

Narrating Your Work: Research with Shell International

Narrating your Work

In Shell and other companies, many people in teams are working virtually, collaborating over geographical boundaries and across time zones, without ever meeting each other in real life. This occasionally leads to reduced knowledge sharing and sense of disconnection from colleagues. 'Narrating Your Work' (or NYW) approach was designed and trialled within a virtual team at Shell distributed in three locations on three continents - Netherlands, USA and Malaysia - to see if it could provide a lightweight, practical form of enhancing knowledge sharing and sense of connectedness within the team. NYW involves members of a virtual team using an enterprise microblogging tool, Yammer, to post regular daily or weekly updates about their everyday work. The updates are available to all team members and others in the organisation to read and respond to, and they focus on important events workers are experiencing, problems they are facing, solutions they are developing, and useful resources they encounter. Shell wanted to find out whether NYW would create a form of ambient intimacy in virtual teams, increasing connectedness and improving knowledge sharing. NYW was trialled within Shell for a month, and subsequently evaluated through a questionnaire survey, interviews and analysis of NYW updates in Yammer. A set of recommendations for the implementation of the methodology in other virtual teams and in other organisations were developed.

Research Findings

First, we found that most people can 'narrate their work' comfortably in the margins of their day: the average time spent writing NYW updates across the sample was 20.53 minutes per week (SD 20.836). At an average of 24.82 minutes per week (SD 22.883), reading colleagues' NYW updates is an equally undemanding activity. Participants thought

Yammer was easy to use, presenting no barrier to their engagement with NYW.

Second, results suggest that team members valued NYW for its strong business purpose and for helping them feel more connected with their teammates, gaining better insight into colleagues' work. Specifically, NYW helped participants gain **awareness of their peers' specific expertise areas**, bringing about synergy and better utilisation of knowledge, skills and personal networks within a distributed team. **It also increased participants' awareness of what others in their organisation, beyond the team, were doing helping** people connect directly with relevant others across the company. Finally, NYW **stimulated regular self-reflection**; although self-reflection is an essential learning, typically it is difficult for professionals to do as part of their work routine.

All in all, the results suggest that NYW is a practical approach to improving knowledge sharing and sense of connectedness in virtual teams, that is easy to use and to implement. NYW can be used by other distributed teams in other organisations. Guidelines for implementation of NYW approach can be found in the NYW Methodology Toolkit developed by the project team <http://www.scribd.com/doc/81960954/Narrating-Your-Work-NYW-Methodology-Toolkit>

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