

# Experts at Being Seen as Experts

Knowledge Management Technology as a Stage for  
Strategic Self-Presentation



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# Knowledge Management **Technology**



# Knowledge Management **Technology**

“We want to capture physicians’ expertise about pathology, acuity – general aspects of pediatric care – share it with those who need it to solve life-threatening problems here and at our affiliate hospitals and store that expertise so we can use it when we need it in the future, even if that physician has moved on.”





FINANCIAL  
TIMES

# Clouds, Big Data, and Smart Assets

September 22, 2010

1. Distributed co-creation moves into the mainstream
2. Making the network the organization
3. Collaboration at scale





# Knowledge Management **Tech**

Cognitive Science

Sociology of Professions

Social Psych



- **Transactive Memory**

(Liang et al., 1995)

(Brandon and Hollingshead, 2004)

- **Collective Action**

(Fulk et al., 2003)

(Wasko & Faraj, 2005)

- **Knowledge Networks**

(Szulanski & Jensen, 2004)

(Contractor & Monge, 2003)

# Experts and Knowledge

Social Construction of Expertise  
“Expertise is a product of social relationships”  
(Agnew et al., 1997)  
(Collins & Evans, 2007)



# Knowledge Management **Tech**

Cognitive Science

Sociology of Professions

Social Psych

Social Construction of Expertise



# KM Technology as Stage

- Audiences use “information” as evidence of knowledge when “behavior” is absent

(Bunderson, 2003)

(Robert, 2000)

- Information is “visible” and easily “comparable”

(Suchman, 1995)

(Shultze & Boland, 2000)

- Inability to index information to behavior allows for “strategic self-presentation”

(Goffman, 1959, 1961)

(Gioia, 1989)

## Social Construction of Expertise



# Different Stages Different Affordances



# KM Technology as Stage



## “Hyperpersonal Affordances”

(Walther, 1996, 2007)

- Editability
- Preparation Time
- Mask Involuntary Cues
- Cognitive Resource Allocation

Result: Increased “Strategizing”  
and more deception

(Carlson et al., 2004)

(Hancock, 2007)

(Toma et al., 2008)

# Research Questions

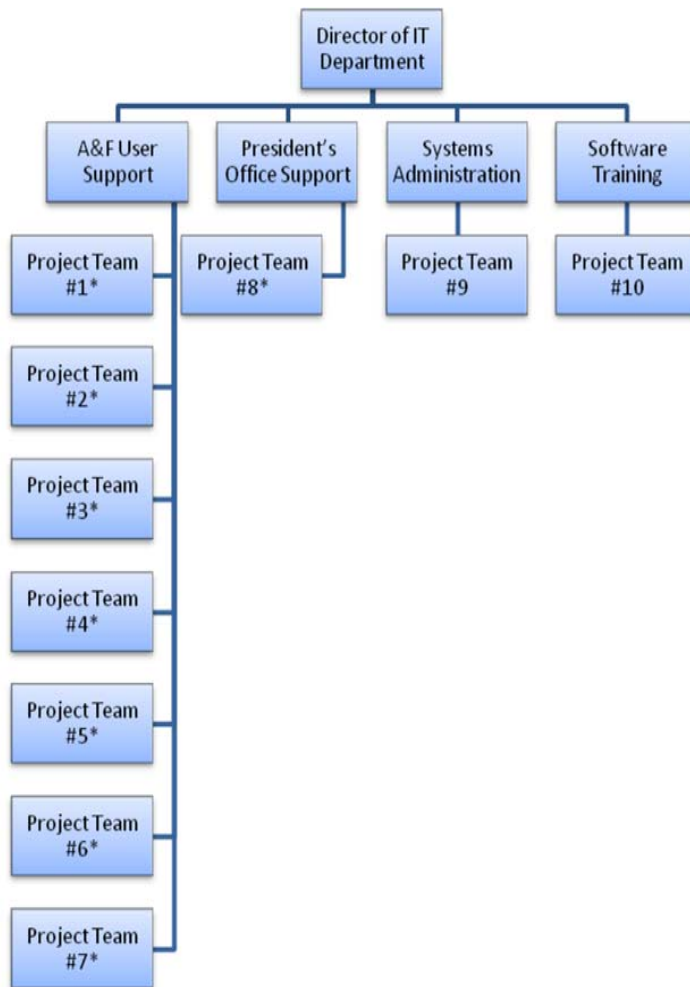
- (1) Under what conditions are users compelled to enter inaccurate or incomplete information representing their knowledge?
- (1) What effects do strategic self-presentation and resultant perceptions of expertise made through use of a knowledge management technology have on the system of relations through which work gets done in the organization?

# SkyLabs

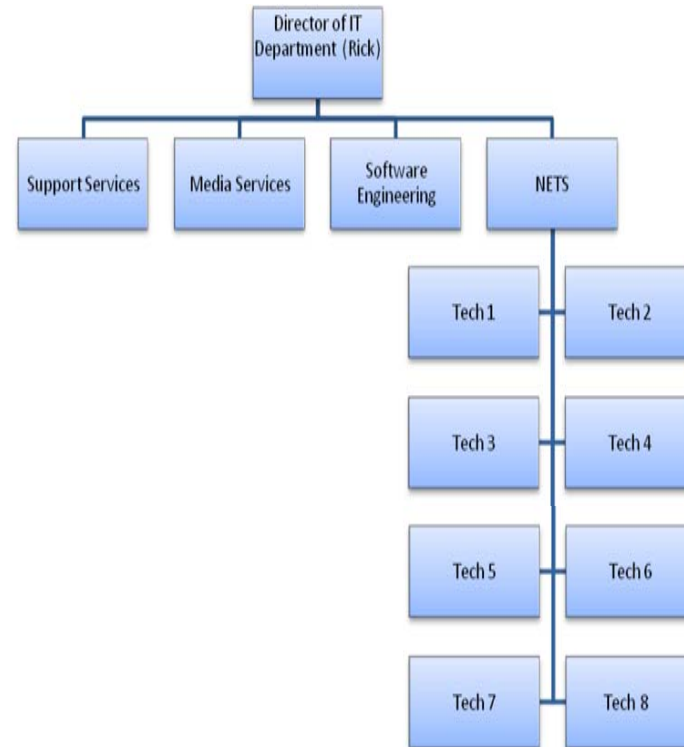
- Research Site
  - IT Department at SkyLabs (NETS Team)
  - Knowledge Management Tool
- Data Collection
  - Pre and Post Implementation Design
  - 5 Month Ethnography
  - 250+ Hours of Observation
  - 42 Interviews (technicians, managers, clients)

# SkyLabs

Before Re-Org



After Re-Org



# 1. Reorganization of Work:

Lack of Insight into “who knows what”

# 2. Implementation of KMS

Information about work behaviors presented to others

# 3. Continued Use of KMS

Information entry for strategic self-presentation

# 1. Reorganization of Work:

## Lack of Insight into “who knows what”

When you work for one division you become the expert about the tools that division uses. I worked with the Facilities division and the tracking software they used to keep tabs on equipment reservations wasn't used by any of the other divisions. So I basically had to learn all about the application so I could support it. That meant that I also was in charge of deciding about when and how to upgrade it and to make modifications to it. None of the guys [technicians with similar roles] on the other project teams would have known anything about that.

## 2. Implementation of KMS

### Information about work behavior presented to others

**Tech 6:** So I saw [when I was browsing the tickets in the KMS] you dealt with some issue with BIOS being corrupt on one of those old Toshibas.

**Tech 7:** Yeah they still like those over there in Safety Services. That was a couple weeks ago. I'm trying to get them migrated to some new Dell's but...

**Tech 6:** What did you do? Did you boot block it?

**Tech 7:** No, because there was some issue with the CMOS configuration so I basically had to end up hot swapping it.

**Tech 6:** Hmm, I didn't really know that. How did you know to do that?

## 2. Implementation of KMS

### Information about work behavior presented to others

If you're trying to decide who to give the ticket to I'll look at their documentation first. I mean you sort of see if they wrote any notes in the "comment" field about what they did to solve it. Usually you'll see that if someone wrote good documentation then they probably know how to do it better.,. So it's sort of a no-brainer that if someone knows it better than you should give it to them because they'll get it done faster and be less intrusive about it.

# 3. Continued Use of KMS

## Information entry for strategic self-presentation

**Tech 3:** Hey, I saw you assigned me a ticket with someone in Finance having some compatibility issues with data transfer?

**Tech 7:** Yeah, I saw you fixed some problems like this in Finance before

**Tech 3:** I think Technician 4 has too.

**Tech 7:** Yeah, I saw that, but my read of your solutions was that you might have it figured out better.

**Tech 3:** So that's why you gave it to me?

**Tech 7:** Yeah, I just figured you could probably handle it easier.

# 3. Continued Use of KMS

## Information entry for strategic self-presentation

On NETS, it turns out that I'm like the hardware expert. That's fine by me. I was doing this job back when all they were using was 80-column punch cards so I guess I've always been comfortable with hardware. So now if someone's got some hardware issue I usually get that ticket.

I keep getting these kinds of assignment from everyone else on NETS. I'm starting to get kind of irked by it. It seems like calendaring stuff is all I do... But I saw in another ticket that Technician 5 got assigned some problem with the configuration issue on the Travel server. I'd rather do that. So what I'll do is when I finish the calendaring problem I won't write in a lot of information about it. I'll just say I fixed it, give a couple points that way they won't be like "Oh, she knows so much about calendars. If I really want to clinch it I can write something in there about how this is just a temporary fix and I doubt it will last.

# 3. Continued Use of KMS

## Information entry for strategic self-presentation

Changes in Expertise Attribution and Strategic Entry of Information into ITSM

Technician	Known as _____ Expert in April	Wanted to be known as expert in this area	Information entered in ITSM strategically to change or maintain other's perceptions of expertise in 50% or more tickets	Known as _____ Expert in October
1	Ghosting	No	Yes	Data Mining
2	Hardware	Yes	No	Hardware
3	Data Management	Yes	Yes	Data Management
4	Productivity Apps.	No	No	Productivity Apps.
5	Printer	No	Yes	Network Security
6	Calendaring	No	No	Calendaring
7	Operating System	No	Yes	Network Admin
8	Server	Yes	No	Server

# What have we learned?

- Work behaviors are invisible
- People use information entered into technology as proxy for knowledge
  - Technology makes information about behaviors visible
- Technology allows them to compare knowledge and make attributions about expertise
- Once job assignments are made based on expertise, people feel consequences of those expertise attributions
- Lack of index to offline behaviors provide space for entry of inaccurate or incomplete information
- New “strategic-presenters” enrolled to combat new attributions of expertise

What have we **learned**?



# Theoretical Implications

- Monitoring and pressures toward strategic self-presentation
  - When monitoring others, people also monitor how others view them
    - Job assignment provides a window into others' evaluations of them
  - Job assignments give expertise construals consequence
    - Decision to use KMS for job assignment is organizational decision
- Effectiveness of KMS for strategic self-presentation
  - Overcome Paradox of expertise presentation (Goffman)
    - It's easy to self-present
  - Paradox of self-promotion (Jones & Pittman)
    - As volume of information increases, self-promotion may become more important
- Systemic effects on strategic self-presentation
  - People "pulled in" to strategic self-presentations because of comparative nature of expertise construal
    - Strategies can be both proactive and reactive
  - Most strategic behaviors were reactive