Kwabena Amoah, Lead Waterhouse Operative

### **4. Oxfam GB**

- Sally Otter, Internal Communications Adviser

### **5. Southeastern**

- Barry Creek, Supervisor
- Richard Anderson, Booking Office Clerk
- Ruth March, Ticket Officer
  - o Focus Group Participants
    - Eugene McConlough, Head of Engagement and Inclusion
    - Miriam Ryan, Communications Executive
    - Claire Bishop, Interim Communications Manager
    - Claire Walker, Policies and Procedures Manager, Human Resources

### **6. The London Borough of Lewisham**

- Adrian Wardle, Head of Communications
- Geeta Subramaniam-Mooney, Head of Service, Crime Reduction and Supporting People
- Andreas Ghosh, Head of Human Resources



## **Annex 2 – Sample question guide**

- To what extent is employee voice important in your organisation?
- What do you see are the benefits of employee voice?
- Why did you decide to start using an enterprise social network internally?
  - o What were you aiming to achieve?
- Did you have any reservations about using an enterprise social network in this way?
- Can you tell me about the enterprise social network platforms you use internally?
  - o Functionality
  - o Issues dealt with
  - o Levels of usage
  - o Impact
  - o Challenges and limitations
- How do you ensure the discussion is work-focused?
- How do you guard against misuse?
- How do you encourage employees to use the tools?
  - o Do they have any reservations? How are these overcome?
- What role have senior managers played in using the enterprise social network?
- What role have middle and line managers played in using the enterprise social network?
- Has the enterprise social network changed the way you engage with employees?
  - o If so, how
    - o In your view, is an enterprise social network a legitimate and valuable form of employee voice?
- How has the use of an enterprise social network interacted with other channels of employee voice?
- What are the advantages of using an enterprise social network to promote employee voice in the workplace?
- What are the limitations of using an enterprise social network to promote employee voice?
- What are the challenges or risks of using an enterprise social network to promote employee voice in the workplace?
  - o How have you managed these challenges/risks?
- Anything else? Questions for me about the project?



