

Web 2.0 in Swiss organizations – Usage, Patterns and Corporate Culture

Assumption and Idea

The extent to which an organization has implemented elements of what is referred to Web 2.0 technology is more than just a matter of technological adaptation. According to the theory of structuration as described by Anthony Giddens (1984), the resources do not simply determine the concepts and norms. Rather, concepts and norms on the one hand and resources and action on the other influence each other in a recursive process. For the use of Web 2.0 in organizational communication, this means that the implementation of Web 2.0 applications is both the result and the cause for a change in communication culture. And since communication culture is closely linked to the organizational culture (Schmidt 2004, 148f), it can be said that there is a mutual influence between organizational culture and Web 2.0 implementation.

Survey

So far, there is still a lack of empirical data on a macro level, which would describe how organizations use Web 2.0 applications. While the EuroBlog surveys try to shed more light onto the use and spread of Web 2.0 in Europe and Switzerland in particular, it has a bias towards early adopters. Therefore, while Web 2.0 has become a common theme in discussions about communication and public relations, it remains unclear to what extent organizations are using these tools in their actual practice (Zerfass et al. 2005).

Based on our assumptions laid out above, a survey was conducted among Swiss organizations to find out how organizations implement and use Web 2.0, and thus how the communication and organizational culture is changing from a culture of rules and control towards a culture of exchange, uncertainty and openness (Keel et al. 2007). We assumed that the use of a new communication mode is indicative for the organizational culture, and thus more can be said about the culture of Swiss organizations

Swiss organizations of different sorts were contacted to report on their use of Web 2.0. Types of organizations included the 200 biggest Swiss companies, registered NGOs, the administrations of Swiss cantons (political entities) and associations. Of the 500 contacted organizations, 104 responded to the call and filled out an online survey, 46 of them companies.

Findings

As a general finding, it can be said that only few Swiss organizations use the tools associated with Web 2.0. Although we assumed that the communication culture of organizations would vary according to their size, type, business model, location etc. and thus influence the use of Web 2.0 applications, we found that factors such as size, language region, or type of organization play a lesser role in determining whether an organization is active in the world of Web 2.0. Therefore, the hypothesis that a company culture as determined by its type, background, business model etc. determines how Web 2.0 is implemented cannot be supported based on the gathered data. Rather, there are early-adaptor organizations across the board as far as organizations are concerned.

There are however interesting findings which give a good impression of the implementation of Web 2.0 among Swiss organizations. For example, Web 2.0 tools have affected the way organizations distribute their news. Furthermore, it can be said that a cultural and technological change in communication is taking place internally, where most Web 2.0 applications are currently used.

The fact that there are no clear concepts that have derived or driven the implementation of Web 2.0 applications shows when looking at the organization's expectations concerning the functions blogs and other Web 2.0 applications: They are no clear concepts yet. For example, some organizations say that blogs play a crucial role in times of crisis, others disagree and think instead that blogs help to raise visibility and to improve one's image, while a third group thinks blogs are best used for internal communications.

Summarizing these results, it can be said that no shift in organizational culture can be found based on an increased use of Web 2.0 application. However, there are signs that this might happen,

starting internally, where communication tends to be more two-way, and then, after gathering first experiences, slowly expanding into external communication.

Future Outlook

This first systematic survey of Web 2.0 use among Swiss organizations renders a fair impression of the implementation of Web 2.0 in Switzerland. It can be a starting point for further research, which could develop in two directions.

Firstly, it can be assumed that the situation as it presented itself in the summer of 2007 will change fast and has already changed. Therefore, an ongoing quantitative monitoring of Web 2.0 activities is necessary to track the development of Web 2.0 among Swiss organizations – possibly with broadened samples.

Secondly, the quantitative research only counts occurrences of uses of certain technologies. It does not however analyze and explain how these technologies are used, what relevance they possess in the communication activities of an organization, and how they relate to the general corporate culture. To gain insights in this field and to support the thesis that the use of Web 2.0 is an expression of a general shift in corporate culture, more qualitative approaches are needed. This will foster a better understanding of the role Web 2.0 plays in organizations, and to what extent it affects the communication culture and the overall culture of an organization.

The Institute of Applied Media Studies in Winterthur (Switzerland), together with private partners, will remain active in with a focus on both questions to monitor how Web 2.0 develops in Switzerland, along with a change in organizational culture.

Literature

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