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Employees' Perceived Benefits of Social Networking Sites in the Workplace

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to explore how social networking sites (SNSs) in the workplace can benefit organisations from employees' points of view. A basic research on previous studies showed a lack of deeper understanding of the positive aspects of SNSs. In order to obtain employees' perceptions, ten in-depth interviews were conducted by interviewing people who work in the consulting industry. The empirical data was coded into categories which were used for the frame of theory. By linking empirical data and theory back and forth, the data represented patterns of employees' perceived benefits and therefore developed the categories of the analysis. The researchers found four benefits to employees which also influence organisations in a positive way either directly or indirectly. They are improved lives, better relationships, easier information sharing and enriched creativity, and a bright future for SNSs. Suggestions for companies to make good use of SNSs are also proposed in this research.

Table of Contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Background	1
1.2	Problem	2
1.3	Purpose	3
1.4	Delimitation	3
1.5	Abbreviations	4
2	Method	5
2.1	Position of Methodology – Grounded Theory	5
2.2	Research Design	6
2.2.1	Qualitative Approach	6
2.2.2	Abductive Approach	6
2.3	Collection of Data	7
2.3.1	Primary Data	7
2.3.2	Secondary Data	10
2.4	The Analysis Process	11
2.5	Evaluation of Sources	13
2.5.1	Validity	14
2.5.2	Reliability	15
3	Empirical Findings	17
3.1	User Experience of SNSs	17
3.1.1	General Opinions	17
3.1.2	Usage	17
3.1.3	Contacts	18
3.1.4	Behaviour	19
3.2	Personal Perception of Life and Work	20
3.2.1	The Interplay between Work and Life	20
3.2.2	Information Sharing	21
3.3	Professional Experience	22
3.3.1	Communication	22
3.3.2	Problem Solving	24
3.4	The Future of SNSs	25
3.4.1	To Ban or Not to Ban	25
3.4.2	The Role to Companies	27
3.5	Negative opinions about SNSs	28
4	Frame of Reference	30
4.1	Social Networks	30
4.2	Technology Evolution and Social Networking Sites	32
4.2.1	Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC)	32
4.2.2	Online Community	33
4.2.3	Social Networking Sites	33
4.3	The Impact of Internet on Our Lives	36
4.3.1	The Online Identity	36
4.3.2	The Online Everyday Life	37
4.3.3	Overlap between Cyberspace and the Real World	40
4.4	Communication	41

4.5	Knowledge Sharing / Information Exchange	43
4.6	Trust and Motivation.....	45
4.6.1	Trust	45
4.6.2	Motivation	46
5	Analysis.....	49
5.1	Improved Lives.....	49
5.1.1	Personal	49
5.1.2	Professional.....	51
5.2	Better Relationships	53
5.2.1	Internally	53
5.2.2	Externally.....	56
5.3	Easier Information Sharing and Enriched Creativity	57
5.3.1	Information Sharing	57
5.3.2	Creativity.....	59
5.4	A Bright Future for SNSs.....	60
6	Conclusion.....	65
7	Recommendations for Further Research	67
	References	68

Tables

Table 1	Empirical Data Coding.....	12
Table 2	Theory Categorisation.....	13
Table 3	Analysis Coding (the benefits seen by comparing empirical data with theory)	13

Appendix

Appendices	75
Appendix 1 Interview guide.....	75
Appendix 2 The Coding into Categories	77

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The networking phenomenon is something which has always been present as connections between humans. It can be defined as a friend of a friend effect, as people share information that they have heard from others and so build a chain of knowledge exchange. Networking has further been described as a “Six Degree of Separation”, as a result of an experiment by sociologist Stanley Milgram, who argues that people are connected to each other by only six steps (Breslin, Passant & Decker, 2009, p.169). Networks can be powerful because they connect people, promote ideas, enhance information or knowledge transmitting efficiency, and provide a sense of belonging and support (Fisher & Vilas, 1999). Naisbitt (1982) points out that information exchange, productivity improvement, and resource sharing are derived from networks (cited in Fisher & Vilas, 1999). In business, networks are linked back to the 1950s used as a means to solve production and transportation problems (Kleindorfer, Wind & Gunther, 2009).

Online social networks have grown as a result of the implementation and development of technology (Dulworth, 2007). When Internet had its upswing in the 90s, people could find most information needed with ease from different websites. They could also communicate by email and later on through instant messaging (IM). However, at first the World Wide Web (WWW) was limited to those who actually understood computers, but it became popular because of the spread of computer education.(Wellman, 2002) Globalisation was also a huge factor in the growth of social networks as people started travelling and meeting new people more frequently. Internet soon became a reliability, as people started to depend on always having access to it, in order to keep in contact.(Küng, Picard & Towse, 2008)

Nowadays millions of people are connected to each other through Internet sites and have friends and partners all over the world (Panteli, 2009). The creation of blogs and wikis has increased rapidly and the traffic on social networking sites (SNSs), such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, MySpace and many more, has sky rocketed

(Küng et al., 2008). It can be a sign that social networking is under an even larger process of expansion from face-to-face to online world than what was seen in the impact of the Internet (Kraut, et.al., 1998, cited in Wellman & Haythornthwaite, 2002). Among their members, the young generation is the major group (Küng et al., 2008). People use networks as social tools to share information about themselves and their lives (Preece, 2000). They also use the networking sites for professional reasons as a way to find information about job vacancies, share knowledge and keep in contact with business partners (Panteli, 2009).

In addition, the use of SNSs has increased in the workplace and they are used by the workers as either an informal networking tool or as a replacement of a coffee or smoking break. Some companies have set up their own formal networks where employees can share information openly between departments, leading to a more horizontal business approach.(Bryan, Matson & Weiss, 2007). On the other hand, some companies are open to external SNSs, whereas some have policies; according to a Swedish study, only 7% of Swedish companies have introduced SNS usage policies compared to about 20% of the companies in the rest of the world (Manpower Inc., 2010a). Since SNSs are getting more popular, certain problems arise in the workplace (see Problem below). This has led to a debate whether or not to use SNSs at work.

1.2 Problem

There have been a lot of discussions about SNSs in the workplace. Take Facebook which is the most popular social networking site for example, a research found that “companies effectively lose an average of 1.5 percent of total office productivity when employees can access Facebook during the work day.” (Nucleus Research, 2009, p.1). Anyhow, another study had a contrary finding that “people who do surf the Internet for fun at work - within a reasonable limit of less than 20% of their total time in the office - are more productive by about 9% than those who don’t.” (The University of Melbourne, 2009).

To avoid the risk brought by SNSs, according to the mass media, more and more companies start to either ban or have limited time control over employees' access to those SNSs in the workplace (The University of Melbourne, 2009, cited in The Economist, 2010; Vijayan, 2007). Nevertheless, those employers may have ignored to evaluate that allowing employees to use SNSs may lead to more gains than losses. For example, the implementation of a drastic organizational policy may result in employees' resistance (LeClaire, 2009), which should be handled with care and taken into consideration beforehand.

Much effort is put on the negative aspects on SNSs at work, instead of investigating the benefits of the phenomenon. SNSs are new means to social networks; their invisible power is still hard to define but worthy of high attention and a closer look.

1.3 Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to explore employees' perceived benefits of SNSs in the workplace.

In this paper, the focus is on employees' perceptions of SNSs to explore if they can be beneficial to employers as well. The bottom-up approach was applied in this research to highlight employees' thoughts and possible influences within an organization.

1.4 Delimitation

To focus on employees' perceptions of SNSs at work, the study sets the scope to the access on computers, instead of mobile phones or any other applications connecting to SNSs.

The qualitative research is limited to ordinary employees who work in companies where they can access SNSs no matter whether they use SNSs for work, for fun, or have not

registered in any SNS yet. Attributes like culture, gender, and working experience are not within the research scope. There is no attempt to understand managers' perceptions on SNSs. The type of companies is restricted to the consulting industry. Due to the limited time and resources, the study is only carried out in Sweden. However, the scarcity of relevant literature has limited the resources for the study since this is a quite new topic. In addition, the general negative reports on SNSs in the workplace have placed the research to a certain degree of sensitivity, which may restrain the respondents from a completely open and honest situation during the interviews.

Last, this study does not emphasize on the benefits from human-technology interaction, but on human social aspect to see the possible gains to an organization.

1.5 Abbreviations

IM:	Instant Messaging
WWW:	World Wide Web
SNS:	Social Network Site
BBS:	Bulletin Board System
CMC:	Computer Mediated Communication
Email:	Electronic mail
24/7:	24 hours a day, 7 days a week

2 Method

This chapter explicitly argues for the choice of methodology and how it fits the purpose. Each and every step of the study is well described and, such as how the study came about, how the research for data was carried out, how the analysis was processed, as well as an evaluation of sources.

2.1 Position of Methodology – Grounded Theory

The *wish to explore*, which was the purpose of this study, can well be linked to the question “what’s going on here?” and is the base on which *grounded theory* research questions lies (Richards & Morse, 2007, p. 60). When exploring, the intention is to understand something from different perspectives and to get a better understanding of a situation. In line with technology change, people evolve their use and change their behaviour towards, and thoughts about, the new evolution, which results in an ever-changing process (Küng, Picard & Towse, 2008). In grounded theory, theory is built from discovering what is going on in different situations, by learning how such processes evolve, and to make use of the data to analyse and create new theory (Richards & Morse, 2007). Further, the methodology generates theory through data rather than testing pre-organised hypotheses and therefore does not force the researchers to look at theory from one direction, but instead enables them openly to question and test their data in line with the development of theory (Dey, 2004). This methodology also supports the view of subjective ontology, which means to try to understand the world not only from one perspective but several (Charmaz, 2006).

This study was *influenced* by grounded theory, for reasons stated throughout the methodology section, which helped structure the research and analysis in order to fit the purpose, but no specific guidelines within the methodology were followed. Just as grounded theory has changed over the years, and nowadays is interpreted in many ways (Dey, 2004; Richards & Morse, 2007; Mason, 2002; Charmaz, 2006), so did this study over the research period as the researchers were shaping and reshaping the data in an open-minded way. To shape and reshape, the researchers looked at the data as a puzzle in which the pieces could fit in different places.

2.2 Research Design

2.2.1 Qualitative Approach

With our approach we aimed to do a *qualitative study* compared to the already existing studies made by companies and newspapers such as Manpower, Deloitte, Metro and Svenska Dagbladet, which have had a more quantitative approach. Those studies have focused on companies and their policies, and positive and negative aspects from an organisational point of view, whereas this research had a bottom-up approach and aimed at discovering and understanding employees' points of view and opinions about using SNSs and whether it could benefit their workplace in any ways.

The reason for choosing a qualitative approach, rather than a quantitative, was that the study was aiming to understand people's opinions in an in-depth manner, instead of finding a correlation between a larger sample of the population (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Moreover, Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2008) discuss that grounded theory focus on generating theory rather than verifying.

Further, in grounded theory much of the research relies on a qualitative approach, through interviews and observation, as to lay a foundation for further data collection. However, it is not necessarily excluding the use of quantitative research (Dey, 2004). In this study, the importance of using in-depth interviews to categorize the data for further theory collection meant quantitative data would not be of relevance.

2.2.2 Abductive Approach

This study was conducted with an *abductive approach* where firstly, interviews were conducted before delving deeper in the theory, and secondly, the theory was developed and redefined while analysing the empirical data (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Mason, 2002; Richards & Morse, 2007).

An abductive approach is mainly used when theory is developed in line with the empirical study and findings. The approach is useful as it enables the researchers to go back and forth, to develop both empirical data and theory in accordance with the information obtained (Mason, 2002). It helped to use such an approach in this study because of the limited information available about the subject. Moreover, it also supported the choice of grounded theory, as it enabled the researchers to understand, develop and add additional insights during the research progress, which were then relevant to the end result.

2.3 Collection of Data

Data can be collected from many different sources, such as people, organizations, texts, objects and events. The data contains different kinds of information which can be used for various reasons, and it is therefore important to know where to look for the information in order to find the most suitable for the specific research being conducted. (Mason, 2002) For this study, a subsequent number of different sources, such as interviews, articles, newspapers and former studies, were thoroughly researched to get a deeper understanding of the topic. Although there was limited information about the topic as it is quite a new area of research, the choice of grounded theory supported this. In grounded theory there is an interest in understanding change over time and to construct new data, not to find data from already existing research (Richards & Morse, 2007).

Additionally, in the grounded theory perspective, data can be collected through observations, interviews, media, and many other sources supporting our choice to look into numerous sources (Dey, 2004).

2.3.1 Primary Data

2.3.1.1 Respondent Selection Method

The researchers decided to interview various people from the consulting industry, such as Auditing, Accounting and IT. This sample group was chosen because of the very vibrant environment they are in and the numerous clients they are communicating with on

either longer or shorter terms. The companies from which the interviewees were chosen are either medium sized or large. Another important selection criterion was that the companies did not restrict the use of SNSs in the workplace. In total, a number of 10 participants were interviewed, which can be seen to be a satisfactory number for a qualitative study where the aim is to get opinions rather than to correlate (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Additionally, large amounts of information tend to be obtained which supports the choice of keeping the sample size small (Oishi, 2004). Further, after conducting the interviews, the researchers found the data gave enough insights in order to be analysed and therefore settled with this number of participants.

Most of the people interviewed had a specific work task within consulting (as mentioned above), some of them were student coordinators in line with their ordinary work, and one was hired by the company to work with SNS-related matters in order to reach out to students. The reason these people were selected was mainly random, as they got involved when the researchers contacted their companies. Some were recruited by other interviewees, as a snowball sampling (Richards & Morse, 2007), and some got recruited on a job fair. However, one major criterion was that the interviewees should have some kind of experience of using SNSs, either at work or leisure. When sampling for a qualitative study, the purpose is not to sample a large piece of the population, but to continue interviewing relevant respondents until themes or categorizations are obtained (Oishi, 2004). These categories can then be used in the analysis phase, and in this study was supporting the development of theory from the grounded theory perspective, where empirical data and theory are developed continuously (Dey, 2004). With the choice of using employees in consulting firms as a sample group, the researchers did not intend to represent the industry, but rather to understand individual opinions within the specific industry (Mason, 2002).

2.3.1.2 Data Collection Approach

The choice of interviews related back to the purpose, in which the researchers wanted to explore benefits of SNSs in the workplace through analysing employees' thoughts and opinions within the firm. In order to get a deeper understanding of these thoughts, "to

describe and interpret experience”, and to construct data from examples and explanations, in-depth interviews were appropriate (Oishi, 2004, p. 173; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Mason, 2002).

Interview Guide

A semi-structured interview guide with questions within four areas, related to the problem and purpose, was put together before the interviews were conducted. The guide was there as a security and structure in order not to float too far from the subject; however, there was room for many additional questions and the interviewees were allowed to “speak freely” (Oishi, 2003, p.171).

Further, the guide was produced and tested before the “real” interviews. Three pilot interviews were conducted; after each of these interviews, the questions were discussed and revised to fit the purpose. The purpose of using test interviews is to test whether the questions are understandable, if the interview guide have a good structure, and whether the interview will have a flow in accordance to the expectations of the researchers (Kylén, 2004). These interviews were also seen as a foundation in the work in line with the grounded theory, as it gave the researchers the first insights to possible patterns and categories.

Interview

Three of the interviews were conducted in a familiar area for the interviewees, in the office which can be said to make the interviewees more comfortable in their situation (Kylén, 2004). Another four interviews were conducted in a room at a library. The room was a private space, making sure there would be no disturbance. One interview was conducted in a restaurant of the interviewee’s choice, during lunch hours, and two at a café, as these were the only times the interviewees could set aside. The researchers still felt all interviewees could relax and answer the questions thoroughly and argue back and forth, as they were involved and interested throughout the whole discussion.

Each interview took between 45 minutes up to an hour, which is useful when the aim is to get a deeper understanding. Having a shorter interview would lead to less in-depth

answers and longer ones needs a huge motivational involvement from the interviewee (Kylén, 2004). Therefore the researchers decided that up to an hour was adequate as to keep an ongoing conversation and still not take too much time from the interviewee to make the person feel uncomfortable.

Both researchers attended all interviews; one asking questions, the other making notes, but still actively participating in the interview. The interviews were recorded, as to be able to use quotations, but more importantly to have the chance to go back and listen to the interviews again to better understand what the different interviewees said and to avoid missing out on important details.(Oishi, 2003)

Before the interviews started, the researchers described the purpose of the study, defined some of the basic areas and encouraged the interviewees to speak freely and ask when something was unclear. Further, as the interviews were going to be recorded, this was beforehand requested and justified (and accepted), in order to avoid any impediments for the interviewees to answer. It is important that the person interviewed knows the conditions and feel comfortable in the situation (Kylén, 2004). Additionally, as some of the interviewees did not want to be related to as employees at their companies, the researchers decided all respondents would be anonymous and company names would be concealed. As mentioned above, the questions were semi-structured and open-ended, therefore, they could be followed up by further questions in order to clarify answers and get a better understanding of the interviewees' opinions (Oishi, 2003).

2.3.2 Secondary Data

Data for theory was collected from books at Jönköping University Library, on the Internet, from journals and magazines. The data was collected and thoroughly studied. The choice of topic limited the extent to which the researchers could find information, as it was a quite new area of research. This, however, did not hinder the authors but instead made the study more interesting, as it challenged the researchers to think outside the box. The literature gave insights to the study and it was therefore important to analyse

different patterns and to find connections (Richards & Morse, 2007). Further, both the influence of grounded theory and the choice of an abductive approach depended on the ability to be able to go back and forth between data and theory and, thus the availability of numerous secondary sources made it possible to delve further into the categories generated over time (Dey, 2004).

2.4 The Analysis Process

The researchers first understood the need of a qualitative study of SNSs after reading about numerous studies which did not give insights in the area of feelings, thoughts and observations, nor did previous studies try to understand but rather just present the data obtained (studies made for example by Manpower, Deloitte, Metro and Svenska Dagbladet). The idea of exploring and understanding employees' perceptions of SNS usage arose. The researchers started to conduct interviews in order to understand, and get opinions about the usage of SNSs from employees within the consulting industry. After the interviews, categories started to emerge and the researchers decided to look into the theory written about those categories. An ongoing process of theory discovering, coding of empirical data, and analysis was initiated which continued back and forth until the data could reveal the results which are presented in the conclusion.

The process of analysing was centred on data coding, which is used in most qualitative studies (Richards & Morse, 2007). In grounded theory, the use of the words collected from empirical findings and theory are coded into categories for the purpose of comparison (Richards & Morse, 2007; Dey, 2004). The empirical findings in this study were coded in an open manner, meaning it followed a process of "breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing data" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, cited in Dey, 2004, p. 84). The empirical data was structured into the four sections in the interview guide, with minor changes in titles. Moreover, the researchers divided the sub-heading into categories depending on the different answers of the interviewees. Many of the answers were similar or had interesting points within the same fields (see Table 1 below). Along with the answers, the theoretical framework was produced and the researchers found four different areas in which the interviewees had interesting answers

and which they wanted to learn more about (see Table 2 below). The four categories follow two introductory sections in the frame of references. Dey (2004) discuss that in order to clarify and amplify the categories, one has to allow the theory to grow out of the data by continuously moving back and forth between these. Therefore, coding of the data was initiated early in the research and could develop as the research progressed. Furthermore, comparing the empirical data with theory, the researchers found there were four benefits of SNSs in the workplace according to the employees (see Table 3 below). There were also some questions in each phase of the research which had an impact on the coding. These questions are presented before each phase in the tables below. More information about how the categories were formed can be found in Appendix 2.

Questions which arose during the initial phase: How are employees using SNSs in the workplace? Are there benefits letting employees use SNSs in the workplace? What are the benefits? How can employers promote/ make use of these benefits according to their employees?

Table 1 Empirical Data Coding

User Experience of SNSs	Personal Perception of Life and Work	Professional Experience	The Future of SNSs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Opinions • Usage • Contacts • Behaviour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Interplay between Work and Life • Information Sharing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication • Problem Solving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To Ban or Not to Ban • The Role to Companies

Questions during the empirical finding phase leading to the search for theoretical information: How and why are SNSs used? What influences employees work-life balance? How can and is knowledge obtained through the use of SNSs? How do employees make use of SNSs to communicate within and outside the workplace? What is the role of SNSs to companies in the future? What is the opinion on restricting SNSs in the workplace?

Table 2 Theory Categorisation

The Impact of Internet on Our Lives	Communication	Knowledge Sharing / Information Exchange	Trust and Motivation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Online Identity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Who is online? – What do they do? • The Online Everyday Life <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Personal – Professional 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trust • Motivation

Questions about what Benefits could be found by comparing the empirical data with theory: Are SNSs influencing people’s lives to an extent in which they can improve their balance in personal and professional life? Are SNSs adding values to better and easier communication in the workplace and outside the workplace? Can SNSs enhance the flow of information as well as educate employees through the exchange of knowledge? Is there a positive role of SNSs to the workplace in the future?

Table 3 Analysis Coding (the benefits seen by comparing empirical data with theory)

Improved Lives	Better Relationships	Easier Information Sharing and Enriched Creativity	A Bright Future for SNSs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional • Personal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internally • Externally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information Sharing • Creativity 	

2.5 Evaluation of Sources

When evaluating research, criteria such as validity and reliability are often used; however, these have often been argued to be more suitable in a quantitative study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, cited in Richards & Morse, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Seale, 1999, cited in Mason, 2002). The argument is mainly that qualitative research “are explicitly anti-positivist, anti-realist or anti-modernist”, which means using these criteria would go against these principles as they are originally from the opposite philosophical approach (Mason, 2002, p.38). Instead of seeing this as a problem, the researchers believed the criteria could be useful if seen from the perspective of a qualitative study. Au-

thors do support the choice of validity and reliability for evaluation purposes, as the aim is still to get a result which measures what we want to measure and which is trustworthy (Jacobsen, 2002; Mason, 2002). Hence, validity can be used as a measure to see if the researchers have done their study in a representable way; in other words, if they have been able to find relevant data to support the purpose. Reliability, on the other hand, handles the use of method and whether the study is accurately produced in line with that choice. (Mason, 2002)

2.5.1 Validity

The purpose of *validity* in qualitative studies is to enable the end result to have an outcome which is appropriate and well founded in the data. The more valid, the more justified the result of the study is. For this to be ensured, there has to be a fit between the question, data and method. Further, each step of the analysis should be thoroughly accounted for. The more proper analysis, the better the outcome; and, the researchers can thereby leave a trustworthy conclusion. (Richards & Morse, 2007)

In order to enhance the validity of the empirical data in this study, the interviews were thoroughly planned before conducted. The interview guide was tested by conducting three pilot interviews and revised as necessary afterwards. Further, the choice of topic came from making a background research on existing literature and research. As the qualitative approach of researching the SNS phenomenon had not yet been used in the topic area, the researchers came to the interviews with an open mind on what they were going to hear.

All interviewees were encouraged to give their insights to the phenomenon, and therefore none of them were regarded as invalid to the study. Because the research had a focus on exploring each person's opinion, the researchers did not expect them to have the same answers. Moreover, by having a semi-structured interview, they felt they could enhance the validity, as the interviewers were able to ask additional questions. When something was unclear or when the answer led to a question with an interesting point

which the interviewers wanted to learn more about and found useful to the research, they made use of these additional questions.

The researchers used coding to analyse the empirical data, and therefore could find patterns (categories) from which the theory was built. However, the researchers did not stop at that point but continued to actively go back and forth between the empirical data and theory while analysing, in order to review and revise the information suitable to give answers to the purpose of the research. The categories found were built on interpretation of the data and not made up by the researchers, which would lower the validity of the research; instead, the researchers were discussing back and forth with each other and found the categories were evident and in accordance with the purpose.

When analysing, the focus was always on the purpose of the study. Further, the use of a somewhat grounded methodology made it possible for the researchers to constantly evaluate their actions by reviewing what had been collected, ensuring a high validity of the results.

2.5.2 Reliability

Reliability relates to the accuracy of the research, meaning using the right methods and techniques to produce data (Mason, 2002).

The choice of interviewing came from the purpose of exploring employees' thoughts and possible influences about SNSs in the workplace, which could be said to be a reliable source as it gives an in-depth understanding of each person. However, according to Kitzinger (2004) many people answer in a way which is not in accordance to their actions, which can lower the reliability of the study. Hence, the researchers cannot completely ignore the fact that the interviewees were not biased in their answers, but as the questions were not known beforehand and the incentive to speak freely with the motivation of anonymity should enhance the reliability of the answers. In addition to this, the researchers made use of open questions in order to avoid predetermined answers.

In order to enhance the reliability of the analysis, the recordings of the interviews were transcribed and coded, and the researchers continuously went back and forth between the data when something was unclear. Another aim of reliability is to be able to duplicate the study doing it all over with the same means; however, as the SNS phenomenon is an ever-changing process, this might not be possible in this kind of study. Nevertheless, the aim of grounded theory is to produce new theory. Therefore the duplication is not the main focus but instead to produce reliable sources for future research.

The conclusions of this study are drawn from the analysis and should both be applicable and reliable as the researchers have carefully made use of the data and connected them to the purpose with the help of grounded theory; in other words, going back and forth between the data enabled the researchers to really understand them and to draw conclusions which are trustworthy.

3 Empirical Findings

This chapter represents the summary of focused empirical results from the interviews with ten employees in five different targeted companies. The findings are divided into four categories which are according to the four main areas in our interview guide, with subsections developed from the respondents' answers. The reason for showing the empirical findings before theory is linked back to the approach of grounded theory, in which theory is researched after or during the empirical data collection. The empirical data was coded into categories, which were used as the base for the theory.

3.1 User Experience of SNSs

This section is to understand employees' opinion and use of SNSs in general.

3.1.1 General Opinions

All of the respondents have a positive view of SNSs. They described SNSs as fun (1, 10), good (2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10), fresh (9), and amazing (7). They are fun as they allow the respondents to keep in touch with friends all over the world (1, 10), as well as to “interact with more and more people at the same place at the same time” (10). They are good because they enable people to network with old friends (2, 3, 7), to share common interests (5), and to meet new people (5, 6, 7, 10). Moreover, they are communication tools for the young generation (4), as well as provide great opportunities (8). Respondent 7 thinks that the most amazing part of SNSs is how it connects people in new ways compared to 20 years ago.

3.1.2 Usage

Except for respondent 4, who used to have accounts in MySpace and LunarStorm but does not use SNSs anymore, all of the interviewees use Facebook. Other SNSs in use are LinkedIn (1, 2, 3, 6, 7), Blog (8), Google Wave (8), Orkut (10), and Couch Surfing (10). Facebook is used on a personal level to communicate with friends and family (1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10), whereas LinkedIn is career oriented (2, 3, 6). However, respondent 6 also has an account on Facebook for work purpose, where contact with unknown people is established.

Respondents 1, 2, 3, 5, 7 and 9 were invited by friends to register on Facebook, and so was 4 on MySpace, as well as 7 on LinkedIn. Either being abroad for studies or friends studying abroad initiated respondents 3's and 7's participation. Interviewee 2 was invited by a client to use LinkedIn. Due to word of mouth and curiosity, respondent 8 joined Facebook and respondent 10 joined Orkut. In order to keep in touch with old friends, a blog was created as a private online community (8). Respondent 10 joined Facebook as a result of moving abroad, and further joined Couch Surfing to connect with travellers.

Interviewee 3 has been on LinkedIn for less than one year, so has interviewee 9 on Facebook. Respondent 5 has been on Facebook for 1-2 years. Most of the respondents have been on SNSs for more than two years (1 on LinkedIn, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8 on Facebook). Interviewee 8 was a very early member on Facebook; however, there was no point in using it at that moment since there were not many people on the site to connect with.

Respondent 1, 3 and 6 log in to SNSs 1-3 times a week. One accesses them every second day (10). Further, respondent 2, 6, 7, 8 and 9 access it daily, especially interviewee 6 who accesses it 20 times a day. Respondent 5 only log in whenever there is some free time, therefore it varies from week to week. Interviewees 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 10 spend 5-30 minutes every time, whereas respondent 9 spends up to an hour on SNSs.

3.1.3 Contacts

Facebook is the most common SNS for the respondents and is more social oriented. Therefore, the respondents' networks are larger on this site than on others. Interviewee 9 has less than 100 people on their friend list on SNSs as he is a new user. The amount of friends is mostly between 100-300 (1, 2, 3, 8, 10). Additionally, two respondents have about 400 friends (6, 7). On the other hand, LinkedIn is considered more professional oriented, hence their networks are smaller. The contacts on LinkedIn are below

50 (2, 3, 6, 7); respondent 6 has the most contacts – 40. Furthermore, the blog used by respondent 8 connects seven close friends.

Respondents 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, and 7 have co-workers on their friend lists, although they can be limited to close ones (1). However, interviewees 8 and 10 do not have any co-workers on the list because it is either unnecessary (8) or with the intention to separate profession from private life (10). Thus, respondent 10 only have ex-colleagues instead of the current ones. Most of the interviewees do not have customers on their lists (1, 2, 3, 5, 9), although respondent 2 would consider adding them if invitations are received. Respondent 9 does have customers on the list but regard them as personal rather than professional contacts. Only two of the interviewees have their bosses on their lists (5, 6). The boss of respondent 5 has been a close friend for many years before their working relationship was established. Respondent 6 only has the boss on the company account on Facebook but not on the personal one.

Interviewees 1, 3, 6 and 7 have to log in to Facebook for work purpose as to communicate with students on their company pages, however students are not considered as customers or clients.

3.1.4 Behaviour

The most common activity the respondents engage in is to check friends' updates, including profiles, status, and uploaded photos or videos (1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 9, 10). The second common one is to comment on friends' postings (1, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9), although respondent 7 seldom does this. Interviewees 1, 8, 9 and 10 mentioned that they update their profiles from time to time. The third common one is to update their status (1, 8, 9, 10). The rest activities are to upload photos or videos (6, 10), to chat online (9), to contact via email function (1), to communicate in private group (7, 8), to share information (8, 9), and to arrange personal activities (5, 8). Respondent 9 only posts intellectual notes and videos, because the respondent does not like meaningless postings.

Among the interviewees, 1, 6 and 8 prefer to know more about their friends instead of exposing themselves too much through status updates. Respondent 6 described this behaviour as being a “sneaky peeper”, which is due to the curiosity and desire to keep updated about others.

Although all of the respondents can access SNSs at work, interviewees 4, 5 and 10 have not experienced it. As mentioned before, interviewee 4 is not using SNSs. Respondent 5 said that SNSs do not come to mind during working hours due to the busy schedule, while respondent 10 chooses not to because it is not a proper behaviour in the workplace. The rest interviewees log in to SNSs at work (1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9). As respondent 7 mentioned, it is “like taking a break or refreshing the brain”. According to respondents 1, 2, 3 and 5, contents should be taken into consideration before posted on SNSs. Both interviewees 2 and 3 think it is improper to post work related messages, whereas interviewee 1 believes complaining about work is risky.

3.2 Personal Perception of Life and Work

This section is to understand how employees feel about their private life and work, and their views and experiences about sharing information on SNSs for work purposes.

3.2.1 The Interplay between Work and Life

A majority of the respondents think they have a good work and life balance (1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8), still respondents 9 and 10 believe work takes up most of their time. Three of the interviewees mentioned that it is difficult to separate work from private life (2, 3, 4). Respondent 3 argued that professional and personal lives are integrated into each other, and gave the example of being good friends with close colleagues. In addition, although interviewee 4 makes use of separate emails and mobile phones for professional and private issues, work is a common conversation topic out of the office.

All interviewees agree that it is important to have a good balance between life and work since they have an influence on each other. According to respondent 2 and 4, a bad

mood can be a result of a lot of work, which will affect the personal life. Further, respondent 9 argued that work expertise is the aid to maintain good relationships by solving problems within the respondent's field.

Depending on whether relationships in personal lives are good or bad, it will affect the work performance in a positive or negative way respectively (1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9). For instance, good personal relationships can enhance work performance (3, 7), as more energy and concentration can be focused on work (7). On the other hand, when people have troubles in their personal lives, they can be either distracted (6, 7) or stressed and depressed easily at work (3). Interviewee 1 thinks that positive energy from holidays and activities in spare time leads to better work performance. However, respondent 8 argued that the negative influence is stronger than the positive one.

3.2.2 Information Sharing

Most of the respondents have no experience in sharing professional knowledge on SNSs (1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10). Interviewee 8 said that either phone or email is the tool for professional knowledge sharing. The relationships with co-workers may be affected indirectly if professional knowledge is shared on SNSs because the identity at work does not match with that at home (10). Yet, Respondent 5 shares professional knowledge on forums instead of on SNSs as forums are for people to share and look for specific knowledge or information.

Many interviewees admitted that they have information sharing experience on SNSs (1, 3, 6, 8, 10). They share company news to students as their work (6), common interests and hobbies with close friends (8), or travel information (10). Although some interviewees do not have such experience (5, 7, 9), respondent 5 shares information on forums as they are mostly used by this respondent. In addition, respondent 7 would like to share or collect personal information on Facebook from now on, such as where to look for a good apartment in this city. An example is that information was gathered due to the participation in a group on Facebook before going abroad (7).

Respondents 2, 3, 8, 9, 10 believe that SNSs are useful for information sharing. People get to know what is happening to friends around the world, which is the same as updating us the news of the world (2, 10). In respondent 10's mind, it is more like knowledge sharing as the news goes from personal level on SNSs instead of from newspaper. Travel information can be offered by friends on SNSs instantly before going for a trip (3, 8), and it is more efficient than sending emails to request others (8). SNSs are replacing calling of mobile phones and texts as a means to express personal feeling and to share personal information and experience (9). Although respondent 6 has no experience of sharing information on SNSs, people's work information is collected by the respondent on LinkedIn. Therefore, information sharing on SNSs is regarded positive to work (2, 5, 9) as people can get updates of the world (2) and have an easy access to information in need, especially when no one around can provide that (5).

SNSs are also considered to have a positive impact on creativity (2, 5, 8, 9, 10) although the information overload results in the decrease of creativity (6). The communication and interaction on SNSs are easier to get insights from others (2); hence new ideas are generated (8). The imperfection of the current SNSs encourages creative thinking on new layout (9). Also, respondent 10 described the creative status updates on SNSs are to arise discussions among friends and to see their reactions for fun (10).

3.3 Professional Experience

In this part, the application or of SNSs in individual professional experience is to be explored.

3.3.1 Communication

Because of SNSs, the communication in the workplace will be changed (1, 8). Respondent 3 said that it has been changed. Respondent 8 argued that it depends on the type of SNS in use; Facebook is for personal use and will not influence the communication in the workplace, while Google Wave will. However, respondent 9 did not think that SNSs

will change workplace communication due to their functions today are no difference to the old Bulletin Board System (BBS).

Although there is an intranet for employees to communicate, it is either seldom (1) or never used (9). Respondent 1 supposed that most co-workers are not aware of the intranet even if it has the chat function; besides, Facebook can perform better than the intranet. The interviewees have professional communication through email (1, 6, 9), external IM (8, 9), Intranet (7), and Facebook (9). However, face-to-face interaction for work is still considered important (1, 3, 4, 5, 10), especially with customers (1, 5). Face-to-face communication is also of importance for personal relation (1,4), and that is why interviewee 4 does not socialize with people on the Internet.

Interviewee 3 found that the understanding of colleagues has been deeper on a personal level after the use of SNSs instead of being limited to work relation (3). Respondents 1 and 9 argued that they have known co-workers from the interaction in real life, thus SNSs do not make any difference to the relation (1, 9). The respondents think it is important to know colleagues better (1, 2, 3, 6, 9) as it will be easier to understand if they are under pressure or having difficulties (1, 2, 6). Respondent 3 said that it will let others tell you what to improve at work without being afraid to offend you. Furthermore, it is necessary to know co-workers better because performance cannot be good if we do not have a good relation with them (9). For example, an ex-colleague got help from interviewee 9 to solve a professional problem without pay for six hours on a Sunday out of friendship and the pride of expertise. The majority of the interviewees considered SNSs play the role in making colleagues closer and even to improve work performance (1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9) because they are a means of social networking to get people closer (9). Respondent 1 added that it works when people spend more time on the postings, while respondent 2 argued that the effect only limits to close friend. Because of SNSs, saying “Happy Birthday” to a colleague when finding out his/her birthday on Facebook is something new and never done before (7). SNSs are quite useful to connect co-workers, especially those we cannot meet in person often (8).

Three of the interviewees suggested building an internal site to improve internal relationship (3, 5, 8). According to respondent 3, colleagues can have more interaction if the Intranet is integrated with SNS function. It can connect co-workers in different branches (8). Interviewee 5 mentioned that employees can decide if and when they want to join the site; hence, they do not have the pressure to take part in. Further, employees can promote their ideas on the site and invite discussions. Managers can understand what are in employees' minds so that an organization can learn the need to change. Due to corporate confidential information, respondent 4 suggested an integration of Intranet and Outlook to reduce the amount of emails as well as an improvement on the Intranet to perform as a communication tool and project group establishment.

SNSs can be a useful tool to communicate with customers (1, 4, 6, 7, 8), which is as practical as communicating with students on a page on Facebook (1, 6). Companies may get to know customers on a deeper level and have better relationships (4, 7, 8) both in the short term and long term (4). Moreover, customer retaining and finding new customers can be achieved (4). Nevertheless, respondents 5 and 8 do not think they cannot be the right tool to communicate with customers although it can be efficient (5); it is better to contact customers either face-to-face (5) or via phone and email (8).

3.3.2 Problem Solving

Some of the respondents have helped friends or others to solve some problems by offering their professional experience on SNSs (1, 2, 3, 7). Respondent 1 and 3 have updated information to students on the company Facebook page, although respondent 3 is continuously doing this because of the work, whereas respondent 1 only adds comments when there is something in regard to the demographic area. Interviewee 2 said friends are often making use of the expertise. Interviewee 7 did not have the experience from it but argued that there were some times when friends had posted questions in the specific field, however, others had already answered before the respondent had the chance.

On the other hand, some of the respondents had not done this for several different reasons (1, 9, 10). Two interviewees discussed the confidentiality, as information could be very exposed on SNSs (1, 9). Respondent 1 finds Skype to be a safer place to discuss problems, whereas respondent 10 did not make use of SNSs for professional reasons at all.

Another remark was that two of the interviewees had made use of their SNS contacts to solve their own professional problems (5, 9). Respondent 5 can often get help on the web forums and found it to be good tools for solving problems as no one in the company had the same or related skills. Additionally, respondent 9 uses support forums but mentioned questions had to be reformulated to avoid exposing company information.

3.4 The Future of SNSs

In this section the future of SNSs is discussed from the interviewees' points of view.

3.4.1 To Ban or Not to Ban

A majority of interviewees agreed that companies should not ban SNSs in the workplace (1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9), however respondents 2 and 5 think that there should be a policy or some restrictions regarding the use of time (2). Interviewee 5 argued that networks are necessary for some professions but SNSs in the workplace should be used in a responsible way. The blocking of SNSs represents another problem in the organisation, such as lack of motivation (5, 8) and responsibility (1, 2, 3, 6, 7). According to respondents 6, 8, and 9, it is a bad sign to block the access as it delivers a message of distrust (8, 9); especially for the younger generation, as respondent 6 pointed out, it would be "the stupidest thing to do, because it makes the company act like a Big Brother who's watching them". Moreover, interviewee 9 said that it is never good to censor anything because it is very "counter-productive", and will hinder some employees from doing their work effectively. As long as there is an open communication channel and people work well, there is no need to ban the access (3). Accessing SNSs is like taking a break or having a cup of coffee to recover the energy (5); if companies take away the coffee machines, employees will feel distrusted, and so does a block of SNSs to em-

ployees (8). However, the freedom of accessing SNSs should not be misused or over-used in the workplace (1, 2, 6, 9). Respondent 3 argued that blocking SNSs does not make workers perform better, and respondent 7 also mentioned that it depends on the person and has nothing to do with SNSs. Organisations should be more open to SNSs because they may find SNSs useful (6, 7). SNSs enable employees to interact with people and to network (3), either with clients, co-workers or students (6). Respondent 6 further claimed that companies “have to go with the flow” since SNSs are growing fast and cannot be controlled.

On the contrary, respondent 10 believes SNSs should be banned in the workplace because of the possibility of reduced productivity and the risk of security issues. It was further proposed that companies could make use of a policy in which the employees are able to access the sites for an hour every day.

All but respondent 10 think that it is better to work for an organisation which allows SNSs; however, interviewee 1 will not prioritise job opportunities due to this reason. It is important to build networks with colleagues in order to influence one another (2). Besides, people find their value in networks, fulfil the need to network with others (2), and have the freedom of speech (2, 6). Interviewee 9 argued that in order to get the information needed to get the job done, people will always find a way around to break through the company system if SNSs are banned. Companies which allow SNSs express trust to their employees (3, 5, 6, 8, 9). It should be mutual (9) as people become more responsible and are glad to take on more duties (8). Respondent 8 pointed out that “if you are a decent person, you make the best out of that trust”. On the other hand, setting a lot of restrictions in the workplace can lead to less productivity and employees’ reluctance as it is a sign of distrust (8). An example given was the former employer of respondent 8 who regulated everything in the workplace which made the employees dissatisfied; this resulted in the behaviours of lying about taking a sick leave and destroying organisational belongings. Employees feel trusted if they have the freedom to access SNSs (5) and can speak freely (6). Respondent 6 added that it is important to communicate with

employees as it is easy to overuse SNSs. Only companies with the right mindset can win employees' hearts (8).

3.4.2 The Role to Companies

All of the respondents reckon that SNSs will play an important role to companies in the future. The younger generation tend to be more social and comfortable to use SNSs, and they rely on the online interaction more than others (2, 4). Since more and more people from the younger generation are going to enter the workplace, being open to SNSs is essential to communicate with the youth as well as to attract young talents (2). Furthermore, when the younger generation "climb the ladder", they will take SNSs as a natural tool of communication with clients, like making phone calls (4). Companies should be open and promote SNSs (7), as they will be as popular as mobile phones in the future (3).

In the future, companies can make use of SNSs for marketing/social media (1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8), internal relationship improvement (5, 7, 8, 9), competitiveness (2, 7), acquiring information (3, 7), business opportunities (3, 7), recruitment (4, 7), and relationship maintenance with former employees (10). Due to SNSs, companies can communicate with people in an open way (7); for example, the transparency on SNSs enables the efficiency of spreading information to students as well as marketing and promoting the company (4, 7). Companies can use SNSs to get closer to customers as they can access people with ease and have a modern channel to communicate and exchange information with them (7). Young companies have already started (5), and SNSs will be more important for newly established firms to promote their new products (1).

Even though respondent 9 thinks SNSs are more for personal purpose, their increasing growth will result in the replacement of intranets. SNSs can improve the relationships with co-workers (5, 7, 8), especially for international organisations (5). Interviewee 5 suggested that SNSs or Skype can be used for long-distance meetings. However, it must

be initiated by the employees to improve the relationships through SNSs in the workplace, and not by the company management (8).

Respondent 7 also mentioned that SNSs provide the means to evaluate the business risk of a new customer from collecting comments on the sites, to find out where customers are, as well as to obtain future employees. Also, interviewee 10 said that companies can make use of SNSs by maintaining the relationships with former employees to expand the organisational networks.

3.5 Negative opinions about SNSs

This section is to represent the transparency in the study. Although the purpose is to understand employees' perceived benefits, the negative aspects are shown to increase the validity. However, this is not a focus in this research and will not be discussed in the analysis.

SNSs may have bad influence on people if personal and professional purposes cannot be separated well (2). In addition, they take away a part of our lives if we spend much time on the sites instead of interacting with people physically (10). For example, Facebook is time consuming (4) as there are too much information (5) and meaningless applications (5, 9), and it is hard to navigate (9). Respondent 6 claims it is easy to get addicted to Facebook.

Since information is overloaded on SNSs (6), not all of the information is correct (5). Therefore, misunderstanding can occur by incorrect information (5) or negative postings (6). Moreover, colleagues can misunderstand co-workers' jokes with close friends or be too curious about others' private lives (2). There might also be misunderstandings due to cultural and age differences (10). Interviewee 10 added that the boss may not get the full understanding when interacting with employees online.

In addition to the distraction from work due to the SNSs overuse in the workplace (4, 5, 7, 10), security is also an issue to be taken into account as much of corporate information is confidential (4, 10).

4 Frame of Reference

In this chapter, the first two sections play an introductory role to the later four sections as they explain the background of the researched SNS phenomenon. The later four sections are developed according to the results of empirical findings.

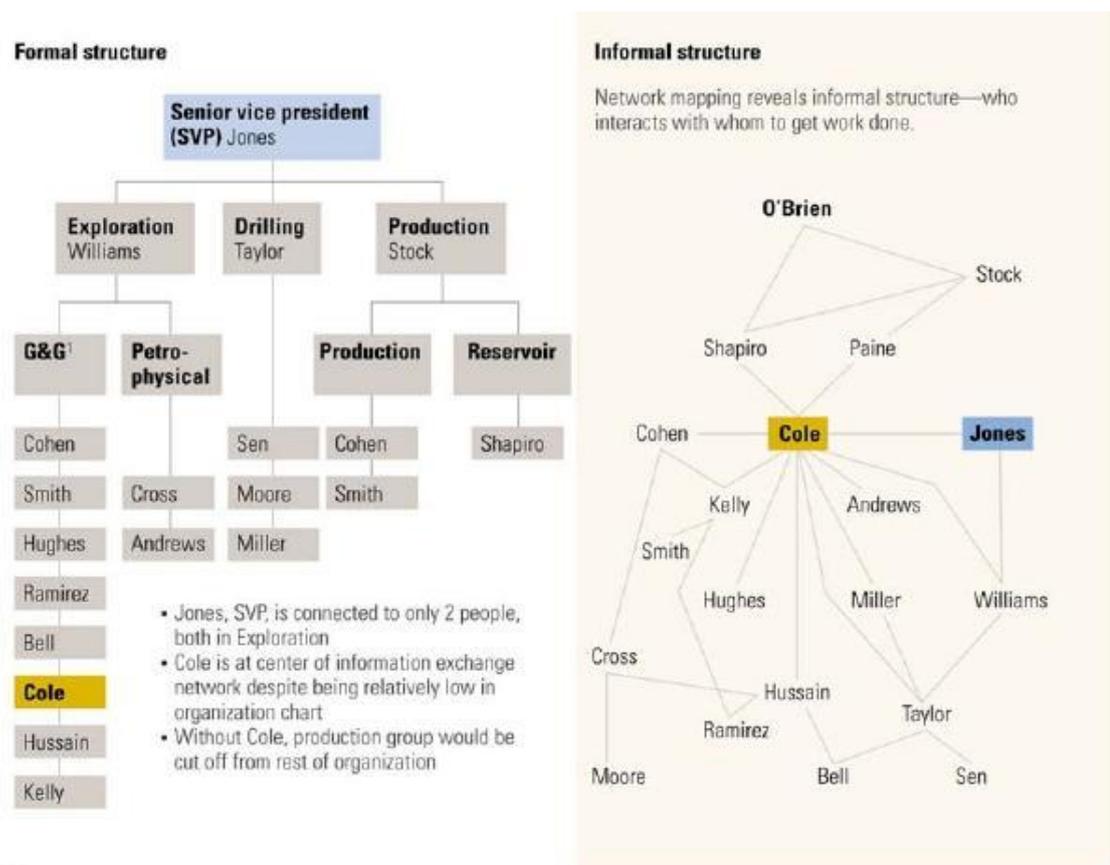
4.1 Social Networks

A network, as Barney (2004) puts it, is a structure of nodes which interconnect to one another by ties. Its existence arises from the ties among the nodes and the connection through the ties to other nodes. What a node is depends on the type of networks they are (Castells, 2010). A node can be a person, a computer, an organization, a city, and so on. When the ties between nodes are built by social relationships, it forms a social network. As Duncan Watts (1999) addresses, the formation of “small worlds” is the widespread set of connections, in nature and in society, between elements which are in fact related by a short chain of intermediaries no matter if they communicate directly or not (Castells, 2010). In other words, “networks are people talking to each other, sharing ideas, information, and resources. The point is often made that networking is a verb, not a noun.” (Naisbitt, 1984, p.215)

Humans are social animals; social networking plays an important role to our lives. Networks can be used for personal satisfaction, door opening, career guidance, problem solving, and learning. Social networks can bring personal and professional success, hence, to realize our dreams (Dulworth, 2007). Dulworth’s argument is in accordance with John Naisbitt’s (1982) explanation, that is, networks exist to foster self-help, to exchange information and share resources, to change society, and to be more effective (cited in Fisher & Vilas, 1999). The way of information transmission is quicker, more high-touch, and more energy-efficient than any other process we know. People can find support, information, and resources and communicate within networks. By interacting and supporting one another, the synergistic effect produces action which leads to results. It is due to the power of networking. (Fisher & Vilas, 1999) The connections between people can be strong or weak ties depending on the kind of relationship preferred and established. Weak ties are those relationships in which we do not actively commu-

nicate but rather use to educate ourselves, whereas the strong relationships are related to those we communicate with on a regular basis. (PsychCentral, 2009) The ability to use networks to open doors to access more people, more information, and more resources is important for virtually anything we need to do in our personal and professional life (Dulworth, 2007). To conclude, networks can enhance our productivity, learning, and success in our career life as well (Cross & Parker, 2004).

In a professional setting, social networks are usually referred as informal networks. The invisible informal web is completely different from an organizational chart which is formed by hierarchies to illustrate the responsibilities and channels of communication (Shirky, 2008). The structures, as cited in Bryan, Matson and Weiss' (2007) article, can be illustrated as below:



¹Geological and geophysical.

Source: Robert L. Cross and Andrew Parker, *The Hidden Power of Social Networks*, Boston: HBS Press, 2004

The value of collaboration is increased by personal social networks, both inside and outside of companies, because the costs of the search and coordination are reduced by connecting the parties who have the related knowledge and interests to share. Those

networks are not represented on the organizational chart (Bryan, Matson & Weiss, 2007). Informal networks are regarded as an essential device for promoting communication, integration, flexibility, and novelty, within and between organizations (Conway, 2001).

4.2 Technology Evolution and Social Networking Sites

With the development of new technology, instant access to information, ideas, and people is brought closer. It is viewed that technology will only accelerate our ability to network. (Dulworth, 2007) Computer mediated communication (CMC), proposed by Susan Herring (1996), means communication which occurs among humans by means of computers (cited in Thurlow, Lengel, & Tomic, 2004; cited in Panteli, 2009). The first and still existing instance of CMC is electronic mail (email) which rose in 1984 (Tannenbaum, 1989). What was following, “from 1995 to 1997, ICQ and AOL Instant Messenger were released, use of commercial phone-based text messaging ramped up, text messaging web portals emerged, and Classmates.com and Six Degrees appeared.” (Skeels & Grudin, 2009, p. 95) SixDegrees.com launched in 1997 was recognized as the first social networking site, which allowed users to create profiles, list their Friends and, further, surf their Friends’ lists. Many new SNSs were launched from 2003. (Boyd & Ellison, 2007)

4.2.1 Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC)

The rise of Internet creates social spaces in the Web. Cyberspace, preferred to be named cyber society by CMC scholar Steven Jones (1995), is a term which describes better “the way that communication mediated by the Internet is all about social life: people, interactions, relationships, identities and communities.” (cited in Thurlow et al., 2004, p.29) In a CMC context, people exchange not only personal but also work-related information; its relations include sending a data file, sharing a computer program, providing emotional support, and arranging a meeting (Garton, Haythornthwaite, & Wellman, 1999). CMC is used as a means of reinforcing and enhancing people’s existing network, and sometimes it can be used to extend their social networks and make new friends as well (Thurlow et al., 2004).

4.2.2 Online Community

CMC has originated a variety of online communities (Castells, 2010). According to Fernback and Thompson's (1995) definition, online community is "social relationships forged in cyberspace through repeated contact within a specified boundary or place that is symbolically delineated by topic of interest" (cited in Panteli, 2009, p. 6). Millions of online communities are on the Internet, and people who participate in them have the same goals, find information, make new friends, or have fun (Preece, 2000). Those communities exist in the Internet environment, allowing their members to interact through CMC. Hence, they offer the opportunities for people to exchange information, to develop relationships, and to have business with others in spite of the geographical spread. (Panteli, 2009)

There are two diverse opinions about online communities. The findings from a research conducted by Carnegie Mellon University, between 1995 and 1996, showed that the great use of Internet was associated with significant declines of social involvement and increases in loneliness and depression (Kraut, Patterson, Lundmark, Kiesler, Mukhopadhyay, & Scherlis, 1998, cited in Preece, 2000, cited in Castells, 2010). On the other hand, it is claimed that the Internet can lead to new better social relationships, where people communicate across geographical and social boundaries, and create new friendships and communities based on their shared interests and concerns (Thurlow et al., 2004). After all, the Internet is regarded by many participants as an easier way to communicate with friends and family. Online communities enable meaningful communication among people who are separated by distance, time, and even culture. (Preece, 2000) Moreover, in some of the networks which Wellman and his collaborators have studied, more Internet use results in more social ties, including physical ties (Castells, 2010). Castells (2010) holds the belief that online communities are booming "not as a virtual world, but as a real virtuality integrated with other forms of interaction in an increasingly hybridized everyday life." (Castells, 2010, p. xxix)

4.2.3 Social Networking Sites

Social networking sites are the websites used for creating and maintaining social inter-

actions to connect geographically dispersed individuals around the globe. They have become an important means for interacting in today's world. (Panteli, 2009) What makes SNSs unique is that users' social networks are represented visible. On many big SNSs, it is not the goal to meet new people but to communicate with those who are already in the participants' extended social networks. (Boyd & Ellison, 2007) Panteli (2009) states that individuals may be excluded from the virtual social network and then from the digital society when they do not either have access or understanding of how such technology functions. Nonetheless, as soon as they can gain access to the media, the opportunities of networking for personal as well as professional reasons are unlimited.

Preece (2000) asserts it is the advent of technologies, like better transport, the telephone, email and CMC that enhances people to spread out to new geographical locations. This results in the need of long-distance support for family relationships and friendships. Consequently, online social networking plays an important role today and the dependence on locally based relationships is getting less compared to fifty years ago. SNSs offer different technological features to meet a wide range of interests and practices. Though these key technological features are consistent, the cultures that emerge around SNSs are varied. (Kreps & Pearson, 2009) Some SNSs are listed below as examples.

- *MySpace* is a youth-oriented SNS. Teenagers share photos and news about music groups and profiles of their likes and dislikes (Knowledge@Wharton, 2006). It provides the space for interaction between bands and fans (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).
- *Facebook* has grown from being a focused college community in the United States into an international community where you can find Facebook is many people's very first experience of online social networking (Kreps & Pearson, 2009).
- *LinkedIn* targets professional use (Skeels & Grudin, 2009; Knowledge@Wharton, 2006; Kreps & Pearson, 2009). It is designed to connect business professionals and enable them to share information, search for vendors or customers, and promote themselves and their businesses (Butow & Taylor, 2009).
- *Orkut* is popular in Brazil and India (Skeels & Grudin, 2009; Madhavan,

2007, cited in Boyd & Ellison, 2007), but is hardly known in the US (Knowledge@Wharton, 2006; Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

- *Blogs*, consisted of frequently updated postings of reversed chronologically, is more like an online diary (Thurlow et al., 2004). They have become “the most popular online personal publishing platform on the internet.” (Brady, 2005, p. 4)
- *Microblog* is another form of blog which is more like current status updates with short texts in an information stream (Makice, 2009; Java, Song, Finin, & Tseng, 2007). Twitter is the most well-known example.

SNSs have attracted millions of users and integrated into many of their daily practices. They differ from the past online communities by structuring on personal networks – placing the individuals in the centre of the communities (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Most sites support users to maintain pre-existing social networks, but others connect strangers based on shared interests, views, or activities. Some sites are appealing to diverse audience, while others are to specific racial, regional, or language identities. (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Kreps & Pearson, 2009) As Preece (2000) puts it, there are many different online communities, just as various face-to-face ones. SNSs are to support strong and multiple ties as well as to extend the social networks by connecting with more people than before (Thurlow et al., 2004). From looser affiliations with less connectivity to close relationships, both types of online friendships exist on SNSs; both of them are useful (Nauert, 2009). Wellman and Gulia (1999) claim that current research showed that most of the friends on SNSs are weak ties; weak ties are critical “sources of information, support, companionship and sense of belonging.” (p. 350; cited in Castells, 2010, p. 389) No matter how these relationships are, they are integrated into our offline relationships in various ways (Preece, 2000).

4.3 The Impact of Internet on Our Lives

4.3.1 The Online Identity

4.3.1.1 Who is Online?

Today Internet is not identified with a specific person, as was the case in its beginning. First out were young white American men, from the middle class and with university degrees who dominated the use. Nowadays, most people have access to Internet daily in some form, either at home, work, school or cafés (Wellman & Haythornthwaite, 2002). In the end of 2009, 89% of the Swedish population used Internet – up from 41% in 1999 – which is one of the highest in the world (Internet World Stats, 2009; Wellman & Haythornthwaite, 2002). However, the digital divide which separated not only country access but also nationality, gender, age, profession and so on has significantly changed, but there are still big parts of the world population which cannot access Internet for several reasons (Wellman & Haythornthwaite, 2002).

Among Internet users there are mostly young people with a small difference between gender, in which guys use it slightly more than girls (Küng, Picard & Towse, 2008). The older population's use is growing fast, however the usage is still irregular (Wellman & Haythornthwaite, 2002). In a study, the use of SNSs shows that the largest growth comes from the people over 50 years old. Though, it is not only the older population using the SNSs more frequently but all Internet users. There are as many as two thirds of the total Internet population are using SNSs (Nielsen Report, 2009).

The largest and most significant difference in access and use is related to the years of experience. Those who have been online for a longer period of time, spend more of their time online every day, and are likely to be online not only daily but for longer hours. Those people engage in more kinds of activities online (Wellman, 2002 & Haythornthwaite; Küng et al., 2008). Wellman and Haythornthwaite (2002, p. 18) discuss that, “awareness is the initial stage in individual adoption of an innovation, and thus a prerequisite for adoption”.

4.3.1.2 What do they do?

In a research made by UCLA CCP in 2000, email and searching for information had the highest priority online. As much as 80% used Internet for email purposes, showing the reason for Internet is not only technological but mostly communicational. Surfing and browsing came second, in which people could find information about their hobbies, travels, sports, news and product information.(cited in Wellman & Haythornthwaite, 2002) Küng, Picard and Towse (2008, p. 94) state that Internet is a preferred medium, used for “email, getting news, checking the weather and doing job-related researches”.

Today, there has been a shift in the use of Internet, and the email has been overtaken by many SNSs, which are counted as the fourth most popular engagement after “search, portals and PC software applications” (Nielsen Report, 2009, p.2).

Internet users are often very active, looking for specific information to satisfy their particular and concrete needs. Being a user, a person does not only use the Internet but also play, search, surf and navigate it. Thus, there is almost an obligation to be engaged in the activity. Internet not only is used as an information and entertainment source, but also engage people in personal communication, a so-called social platform. (Küng et al., 2008) When people enter the Internet world they are often drawn to the communities in which they can find information, connect with new people and interact, and have fun (Nonnecke & Preece, 1999, cited in Preece, 2000). The more clearly stated the goals of the communities, the better the connectivity between users, as people can meet like-minded friends (Preece, 2000).

4.3.2 The Online Everyday Life

4.3.2.1 Personal

Today people use the Internet as a means to keep themselves updated and non-users state this as the main reason for becoming an Internet user. Further, the society has shifted from a group-based to a networked society, where people are trying to extend their connections, not only in real life but also online. As a result, people who add

online activities to their daily life require redistributing their limited personal resources of time and effort. (Wellman & Haythornthwaite, 2002) According to a study by Nie and Erbring (2000), using the Internet for more than 5 hours a week changes individuals' lives significantly, as other activities are being replaced (cited in Wellman & Haythornthwaite, 2002). An example of this is people exchanging their friends from face-to-face to online friends, or replacing the phone with email or other means. This means they have to take time from their real world activities in order to communicate online, which may compromise their individual wellbeing (Kraut et al., 1998, cited in Wellman & Haythornthwaite, 2002).

As an example of how Internet are changing people's lives is a study which shows that users spend 28% less time watching television than non-users. The more time people spend online the more they cut back on the use of other traditional media (television, newspaper, phone to friends and family), as well as other activities such as shopping in stores (Nie & Erbring, 2000, cited in Wellman & Haythornthwaite, 2002). At the same time, as the use of Internet increases the more time people spend on SNSs. In 2008, one in eleven minutes on Internet was spent on 'Member Communities' (includes SNSs and blogging websites) and it is increasing fast (Nielsen Report, 2009). According to Robinson, Kestnbaum, Neustadt, and Alvarez, "Internet users show a more active lifestyle than non-users, including less sleep, and more social contact with friends and co-workers (although less time with their children)" (cited in Wellman & Haythornthwaite, 2002, p. 23).

Sitting by the computer alone does not necessarily mean being alone, as using the Internet enhances the communication with others, compared to those watching television (Wellman & Haythornthwaite, 2002). According to Katz and Rice, there is little impact on time spent with friends and family. Instead, they found that we communicate more with some friends and family and that the Internet is used to enhance people's social relations, no matter where they are located (cited in Wellman & Haythornthwaite, 2002). On the other hand, Nie and Erbring (2000) found that spending more time online decreases the social interaction with friends and family. One explanation for this was that the impact of decreased face-to-face interaction could be seen mostly by those using Internet often (cited in Wellman & Haythornthwaite, 2002).

People are drawn to the online activities for many reasons. Some people want to find information, while others want to connect and interact with like-minded people. (Nonnecke & Preece, 1999, cited in Preece, 2000) On the other hand, there are those who only observe what others do; they do not participate in the discussions and so on. These people are so-called “lurkers” as they lurk around reading other people’s conversations and blogs without commenting (Nonnecke, 2000, cited in Preece, 2000, p.87). As an effect of the more activities, people spend more and more time online, especially on SNSs. The use of Facebook exploded with a 566 percent change in minutes spent on the page from 2007 to 2008, whereas the total growth of online minutes was 18% globally in the same period. Other sectors increasing are Videos and Online Games. (Nielsen Report, 2009)

No matter what reasons people have for being online, what can be seen is that new technologies are used to make everyday activities more efficient, more convenient, or just more fun (Kraut, Brynin & Kiesler, 2006).

4.3.2.2 Professional

In today’s society, some people are working longer and longer hours resulting in the choice to bring their work home as they can do their work online. Further, people bring their work home in order to be able to spend more time with their families as it is easier to be flexible by using the Internet as a work platform. (Wellman & Haythornthwaite, 2002) As a result, the difference between work space and home space gets blurry because there is nothing specifying whether the person is working or not. Consequently, the personal life might be affected because the technologies increase the availability of an employee to more or less 100 percent. Many employers expect their employees to be online 24/7 in order to answer emails or calls. (Duck & McMahan, 2010)

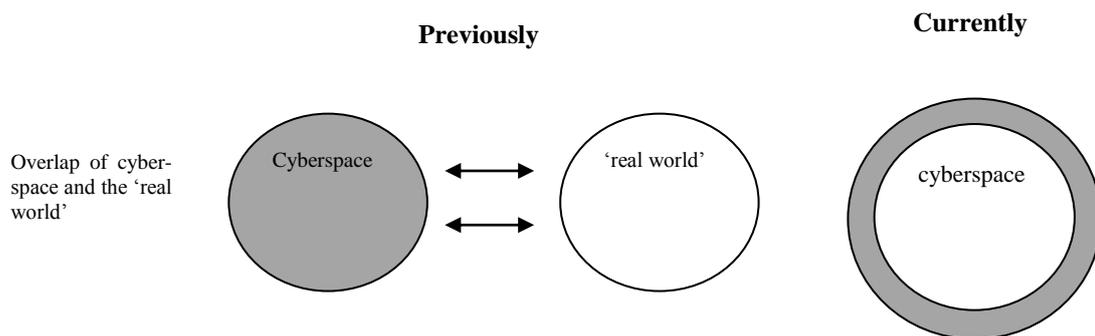
Bringing work home could also mean bringing work problems home, which affects the relationships with family and friends. On the other hand, employees may bring their personal problems to work, which can have a negative impact on their work performance (Duck & McMahan, 2010). Totten (2006) argues that bringing work home results

in a difficulty of separating the roles of personal and professional lives as people have to choose between doing the work or being a good parent (cited in Duck & McMahan, 2010).

Another aspect of the online professional life lies in the activities employees perform during working hours. Employers expect their employees to keep certain information within the company walls, just as they expect them not to steal from them (Duck & McMahan, 2010). Further, they trust their employees in doing their work and not spending their time playing Internet games (Zweig & Webster, 2002, cited in Duck & McMahan, 2010). However, this issue is not as easily detected, as would theft, and relates to privacy and trust between the employer and its employees (Zweig, 2005, cited in Duck & McMahan, 2010).

4.3.3 Overlap between Cyberspace and the Real World

In today's society there is an overlap between cyberspace and the real world, which means it is hard to tell what is real and what online activities are. Moreover, the Internet is often viewed as separate from people's lives; therefore, it is an add-on which interferes with the real life activities pursued by people. (Thurlow, Lengel & Tomic, 2004) Below is a figure showing the influence the cyberspace has on the real world compared to the early Internet era (Thurlow et al., 2004, p. 30).



Rheingold (1994) discusses some of the activities which people engage in when entering the cyberspace and came to the conclusion that:

“In cyberspace, we chat and argue, engage in intellectual discourse, perform acts of commerce, exchange knowledge, share emotional support, make plans, brain-

storm, gossip, feud, fall in love, find friends and lose them, play games and meta-games, flirt... We do everything people do when people get together, but we do it with words on computer screens, leaving our bodies behind. ... our identities con-ingle and interact electronically, independent of local time or location” (p. 58, cited in Preece, 2000, p.11).

4.4 Communication

Interpersonal communication usually occurs face-to-face, like talking to classmates in school, interacting with friends or family over a meal, or discussing work with colleagues in the office. All modes of communication represent your reliance on your connections with others and the distribution of information (Duck & McMahan, 2010). In addition to those interactions, conversations take place on the Internet as well. CMC is a vital part of a personal and social communication tool in our current lives. (DeVito, 2009) Naisbitt (1984) points out, human interaction will be increasingly in need due to more and more technology infused into our workplaces; networks can fulfil the requirement. Part of the significance of the network is to form the linkages between individuals and groups of people via communication. Preece (2000) contends that although communication online cannot substitute for real human interaction, people who are not physically close due to the distance, time, or culture can communicate more effectively in online communities. Network convergence takes place while interpersonal relationships develop in the Internet; that is to say, people share their correspondence network with each other when the development of relationships between two persons start (Parks, 1995; Parks & Floyd, 1996, cited in DeVito, 2009). The Internet both expands and strengthens the numerous weak ties which act as the essential phase of social interaction in a technological world (Castells, 2010). Boase, Horrigan, Wellman, & Rainie (2006) state that online communication can enable the maintenance of existing relationships as well as the creation of new relationships; at the same time, it is changing social networks significantly (cited in Duck and McMahan, 2010). Online communication is seen as common as face-to-face communication, especially younger generations who engage in online interactions with quality communication more frequently (Duck & McMahan, 2010). Among all types of online communication, “SNS enables lightweight communication without interrupting.” (Skeels and Grudin, 2009, p. 99)

Formal and informal communications both take place in organizational settings (DeVito, 2009). Formality and hierarchy are expected in a business conversation (Duck & McMahan, 2010). As Naisbitt (1984) points out, due to the entrance of technology into our society, people tend to get more annoyed by the cold and unfriendly characteristics of “bureaucratic hierarchy”. He claims that people need more high-touch and more personal interaction so that we can respond to the future technology into our existing “impersonal hierarchy” (p. 213). Stacey (1996) explains that the rise of informal organization is from two primary “failings of bureaucratic control: firstly, the subordination of individuality, and the alienating and de-motivating nature of bureaucracy; and secondly, the inability of the bureaucratic structure to handle environmental ambiguity and uncertainty.” (cited in Conway, 2001, p. 94) Within an organization, the problems usually result from the failure of communication to employees appropriately. Employees may reject or resist management and instructions (Mumby, 2006, cited in Duck & McMahan, 2010) by means of speech or behaviour to show their disdain for the management. (Duck & McMahan, 2010) Therefore, Krackhardt and Hanson (1993) propose that managers will need to take the major responsibility to leverage informal networks as organizations discard the pyramid and head toward flatter structures. They will depend more on the actors in their informal networks than on “authority inherent in their title”; in sum, “understanding relationships will be the key to managerial success”. (p. 111, cited in Conway, 2001, p. 114)

Good communication or good working relationships is believed as the cure-all for organizational troubles and the starting point for organizational success (Duck & McMahan, 2010). According to the research conducted by Skeels and Grudin (2009), informal networks enhance the development of coherence among colleagues by having some interests in common. People can find a more effective way to communicate and be more productive at work when they know someone better. On the other hand, an informal organization is regarded as the mechanism “to satisfy social and motivational need...and as the tool to promote innovation and change”. (Stacey, 1996, p. 341, cited in Conway, 2001, p. 95) After all, hierarchies create pressure and tension, whereas individuals are empowered by networking and producing stress, tension, and anxiety. Net-

working empowers the individual, and people in networks are inclined to care for one another (Naisbitt, 1984). Firms can make use of personal networks to tackle uncertainties as those relations perform “a high quality of communication” (Parker, 2004, p. 46).

4.5 Knowledge Sharing / Information Exchange

It is a human inherent social phenomenon to exchange information (Haythornthwaite & Wellman, 1998). Monge, Cozzens, and Contractors (1992) claim that the ability to exchange information effectively is a very powerful predictor of creativity as it is a source of potential innovation in the business environment (cited in Ziebro & Northcraft, 2009).

Castells (2010) mentions, “information circulates through networks: networks between companies, networks within companies, personal networks, and computer networks.” (p. 177) That is, as Naisbitt (1984) points out, one of the attraction in networking. A network can amplify one’s ability to respond well to new challenges when the person knows who the expert is to seek for information (Cross & Cummings, 2004). Individuals benefit from the awareness of the resources in their professional or personal networks (Dulworth, 2007). On the other hand, as many companies experience the fast turnover, it is important to find ways to help people get better connected in order to obtain the benefits of their expertise more effectively (Cross, Parker, Prusak, & Borgatti, 2001) Conway (2001) asserts that informal networks can complement, reinforce and even add value to the formal organization. Informal ties are widespread; they cultivate a wide range of information-exchange relations (Haythornthwaite & Wellman, 1998). However, there may be a contradiction to the formal system, as Burns and Flam (1987) put it, when participants bring the social rule systems from external relationships and network to the formal organization (cited in Conway, 2001). Conway (2001) declares that such behaviour is not in accordance with the economic interests of the employers. This leads to managerial concern of “the sourcing and acquisition of information and know-how” provided by informal boundary-spanning activity as well as the information leakage resulted from personal objectives. (Conway, 2001, p. 99)

Knowledge as an intangible asset to a firm is regarded as “the most important resource, and learning the most important process” (Lundvall, 1992, cited in Parker & Vaidya, 2001, p. 139). It is believed that “norms, values, tacit knowledge, trust and face-to-face interaction were seen as playing a key role in the formation of innovation networks.” (Polanyi, 1958; Saxenian, 1991, cited in Grundmann, 2001, p. 267) Tacit knowledge is difficult to transfer or copy since it can hardly be articulated but is by means of social interactions like personal and informal communications (Polanyi, 1996, cited in Parker & Vaidya, 2001). Therefore, networks can act beyond the “transfer of data to the creation and exchange of knowledge.” (Naisbitt, 1984, p. 217)

In a knowledge economy, innovation as the organizational ability to enlarge and extend its sources from knowledge is the crucial base of the company (Castells, 2010). Within a network, the main potential source of knowledge and information comes from weak ties (Granovetter, 1973, cited from Jones, Conway & Steward, 2001). Weak ties can offer access to a broader range of thoughts and avoid the information redundancy (Burt, 1997; Granovetter, 1973, 1982; Ibarra & Andrews, 1993, cited in Perry-Smith & Shalley, 2003). What is more, weak ties open up the new areas to different expertise. Strong ties, on the contrary, block the way to obtain knowledge sources and innovative ideas. (Jones, Conway & Steward, 2001) Information flow in a strong-tied network is usually redundant due to the lack of diversity and dissimilarity (Perry-Smith & Shalley, 2003).

Kim and Lee (2006) affirm that creativity has played a growing major role in an organizational capability to both develop and sustain its competitive advantage in today’s economy (cited in Ziebro & Northcraft, 2009). Creativity is mostly defined as “the product of the combination of two or more ideas in a unique manner, resulting in the creation of a singular idea that is both novel and appropriate.” (Hargadon, 2003; Amabile, 1996, cited in Ziebro & Northcraft, 2009, p. 136) From a social view, it is asserted that creativity can be enhanced by the communication of thoughts and information (Amabile, 1988, 1996; Kanter, 1988; Woodman et al., 1993, cited in Perry-Smith & Shalley, 2003); namely, we can see a different world from another angle through com-

munication and interaction with others (Ziebro & Northcraft, 2009). Each person in a network receives new information from others; consequently, he or she synthesizes and utilizes it and proposes new ideas (Naisbitt, 1984). Perry-Smith and Shalley (2003) state that by means of the connections with diverse associates, within or external to the organization, creativity-related skills are expected to be improved. Ziebro and Northcraft (2009) claim that the flow of information within the same domain leads to “*incremental developments*”, whereas information transferred across domains “can spark *radical creativity*” due to the production of brand new ideas. (p. 143) Though people may feel more comfortable sharing information with stronger relationships where trust and sincerity exist, creativity-relevant information is more effectively exchanged and generated via weaker ties (Perry-Smith & Shalley, 2003). Strong ties may be positive and supply social support to creativity (Isen, Daubman, & Nowicki, 1987; Madjar, Oldham, & Pratt, 2002, cited in Zhou, Shin, Brass, Choi, & Zhang, 2009); however, the homophily and the strain of conformity may prohibit creativity (Zhou et al., 2009). As a result, the more weak ties, the more sources of novel ideas; hence, the likelihood of creativity is increased (Campbell, 1960; Simonton, 1999, cited in Zhou et al., 2009). By being actively in search of connection with people who are “outside of an industry or domain that you belong to is a vital component to being able to bring in new thinking that ultimately is going to drive innovation.” (J. Zapolski, interview, cited in Dulworth, 2007)

4.6 Trust and Motivation

4.6.1 Trust

“Trust is the positive expectation a person has for another person, organization, tool, or process that is based on past performance and truthful future guarantees made by a responsible person or organization”

(Shneiderman, 2000, cited in Preece 2000, p. 192).

According to Figallo (1998), trust must be earned (cited in Preece 2000). From another point of view, if a person or company fails people’s expectations, they are likely to lose their trust in them (Preece, 2000).

As mentioned in the section The Impact of Internet on Our Lives, organizations expect their employees not to steal from them because this not only fails their trust but is a misuse of the resources held by the employees (Zweig, 2005, cited in Duck & McMahan, 2010). Zweig and Webster (2002) discuss that employees are expected not to use their computer for non-working activities, a view which comes not only from employers but also from co-workers (cited in Duck & McMahan, 2010). According to Duck and McMahan (2010), employees understand and accept that their organizations keep track on what they are doing; however, it must be under those circumstances in which the employees know they are being watched. On the other hand, this might cause a feeling, where the employees feel exposed and unworthy of the trust of their employers (Küng, Picard & Towse, 2008).

In the matter of trust and change, employees are more likely to trust their management if they justify a change. The more credible the reason for the change is, as well as how legitimate it is, the easier it is for employees to trust the management to make a sound decision.(Porter et al., 2003)

4.6.2 Motivation

According to Maslow (1971), “human nature includes the need for meaningful work, for responsibility, for creativeness, for being fair and just, for doing what is worthwhile, and for *preferring to do it well*” (cited in Frager, Fadiman, McReynolds & Cox, 1987, p.256).

Individuals have needs which they want to pursue, and the activities people are attempting are those which motivate the individuals to continue pursuing them until they are satisfied. When one need is satisfied, people will move on to the next until they reach a state of self-actualization. One step of the *Hierarchy of Needs* is belongingness, which relates to people’s needs to be accepted and the desire for friendship and love. In order

to satisfy this need within organisations, employees can make use of frequent interaction with co-workers.(Maslow, 1954, cited in Porter, Bigley & Steers, 2003)

Maslow further developed some preconditions which organisations need to function, such as assuming that people have an impulse to achieve, to work well and not to waste time, and that they want to do a good job; to assume that people are trustworthy and have a tendency to identify with the world to gain values, such as truth and justice (Maslow, 1965, cited in Frager et al., 1987). Moreover, “when individuals believe they are being treated fairly, they tend to exhibit higher levels of job performance and more organizational citizenship behavior” (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001, cited in Porter et al., 2003, p.82).

When it comes to job attitudes, people constantly appraise their work situation. If there is a change in the work situation, the attitudes of people are adjusted either in a positive or negative way which depends on the kind of change and how sensitive they are about it (Porter et al., 2003).

Additionally, in a trend dynamics analysis carried out by Manpower Inc. (Jan 2010b), the company found there have been changes in the demographics, customer sophistication, individual choice and technological revolution. In the individual choice, Manpower argues that companies must enhance their understanding of individuals’ motivations and work preferences as there is a shift to “one size fits one” in how to attract, engage and retain talented employees (p.3). Further, the employees will have a greater responsibility to develop their careers.

In another study made by Manpower Inc. (Jan 2010c), company success is discussed to be obtained by keeping employees both intellectually and emotionally engaged in different work tasks. Moreover, communication through SNSs (in the study referred to as Social Media) can be used to enhance the knowledge about a company’s mission and vision, and also give employees the chance to keep in touch and feel connected to each

other. It is further discussed that the young generation entering the workplace will demand to use the tools that they have been using so far, for both personal and work communication purposes.

5 Analysis

In this chapter, the empirical findings were applied to find connections with the theory. Four benefits to employees, which influence organisations in a positive way either directly or indirectly, were developed.

5.1 Improved Lives

Even though the purpose is to reflect the benefits in the workplace, the researchers found that personal life is influencing the professional life and will therefore also be mentioned in this section.

5.1.1 Personal

SNSs are the 4th most popular engagement online and used by as many as two thirds of the total Internet population (Nielsen Report, 2009). Mostly on the sites are the younger generation, however there is a growth in the market of people at the age above 50 (Küng et al., 2008; Wellman & Haythornthwaite, 2002; Nielsen Report, 2009). All but one interviewees are using SNSs today though respondent 4 did use them a couple of years ago. Most of the respondents have been members for over 2 years (2, 3, 6, 7, 8 on Facebook, and 1 on LinkedIn) and are using the sites daily (2, 6, 7, 8, 9). Wellman and Haythornthwaite (2002) as well as Küng et al. (2008) argue that experience of access and use have an influence on the activities people pursue; the more frequent users, the more activities they engage in online. Interviewees 2, 3, and 7 think SNSs enable people to network, share interests and meet new people; moreover, respondents 1 and 10 believe SNSs are great tools to connect people all over the world. Nonnecke and Preece (1999) claim that people are drawn to the Internet as it allows people to search for and find information, to connect and interact with new people, as well as having fun (cited in Preece, 2000). Further, Preece (2000) points out that it lets people meet like-minded friends; also mentioned by interviewee 5, who uses forums to connect people with the same interests.

The frequent engagement in online activities shows that most of the interviewees are active users of both the Internet and SNSs. Everyone, except respondent 4, uses Facebook

to communicate on a personal level. Respondent 9 points out that SNSs are means of social networking, which Küng et al. (2008) mention as social platforms in which people engage in personal communication. A study by UCLA CCP (2000) describes Internet works not only as technological but also as communicational. Hence, there is a shift from using Internet in general and SNSs especially as a technological tool, to a world where it is integrated into our lives. Thurlow et al. (2004) describes this influence of technology on our lives as an overlap between cyberspace and real life. People today are not only meeting face-to-face and interact but also let their identities “comingle and interact electronically” (p. 58, cited in Preece, 2000, p.11). As the interaction allows people to pursue almost all activities online it can also add to people’s needs of belongingness; people can be accepted and find friends and love on a larger scale (Maslow, 1954, cited in Porter et al., 2003). A good example of this is respondent 10, who can interact with friends back home no matter the distance and time difference. A feeling of belongingness can motivate people to do better and enhance their relationships not only in the private but also professional lives.

Furthermore, it is not only the difference between cyber world and real life but also the separation between work and life is getting blurry (Duck & McMahan, 2010). Respondents 2, 3, and 4 find it difficult to divide work from private life. Respondents 9 and 10 think that work takes up most of their time; interviewee 9 even said work is on the interviewee’s mind all the time. Interviewee 3 said that professional and private lives are integrated into each other by giving the example of being good friends with colleagues. Moreover, respondent 4 pointed out that work is part of many of the conversations with friends. The interviewees also agree that good or bad personal relationships will affect their work performance positively or negatively respectively (1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9). For example, respondents 3 and 7 believe that work performance can be improved by good personal relationships as they can concentrate on the work more (7). On the other hand, people can get distracted if they have problems at home (6, 7). Interviewee 8 claimed that negative issues have a stronger influence than positive ones.

Not only SNSs integrate people and create a feeling of belongingness on a personal level, but also employees can get to know each other on a better level by adding colleagues onto their friend lists on SNSs. They can motivate as well as help one another in difficult times and situations.

5.1.2 Professional

In one example above, respondent 4 often has conversations with friends about work; yet, the respondent also pointed out that any confidential information or anything about clients would never be revealed. According to Duck and McMahan (2010), employers count on the employees to keep certain information undisclosed. Interviewees 1, 2, 3, and 5 agree on this point and argue that employees should take the information posted on SNSs into consideration before posting. The issue of privacy and trust between employers and employees can develop their relationships as both sides take responsible actions. The relationships can motivate employees to perform better and create an organisational citizenship (Colquitt et al., 2001, cited in Porter et al., 2003). Further, Maslow (1954) discusses that people can make use of frequent interaction with co-workers to satisfy their needs (cited in Porter et al., 2003). Most of the interviewees have some of their colleagues in their friend lists on SNSs (1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7). This creates a feeling of belongingness which helps the employees to pursue needs and motivate them to continue on in their hierarchy of needs, in accordance to Maslow (1954, cited in Porter et al., 2003). Although respondents 1, 6, and 8 sometimes feel like prying into others' lives, respondent 6 calls this behaviour as a "sneaky peeper", also mentioned by Nonnecke (2000, cited in Preece, 2000, p.87) as "lurkers"; they can still make use of their connections as they get to know each other on a deeper level and can support each other.

Interviewees 2 and 4 think that a bad mood can be a result from a lot of work which in turn affects the personal life. Duck and McMahan (2010) argue that bringing work home might also lead to bringing the work problems home which affects the relationships with friends and family. Respondent 9 further pointed out that the work expertise helps the respondent in maintaining good relationships both personally and profession-

ally. Hence, bringing work home does not have negative influence on the respondent's personal relationships. Moreover, respondent 8 can bring work home and likes the flexibility because it is easier to organise the days around the family. Wellman and Haythornthwaite (2002) argue that people bring their work home to have more time with their family as it is easy to use the Internet for work nowadays. Duck and McMahan (2010) claim that to bring work home might affect the personal life because the availability of an employee extends to more than eight hours a day. Interviewee 4 makes use of separate mobile phones and emails for work and personal issues; however, the close co-workers of respondent 3's are also close friends and respondent 1 have close colleagues on the Facebook friend list. Even though dividing personal and professional life might be difficult, interviewees 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 8 believe they have a good work and life balance. Although work and life is not easy to separate, due to the extra contact on SNSs with colleagues, the relationships have expanded from professional to personal. Their interaction on SNSs includes both personal and work related issues. Since this is not as formal as the interaction in the office, employees can feel more relaxed within such interaction and have a better work and life balance.

Going back to the discussion about the influence of SNSs on the professional life, the respondents mostly spend about 5-30 minutes a time when visiting SNSs (1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 10) and have about 100-300 friends on their friend lists. According to Robinson et al., Internet users are more active in their lives, especially when it comes to being social with friends and colleagues (cited in Wellman & Haythornthwaite, 2002). As many of the respondents have co-workers on their friend lists (1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7) and some of them are student coordinators (1, 3, 6, 7), there is a tendency of a greater social lifestyle among the interviewees. Moreover, respondent 6 is using both Facebook and LinkedIn to extend the connections further by adding friends of friends. Extending connections both in real life and online shows that we are moving from a group-based to a networked society (Wellman & Haythornthwaite, 2002). Therefore, SNSs are connecting people, making them feel more valuable as well as motivating them to perform better both in their personal and professional lives. Interviewee 8 gave a great example of how SNSs motivates people, discussing the motivational aspect of having a coffee machine

in the office; if the company decides to take away the coffee machine employees will feel demotivated and untrustworthy, and so will a ban of SNSs to employees.

5.2 Better Relationships

5.2.1 Internally

It is considered essential to know colleagues better (1, 2, 3, 6, 9); people can find a more effective way to communicate and be more productive (Skeels & Grudin, 2009). Good relations with co-workers can enhance work performance (9). More specifically, SNSs play an important role in making colleagues get closer as well as to perform better (1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9). As respondent 3 mentioned, suggestions of work improvement can be obtained when co-workers know you better because they do not have to worry about offending you. Because of the close relationships, people can find a better way to communicate and the receivers can understand those suggestions are out of good intentions and see the need to improve themselves.

The better you know someone, the more effective communication and higher productivity you have (Skeels & Grudin, 2009). Due to the friendship and pride of expertise, interviewee 9 was willing to help an ex-colleague to solve a professional problem in spare time without pay. If a good relationship had not been developed and maintained, an extra help beyond the professional relationship would not have been provided.

Naisbitt (1984) states that networking empowers the individual and increases the likelihood of caring for one another. Also, Castells (2010) claims that the expansion and strengthening of the various weak ties in the Internet world is important to social interaction today. Respondent 2 asserted that people can influence each other by building networks with co-workers, which results in a feeling of being valued. Moreover, it is easier to understand if the colleagues are under stress or having difficulties when the relationships are extended to a deeper level (1, 2, 6). Respondent 7 mentioned that saying “Happy birthday” to a colleague because seeing a notice on Facebook could be some-

thing never done before. SNSs provide the opportunity of networking and more interaction with those who you work together; hence, further understanding of individuals' personality can be obtained to improve communication and to offer either emotional or practical support. Due to the contribution of SNSs, weak ties in the workplace can be extended and reinforced to enhance the coherence within an organisation.

According to Duck and McMahan (2010), formality and hierarchy are expected in a business conversation; however, Naisbitt (1984) claims that more high-touch and personal interaction are needed in order to respond to the future technology into our existing "impersonal hierarchy" (p. 213). Interviewee 2 thinks that companies should fulfil people's need to speak as well as to interact with others to extend their networks by allowing employees to access SNSs in the workplace. The wish to connect and speak freely reflects the change of communication due to the emergence of technology in an organisation. Being able to express personal thoughts on SNSs will increase individual visibility and gain support to new ideas instead of communicating through the hierarchical structure. As Stacey (1996) points out, informal networks can satisfy the need for social interaction and motivation, and promote innovation and change (cited in Conway, 2001). Interviewee 5 believes that an internal SNS can be used to promote suggestions and gain opinions throughout the organisation; moreover, managers can respond to the need of change quickly as they understand employees' thoughts better. Informal networks go beyond hierarchy and open up communication to increase the agility of organisational innovation and change as well as to share information on a wider scale within organisations.

In Parker's (2004) opinion, personal networks enable companies to deal with uncertainties due to the high quality communication within the interconnection. As mentioned before, the willingness of respondent 9 to help an ex-colleague in spare time, which solved not only the ex-colleague's problem but also the firm's. Although it is a cry for help from the internal to the external environment, it is evident that when encountering a problem which cannot be solved internally, an external assistance from personal relationships play a critical role. Without the further relationship aside from the professional

one, the task cannot be worked out unless an employee is aware of and can access the most suitable and valuable resources to perform the job. On the other hand, internal personal networks cross the boundary of department and hierarchy; thus, workers can support each other with either different expertise and knowledge or positive energy whenever a person in networks is in need. The majority of the interviewees think that SNSs can improve the relationships among co-workers as well as work performance (1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9) as they are means of social networking to get people closer (9). SNSs can offer the accessibility to resources and support by means of networking with others, hence work can be more effective and efficient.

Therefore, censoring SNSs will only be counter-productive (9) and deliver a message of distrust (8, 9). Since trust is based on past performance and future guarantees (Preece, 2000), it will be a bad sign to block the access to SNSs in the workplace (6, 8, 9). Respondent 3 argued that blocking SNSs will not enhance employees' work performance; also, respondent 7 believes people's reluctance to work does not have anything to do with SNSs. Employees will always find a way around if they want to access a blocked website (9). However, trust has to be earned (Figallo, 1998, cited in Preece, 2000); hence, the freedom of accessing SNSs should not be overused or misused (1, 2, 6, 9). According to Zweig (2005), employees should not misuse the corporate resources provided to them; moreover, Zweig and Webster (2002) point out that employees are expected to perform work-related matters on their computers (both cited in Duck & McMahan, 2010). On the other hand, by failing people's expectations, trust is lost (Preece, 2000), which might result in reluctance among employees (8). Interviewee 8 gave the example of having a boss who set restrictions on everything, which in turn proceeded with employees' resistance and distrust. It was further mentioned that decent persons make the best out of the trust relation (8), therefore employees should not be mistrusted in doing their work. Employees feel more trusted if they have the freedom to access SNSs (5) and have the ability to speak freely (6). Though, Duck and McMahan (2010) claims that employees understand and accept companies to keep track of their work, as long as they know about it. Respondent 6 pointed out that it is important for companies to communicate with the employees; on the one hand because it is easy to overuse SNSs, and keeping track of employees' usage might be regarded as an act of

“Big Brother who’s watching them”, especially for the younger generation. Küng, Picard and Towse (2008) agree on this point as employees feel exposed and unworthy of their employers’ trust. Interviewees 2, 5, and 10 said that some kind of policy or restriction might be good; moreover, respondent 1 added that the organisation should have a good reason for restricting SNSs access. According to Porter et al. (2003), employees trust their company if they justify changes within the organisation. Hence, companies which want to introduce policies should justify and communicate their reasons to all employees. Interviewee 8 concluded that only the companies with the right mindset can win their employees’ hearts. Be open and allow employees have freedom is a symbol of trust, thus they will not misuse the freedom. Compared to those who cannot access SNS at work, employees will feel more trusted, be more responsible for their professions, and have a better employer-employee relationship.

5.2.2 Externally

Naisbitt (1984) argues that networks are significant communication tools because they enhance the connections between individuals and groups. According to some of the respondents who are also student coordinators (1, 3, 6, 7), the company pages on Facebook enable them to communicate with students. Take respondent 6 for example, it is an effective way to reach the student groups, which is supported by Duck & McMahan (2010), as it is especially the younger generation who engage in online interaction and find such communication similar to face-to-face interaction. Since students are the major group on SNSs, companies can easily connect them to build relationships by offering corporate career opportunities. On the other hand, students can communicate with the companies on the SNSs instead of making phone calls or sending emails.

SNSs can be useful to communicate with customers (1, 4, 6, 7, 8), as they may enhance their relationships (4, 7, 8). In addition, companies can maintain existing customers and establish relationships with new ones (4). SNSs are means of communication, thus they provide customers a new channel to contact suppliers and to get quicker responses. Meanwhile, companies can obtain customers’ feedback and find out new opportunities from customers due to the interaction on a deeper level. SNSs can increase the opportu-

nity of interaction to establish relationships with new customers. As Castells (2010) states, weak ties are strengthened and growing by means of the Internet in the technological world. Also, to interact online enables the maintenance of existing relationships as well as the creation of new ones (Boase et al., 2006, cited in Duck & McMahan, 2010).

5.3 Easier Information Sharing and Enriched Creativity

5.3.1 Information Sharing

Informal ties are prevalent; they cultivate a wide range of information-exchange relations (Haythornthwaite & Wellman, 1998). Most of the respondents have experienced sharing information on SNSs with others (1, 3, 6, 8, 10). The information shared by respondents on SNSs includes company news for work (6), personal hobbies and interests (8), travel (10) and so on. Respondent 7 used to gather information by joining a group on Facebook before going abroad; in addition, the respondent is thinking about making use of SNSs for more life information collection.

According to the data in this research, SNSs are useful for information sharing (2, 3, 8, 9, 10). People received news from friends all over the world (2, 10) and practical travel information before having a trip (3, 8) as it is more efficient than sending emails to request for information (8). As respondent 9 claimed, SNSs are replacing calling on mobile phones and texts as a means to express personal feeling and to share personal information and experience. Informal relationships can complement, reinforce and add value to a formal organization (Conway, 2001). People share all kinds of information on SNSs today. Because the personal relationship is beyond an organizational formal setting, people feel free to share whatever they know and feel on SNSs effortlessly. Although some information may be out of personal views, to some extent, it can be a predictor to business development and opportunity. Information sharing on SNSs is seen positive to the workplace (2, 5, 9). Take the travel information obtained on SNSs for instance, it can save the organisational effort on the searching process and time for the hotel accommodation when arranging a business trip. If it is a personal trip for the coming

vacation, employees can focus on the work more instead of surfing on the Internet to look for all of the travel information in the workplace because the word-of-mouth effect on SNSs is more influential and the instant collection of information can save the employee a lot of time. On the other hand, interviewee 6 collects people's work information on LinkedIn from time to time. Such behaviour is a good preparation for sourcing, new opportunity creation, and staff recruitment. A person with the relevant information on SNSs can contribute to his/her organization when necessary; namely, the organization's demand will be responded rapidly and be ahead of the competitors no matter in acquiring business opportunities or talents.

Cross and Cummings (2004) claim that a network increases an individual's ability to respond well to new challenges when s/he knows who the expert is to seek for information. From respondent 9's example which was mentioned before, the request to help the ex-colleague is through a personal relationship. It is because of the informal network that a friend knows who to ask for help as the person is the expert who can solve the problem effectively. No one is capable of everything; knowing where to get the best assistance from an expert is an efficient way to solve a problem and can develop tacit knowledge by learning from the experience. Therefore, individuals benefit from the awareness of the resources in their professional or personal networks (Dulworth, 2007).

Respondents 1, 2, 3, and 4 have helped friends or others to solve problems by offering their professional experience or knowledge on SNSs (1, 2, 3, 7). Friends make use of respondent 2's expertise, and interviewee 7 has seen friends' specific questions regarding to the professional field and had received answers on Facebook before she could offer the help. Through SNSs, the networks are expanded from the existing relationships and increase the speed and quantity of information sharing, which enables those who are connected to have more resources for problem solving.

5.3.2 Creativity

Perry-Smith and Shalley (2003) state that information flow in a strong-tied network is usually redundant due to the lack of diversity and dissimilarity. Weak ties can offer access to a more extensive range of thoughts and avoid the information redundancy (Burt, 1997; Granovetter, 1973, 1982; Ibarra & Andrews, 1993, cited in Perry-Smith & Shalley, 2003). Wellman and Gulia (1999) point out that most of the friends on SNSs are weak ties; weak ties are the main providers of information, support, friendship as well as belongingness (cited in Castells, 2010). Most of the respondents' friends on SNSs are between 100 and 300 (1, 2, 3, 8, 10). Compared to the respondents who think that SNSs have positive influence on creativity (2, 5, 8, 9, 10), people with the medium and medium-high size on SNSs cline to assent that SNSs are beneficial to creativity. Although interviewee 9 has less than 100 friends on a SNS, the duration of being a member on Facebook is less than one year.

It is declared, from a social view, that creativity can be enhanced by the communication of thoughts and information (Amabile, 1988, 1996; Kanter, 1988; Woodman et al., 1993, cited in Perry-Smith & Shalley, 2003). People can see a different world from another viewpoint through communication and interaction with others (Ziebro & Northcraft, 2009). As respondent 2 mentioned, the communication and interaction on SNSs enable people to gain insights from others. Respondent 8 further added that new ideas are generated from those different insights. Their arguments are in accordance with Naisbitt's (1984) statement that each person in a network receives new information from others; next, s/he compounds and utilizes it and comes up with new ideas. Owing to the medium and high-medium size of contacts on SNSs, the amount of weak ties are proper for creativity enhancement as it is neither information overloaded nor redundant.

To stay in a strong-tied network, a great deal of time will be spent on maintaining the relationship; hence, the development of weak ties is limited. Moreover, due to the characteristic of a strong network, people are usually connected with same interests, professions, culture or regions; thus, creativity is hard to develop as those in the same network have too many similarities. Zhou et al. (2009) claims that the homophily and the strain

of conformity may prohibit creativity. To be in a part of a strong-tied network, it is important to behave in conformity; however, this results in the restriction on the development of creativity. On SNSs, especially Facebook, there is no boundary of nationality, profession, culture, and so on to hinder the flow of diverse information to increase creativity. By sharing and exchanging information with one another, everyone's ability of creativity is elevated. People can find interesting or intelligent postings on SNSs to derive creative thoughts to improve both professional and personal lives.

5.4 A Bright Future for SNSs

Panteli (2009) noted that SNSs are used for creating and maintaining social interactions to connect geographically dispersed individuals all over the world. They have become an important instrument for today's interaction. Some people want to find information online, while some want to connect and interact with like-minded people (Nonnecke and Preece, 1999, cited in Preece, 2000). From Naisbitt's (1984) point of view, the need for human interaction is increasing since more and more technology is introduced and merged into our workplaces; networks can fulfil the requirement. According to respondent 2, it is important to build networks with colleagues and to fulfil the need to network with people; further, SNSs enable employees to network with others (3). Interviewee 9 thinks that SNSs are useful means to get information for work; thus, if SNSs are blocked in the workplace, in order to get the job done, it is necessary to find another way around to hack into the company system to obtain the information needed. Maslow (1954) points out that individuals have needs to pursue, and they are motivated to be engaged in the continuous pursuing activities until they are satisfied (cited in Porter et al., 2003). No matter it is out of personal reason or work-related purpose, banning SNSs in the workplace is against human nature to connect with people. Moreover, due to the easy access to information online, people can find a way out on the Internet to either hack into the corporate system to acquire necessary information or pass the corporate security system to access SNSs at work, which will place an organization in a greater risk. In addition to the risk of security, distrust can lead to a bad relationship between employers and employees; as mentioned by the respondents, being able to access SNSs in the workplace means a trust in employees (3, 5, 6, 8, 9). It is a bad sign of the management when setting a lot of restrictions for employees to follow as employees feel

distrusted (8, 9), which will only demotivate employees more and lead to less productivity. Furthermore, networks can enhance our productivity, learning, and success in our career life (Cross & Parker, 2004). As interviewee 9 mentioned, it is counter-productive because SNSs can provide an extra platform for information sharing.

SNSs are regarded positive by all of the interviewees. However, three of the respondents (2, 5, 10) raised a proposal for certain restrictions or policy on SNSs in the workplace although interviewees 2 and 5 are against the blocking. Respondent 10 thinks that companies should ban SNSs access, but still suggested an opening of one hour per day. SNSs in the workplace should be used in a responsible way because they play the role as taking a break and having a cup of coffee (5). People should be careful not to misuse the freedom of SNSs access (1, 2, 6, 9). Both employers and co-workers believe that employees are expected not to use their computers for non-work related activities (Zweig & Webster, 2002, cited in Duck & McMahan, 2010). Compared to the time spent on SNSs, mostly is between 5 and 30 minutes a day, including at work and at home (1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 10). Respondent 5 is not an active SNS user as the respondent only logs in to Facebook when there is free time, while up to one hour was spent by respondent 9 and twenty times of logins a day by respondent 6 were due to the work contact for information or job scope. It is evident that employees do not spend much time on SNSs for personal purpose, but for either work or taking a short break. Employees are responsible and know that they are supposed to work instead of surfing or chatting on SNSs for fun. Work will not be affected in a negative way by the availability to SNSs in the workplace; on the contrary, employees get more responsible and more motivated because they cherish the freedom and will not misuse it.

Those who use the Internet are more involved in their real lives than non-users; meanwhile, they have more interactions with friends and colleagues (Robinson et al., cited in Wellman & Haythornthwaite, 2002). As interviewees 1, 3, 4, 5, and 10 claim that face-to-face interaction for work is required; it is critical for personal relation as well (1, 4). Employees will not give up or discard the significance of face-to-face communication and interaction due to the use of SNSs as it still plays an important role to our lives.

Küing et al. (2008) explained that Internet is not only used as an information and entertainment source, but also engage people in personal communication, a so-called social platform. There are a lot of technological products in lives; SNSs can enable people to have interaction. Compared to those watching television, by using SNSs, employees can expand their networks and have a more active lifestyle.

There are as many as two thirds of the total Internet population using SNSs (Nielsen Report, 2009) Among Internet users there are mostly young people with a small difference between gender (Küing et al., 2008). The email has been overtaken by the many SNSs (Nielsen Report, 2009). Sitting by the computer alone does not necessarily mean being alone, as using the Internet enhance the communication with others, compared to those watching television (Wellman & Haythornthwaite, 2002). SNSs are growing fast and hard to be controlled; therefore, companies should “go with the flow.” (6) All of the respondents think that SNSs will play an essential role to companies in the future. The younger generation are more social and comfortable to use SNSs, and they rely on the online interaction more than others (2, 4). Respondent 3 commented that SNSs will be as popular as mobile phones in the future. In the current business environment, the use of mobile phone is of necessity, so will that of SNSs in the workplace to connect people. Restricting SNSs is similar to no mobile phone in the workplace. More and more young people are going to enter the workplace; being open to SNSs is essential to communicate with the youth as well as to attract young talents (2). When the younger generation “climb the ladder”, they will take SNSs as a natural tool of communication with clients, like making phone calls (4). Therefore, respondent 7 said that companies should be open and promote SNSs. Panteli (2009) claims that individuals may be excluded from the virtual social network and then from the digital society when they do not either have access or understanding of how such technology functions. Young people need high technology to connect with more people and have the freedom to speak. An organisation which rejects SNSs in the workplace will be regarded as old-fashioned, stubborn, and lack of flexibility; put it another way, it is against the flow. An old management will probably restrict the SNSs, whereas a management team consisting of young people will be more open to SNSs as they are effective communication tools. To be more competitive and be ahead of competitors, organisations have to be aware of young

thoughts and have more interaction with the youth. An open mind to embrace SNSs can definitely benefit organisations in developing, attracting, and retaining more young talented employees.

Online communities offer the opportunities for people to exchange information, to develop relationships, and to have business with others in spite of the geographical differences (Panteli, 2009). They also enable meaningful communication among people who are separated by distance, time, and even culture (Preece, 2000). Interviewees 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 asserted that SNSs can perform a marketing/social media role to companies, while respondents 5, 7, 8, and 9 observed that they can improve internal relationships. SNSs can also help organisations obtain information and business opportunities (3, 7). The transparency on SNSs enables the efficiency of spreading information to students as well as marketing and promoting the company (4, 7). Therefore, by sharing or exchanging information with the target groups on SNSs, the marketing function is facilitated; hence, relationships are developed gradually during the interaction. With the widespread of the Internet in the world, the marketing on SNSs can reach as many and as far as possible. It is not only efficient but also effective. Moreover, they will get closer to customers as they can access people with ease and have a modern channel to communicate and exchange information with them (7). Organisations can make use of SNSs as the instrument to understand customers' needs and current trends, sense the future market needs, and obtain their business opportunities. The work information on LinkedIn was collected by respondent 6. The external network may serve as a corporate source when the organization is in need of expertise or knowledge from other fields. A person with diverse networks can be a great contributor to the organization as s/he has more connections and knows where to access them. Respondent 5 said that young companies have already started the use, and interviewee 1 thinks that SNSs will be more important for newly established firms to promote their new products. Being a young or new company, it is usually hard to enter the market. With the aid of SNSs, it can enter the market and approach customers in an easier and more cost-saving way.

The way of information transmission is quicker, more high-touch, and more energy-efficient than any other process we know. People can find support, information, and resources and communicate within networks (Fisher & Vilas, 1999). As interviewee 9 argued, they will replace the intranets in the future. SNSs can improve the relationships with colleagues (5, 7, 8), especially for multinational organisations (5). They are also suggested for long-distance meetings (5). Respondent 2 mentioned that people feel valuable when they are in a network. Employees can get closer, share information, and encourage and support one another. Everyone in a network play a more or less important role. Conway (2001) pointed out that informal networks can complement, reinforce and even add value to the formal organization. The informal network built on SNSs will enhance the higher speed of information exchange and support, which are out of the scope of the formal network. Through the increasing interaction with colleagues on SNSs, an organisation is more capable of facing challenges as the cohesion is strong and cannot be defeated with ease.

Polanyi (1958) and Saxenian (1991) concluded, “norms, values, tacit knowledge, trust and face-to-face interaction were seen as playing a key role in the formation of innovation networks.” (cited in Grundmann, 2001, p. 267) Being able to access SNSs in the workplace can increase the transfer of tacit knowledge and trust in employees. Employees will still follow the norms and understand values and responsibilities better. The importance of face-to-face interaction will not be replaced by SNSs; on the other hand, relationships either external or internal will be improved by the use of SNSs due to its efficiency.

6 Conclusion

The technology has brought the convenience to our lives and provided a new channel to social networking. It seems to be a fashion to be connected on a SNS no matter if you are a student or a professional. However, some enterprises deem SNSs as a huge threat to their businesses and ban the access to SNSs in the workplace. According to Nucleus Research (2009), productivity decreases 1.5 percent every working day when they can access Facebook; whereas, The University of Melbourne (2009) has another finding and claims that people who use the Internet for less than 20 percent of the working hours for fun are 9 percent more productive. The later research is surprising to the public due to the positive result, but surfing Internet as a break is the sole benefit it addresses. Therefore, the intention to explore more benefits of SNSs in the workplace to employees and employers was formed.

The authors found more benefits to employees which also influence organisations in a positive way either directly or indirectly. The four benefits explained thoroughly in the analysis of this research contribute to a deeper understanding of SNSs in the workplace. Those benefits are improved lives, better relationships, easier information sharing and enriched creativity, and a bright future for SNSs. Due to the interplay between personal and professional lives, a feeling of belongingness as well as trust by being connected on SNSs in the workplace can motivate employees; weak ties are reinforced and expanded, which increases not only the internal cohesion but also external opportunities; the speed of information sharing enables both the accessibility to resources to solve problem effectively and augments creativity; SNSs will be more and more widespread and can be an useful tool for organisations in the near future.

From employees' perspective, they expect to have the access to SNSs in the workplace. It is not out of their intention to spend time on SNSs instead of working as they are responsible enough for their work. Employees get more responsible when they have appropriate freedom at work. Being able to access SNSs in the workplace does not mean that they will override their limits; on the other hand, they will be even more efficient

than before. Information is exchanged or shared in a fast pace; hence, creativity is increased and problem solving is more effective through the new communication channel. Furthermore, employees feel trusted when being able to access SNSs at work, which motivates them to perform better. Colquitt et al. (2001) declare there is a tendency that a higher level of work performance and behaviour in an organisation is represented when people are treated well. Moreover, it is human nature to network internally and externally. Skeels and Grudin (2009) conclude that the better you know someone, the more effective communication and higher productivity you have. By being connected on SNSs, internal cohesion is enhanced and external relationships are extended and strengthened hence, productivity is increased. The results are contrary to Nucleus Research (2009) as being able to access SNSs at work is positive to productivity from employees' viewpoints.

From organisations' perspective, they should trust that employees will take responsible actions when using SNSs. As Figallo (1998) mentions, trust must be earned (cited in Preece, 2000). If a person or company fails people's expectations, they are likely to lose their trust in them (Preece, 2000).

Not only the interviewees who have to perform part of their work on Facebook but also those who do not have to are positive for the role of SNSs to organisations in the future. It appears most likely that corporations can make use of SNSs as a marketing tool. Thurlow et al. (2004) state that SNSs are to support strong and multiple ties as well as to extend the social networks by connecting with more people than before. The corporations should "go with the flow".

7 Recommendations for Further Research

As the focus of this study is narrowed down to employees' perceptions and benefits to organisations, there are still some areas out of the scope but worth investigating.

First of all, the researchers only receive employees' perceptions but do not try to find out employers' views about SNSs. A dual research on the viewpoint of both sides can enable organisations to find a better solution of how to manage SNS issues in the workplace by matching the results.

Second, since some of the interviewees point out that it is easy to overuse or misuse SNSs and that a policy can be a solution. A research on what conditions are in a SNS use policy and how managers should communicate with employees beforehand to carry it out effectively so that it will not result in employees' resistance.

Last, individuals are also representatives of their companies; external networks might be of use to organisations. A research on how companies can make use of individuals' relationships on SNSs to find opportunities or collaborations can be put into practice.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Interview guide

Personal perspective and experience

1. Can you tell us your opinion about SNS?

2. What social networking sites do you use?

Facebook LinkedIn Orkut Twitter You Tube Others

3. Why did you start to use SNS?

4. How often do you visit the site(s)?

5. How many people are in your contact list on the site(s)? Are most of them your family and friends, or mostly professional-related?

6. Can you describe what you usually do on the site(s)?

Update own profile Comment on friends' posts Ask or answer questions
 Share photos, music or videos Play games Others

What are the purposes to use it/them?

7. How long do you usually spend on the SNS in your free time and during working hours respectively?

Personal perception for life and work

8. What do you think about work-life balance? How do they influence each other?

9. Will your good personal life and relationships have a positive influence on your work? Can you describe it?

10. What is the role of SNS to knowledge sharing in your life and in your profession? Can you give us some examples of yours?

11. Do SNS change the way of communication at work? How?

(with colleagues, supervisors, subordinates, partners, customers, and so on)

12. Do you think that SNS make you get closer to your colleagues? Does it help for the work and how?

Professional experience

13. What department are you in?

14. Have you accomplished a task or solved a problem because of making use of your networks on the SNS? (Have you helped anyone on SNS to solve a professional problem?) How did you do it?

15. How did you usually contact others for work-related purposes before the application of SNS?

Future

16. What is your opinion about restricting SNS at workplace?

17. What do you think about the roles of SNS to companies in the future?

18. Would you prefer to work for a company which allows employees to use SNS at workplace? Why (not)?

Appendix 2 The Coding into Categories

Empirical Data Coding:

The categories are divided after the interview guide and the subheadings are coded out of the data collected from the interviews.

User Experience of SNSs (=Personal Perspective and Experience)	Personal Perception of Life and Work
<p>Interesting points:</p> <p>General Opinions</p> <p>The respondents had different opinions about SNSs</p> <p>Usage</p> <p>The respondents used SNSs more or less frequently</p> <p>Contacts</p> <p>The contacts of the respondents varied</p> <p>Behaviour</p> <p>The respondents used the SNSs for several different reasons</p>	<p>Interesting points:</p> <p>The Interplay between Life and Work</p> <p>Work and life had an impact on each respondent in different ways</p> <p>Information Sharing</p> <p>Many of the respondents used SNSs to share information with friends, some with colleagues</p>

Professional Experience	The Future of SNSs (=Future)
<p>Interesting points:</p> <p>Communication</p> <p>The respondents used SNSs to communicate</p> <p>Problem Solving</p> <p>Some of the respondents used SNSs to solve professional problems as well as got help from others</p>	<p>Interesting points:</p> <p>To Ban or Not to Ban</p> <p>There were different opinions about restricting SNSs in the workplace</p> <p>The Role to Companies</p> <p>The future of SNSs to companies was discussed</p>

Theory Categorisation:

The two first categories are general information about the background of SNSs.

The Impact of Internet on Our Lives	Communication
<p>Reasons for using these category:</p> <p>The Online Identity</p> <p>Because of different usage and behaviours the researchers decided to look deeper into the Internet era to see what kind of people are online and what they do</p> <p>The Online Everyday Life</p> <p>This section discuss how people use Internet in their personal and professional lives, which relates back to the respondents' answers about impact on work and life</p> <p>Overlap</p> <p>Many of the respondents discussed an overlap of work on their personal lives as well as Internet having a big influence on their lives</p>	<p>Reasons for using this category:</p> <p>Most of the respondents used SNSs to communicate privately but saw the need for it professionally as well</p>

Appendix

Knowledge Sharing / Information Exchange	Trust and Motivation
<p>Reasons for using this category:</p> <p>Some of the respondents discussed the use of SNSs for sharing information or knowledge</p>	<p>Reasons for using this category:</p> <p>Much effort was put on discussing trust and motivation in the interviews which led to this section</p>

Analysis Categorisation:

Divided into sections of benefits for companies using SNSs

Improved Lives	Better Relationships
<p>Personal</p> <p>SNSs improve the balance between work and private life and allow the employees to connect with each other on a private level</p> <p>Professional</p> <p>Employees can more easily connect with co-workers and motivate each other</p>	<p>Internally</p> <p>Allowing employees to use SNSs at work enhance their networks internally which in turn affect the companies positively</p> <p>Externally</p> <p>It also allows employees to enhance their networks externally to customers and clients important to the company</p>

Easier Information Sharing and Enriched Creativity	A Bright Future for SNSs
<p>Information Sharing</p> <p>Employees can make use of SNSs to share information about their knowledge and further find relevant people for new projects</p> <p>Creativity</p> <p>Making use of SNSs companies can promote new ideas and have a more open discussion</p>	<p>A Bright Future for SNSs</p> <p>SNSs have great potential for companies for several reasons, such as communication both internally and externally</p>