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UTILISING THE SOCIAL MEDIA AND ORGANISATION POLICY (SOMEOP) FRAMEWORK: AN EXAMPLE OF ORGANISATIONAL POLICY DEVELOPMENT WITHIN A PUBLIC SECTOR ENTITY

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Organisational policy development is vital for the effective business operations. Policies are developed and applied to specific areas or applications within the organisation; such that they are sited within an organisational context. Evidence suggests that the development of policies for general employment conditions, (for example, electronic mail usage), tends to be highly structured and provide little flexibility for their implementation. Standard organisational policy development is about applying a set of rules in the workplace. However, when implementing social media in an organisation, the standard policy development processes are not effective in allowing organisations to benefit from the available social media tools. Social media tools have the advantages of offering the organisation flexibility and rapid dispersion of information within the online environment. Hence, organisational policy development for social media usage needs to take these characteristics into account. There is a perceived gap concerning the development of policies for social media usage, as traditional organisational policy development enforces structure and rules that are at odds with the ways social media tools work in the organisation. To fill this gap, we have proposed the Social Media and Organisation Policy (SOMEOP) framework, created to allow organisations to build policies that take specific social media advantages or issues into consideration. By combining key components, such as legal issues, and social media ethics, this framework demonstrates effective and efficient development of social media policy. This paper highlights the processes involved for a public sector entity when developing a social media policy using the SOMEOP framework, and describes the application of the framework within the entity.

Keywords: SOMEOP, social media, policies, organisations, guidelines, enterprise 2.0.

1 INTRODUCTION

By adopting Web 2.0 tools early, companies or users stand to gain ‘first mover advantage’ (Spence, 1981) in their respective markets (Musser & O’Reilly, 2006). This success is evident in companies such as eBay, Yahoo! and Google, which have successfully harnessed the collective intelligence of their users (O’Reilly, 2005). Most of these companies have provided some form of extension to enable users to create and share information easily with other users. According to O’Reilly (2005), Yahoo! directory of links was the initiator of this structure, followed by Google’s Page Rank, which made use of the link structure of the web to provide better search results. eBay then showed how collective activity could grow into a large and successful enterprise, where the eBay’s auction platform acts as an enabler for that activity.

Resulting from these innovations, more companies are extending their application, or breaking new ground, using Web 2.0 tools. Companies such as Flickr, del.icio.us and Wikipedia are making use of the collaborative concept similar to building a collective intelligence (Newman & Thomas, 2009 p. 9) known as ‘crowdsourcing’ (Howe, 2006), where the skills and knowledge of large numbers of individuals enhance websites, solve problems and even produce products to dominate their respective markets (O’Reilly, 2005). With Web 2.0 technologies becoming increasingly popular (Newman & Thomas, 2009), it was perhaps inevitable that it would eventually command the attention of the business community. Implementations of social media as part of business activities are evident across different fields, such as finance, manufacturing, broadcasting, and many more (Sharma, 2007).

One of the earliest adopters of social media within Australia was Westpac Bank which implemented tools such as an internal social networking, establishing a presence on Second Life for training purposes (Australian, 2007; Sharma, 2007; Winterford, 2007; Backley, 2008). However, this endeavour was financially unsuccessful (Keall, 2009; Winterford, 2009). Based on the public observations of Westpac’s implementation, one main reason the project failed was the lack of an effective social media usage policy for their employees. Employees were unsure what was considered acceptable and/or unacceptable behaviour, resulting in their apprehension when using the tools (Sharma, 2009; Tung, 2009; Winterford, 2009).

When an organisation such as a public sector entity or government department implements a new technology, the process is lengthy, due to the different levels of management involved, as well as an assessment of the perceived risks during implementation and the development of suitable organisational policies (Moule & Giavara, 1995). It is the organisational policy issues that this research considers. Standard organisational policy development is about applying a set of rules in the workplace (Moule & Giavara, 1995). In the case of the public sector, policy development is more likely to be in-depth and methodical, requiring extended timeframes and resulting in a comprehensive guideline, or policy. More often than not, policies tend to be ‘privileged’ or scantily reviewed by employees (Althaus, Bridgman & Davis, 2008), and this can be attributed to their comprehensiveness and length or perceived lack of relevance (Althaus et al., 2008). Hence, employees tend to review only those policy sections of immediate interest. This is where effective policy development plays a major role.

Our research is motivated by a perceived gap in the literature concerning the development of organisational policies for social media usage. When implementing social media in an organisation, standard policy development processes are not effective in allowing organisations to benefit from the available social media tools. Social media tools have the advantages of offering the organisation flexibility and rapid dispersion of information within the online environment (Newman & Thomas, 2009). Hence, organisational policy development for social media usage needs to take these characteristics into account. The aim of this research is to highlight the components of a social media policy framework that is applied in practice using a public sector entity as an exemplar. The research question framed to address this aim is: *How can the application of the SOMEOP framework improve organisational policy development for social media technology usage in business?*

This paper describes the proposed framework that may be applied when developing social media policy within organisations. The paper firstly provides an account of social media platforms in organisations, followed by a discussion of the role of policy. Within this context the social media framework is presented and applied in practice in a public sector entity.

2 BACKGROUND - ORGANISATIONAL POLICY AND SOCIAL SOFTWARE PLATFORMS IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

In 2006, Web 2.0 was just gaining momentum among general users, but McAfee (2009) foresaw that these technologies could be used effectively within organisations for business purposes. Essentially, Web 2.0 is the idea and technology that supports social media as a tool; while Enterprise 2.0 is the concept of how organisations are using those tools in their business activities (McAfee, 2009). For the sake of conforming to the current social convention (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010), we use social media as the keyword linked to Enterprise 2.0 in this paper. Enterprise 2.0 is defined as ‘the use of emergent social software platforms by organisations in pursuit of their goals’ (McAfee, 2009, p.73) meaning that social media software could be used within organisations to guide the organisation to achieve its intended outcome and goals. Large organisations such as IBM (Lennon, 2009), BBC (Sutherland, 2008) and even Westpac during their initial foray with Web 2.0 (Winterford, 2007), started reaping the benefits that social software brings. There are many more organisations which have begun to realise success but without publicly announcing their endeavours. This may be due to standard business practices, or to protect intellectual property from their competitors (McAfee, 2009). These trends of utilising social software within organisation may also attributed to the number of new graduates who, accustomed to utilising these tools, then enter the workforce (Morris & Venkatesh, 2000; Bennett, 2010). Hence, it appears a natural transition for the public sector (generally employing recent graduates), to commence experimenting with the platforms.

One of the first prolific government organisations to use social media was the United States Intelligence community which launched Intellipedia in April 2006; an internal wiki for the employees of different intelligence divisions (McAfee, 2009; McClure, 2010) to collaborate and share information. The community also included the use of blogs, acting as a way for users to link to a direct post on a related topic that would interest others (McAfee, 2009). Another example of a government department using social media was in 2003 when the US Government developed a social media strategy for the Spanish-speaking community through the GobiernoUSA.gov site (Skirbunt, Martinez & Meskell, 2009). Through this social strategy, a Facebook page was created to facilitate information sharing between the Hispanic community and the Office of Citizen Services (OCS), enabling Spanish-speaking citizens to communicate with government officials quickly and effectively.

In Australia, social media has initially been used within the government such as the 1) SAGEMS which is an acronym for a short messaging service that acts as an instant messaging system among different South Australian government departments (Gauci & Jones, 2010) and 2) the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research (DIISR) blog platform aptly entitled ‘Innovation Blog’ (About 2010; Committee, 2010). This blog acts as a semiformal channel for government employees to gain updates on new innovation developments within the government sector, as well as procuring ideas for new innovations and highlighting examples of their use within the public sector.

Public sector organisations are renowned for their detailed policies or guidelines, designating actions that are acceptable or unacceptable across the level of department, with some addendums for department-specific activities (Moule & Giavara, 1995). This includes communication, processes and decisions that any given department undergoes. The entire process is relatively straightforward with a top-down approach which requires the central government to be coherent to avoid the fragmentation problem among different government agencies (Colebatch, 2005). Policies are developed not as ‘imposition of solutions’ by a detached policy developer; but more as the normalisation of problems where certain gatekeepers decide which controversial topic is transformed into a standard routine

(Colebatch, 2005; Althaus et al, 2008, p.5). Althaus et al. (2008, p.6) suggests there are three ways that policy is normally viewed:

- As an authoritative choice
Policies are used as a way for government to exercise their power and ensuring the certainty of action for the matter at hand through structured decisions, albeit chaotic process.
- As an hypothesis
Policies are often created with a high level of uncertainty and implemented in highly demanding situations which often 'makes or breaks them' (Smith, 2000; Colebatch, 2005). By learning from errors, policy makers could correct those uncertain elements within a policy. This shows that a newly developed policy undergoes an iterative development process, to ensure the policy is more effective in the long run.
- As an objective of government action
Ultimately, policies are meant to guide a department or organisation towards a goal (Moule & Giavara, 1995). They are designed to ensure actions conducted by either the government department or organisation would achieve the intended results. Without a purpose, a policy might work against the government or organisation which results in what is called 'losing its way' (Althaus et al., 2008).

The three policy views may be used as a way for policy developers to ensure an *authoritative choice* is provided to related parties based on a plausible *hypothesis* which need to deliver the intended *objective* for the government or organisation. Essentially policies could only be deemed effective after considering many issues, such as the process flow of government activities, prevailing cultures, as well as economic values that the policy brings to the government or organisation.

In relation to social software platforms, the authoritative choice view is less regarded as essential within the policy compared with the other two views. This is due to the flexibility, collaborative-centred and high level of transparency that the social media technologies represent, and which opposes the rigid and highly process-dependent institution such as a government department. When Andrew McAfee (2006) suggested that web based collaborative tools, such as blogs and wikis could be used for organisations to achieve their goals, few organisations believed in the technology. The concept for socially based platforms being used within organisations was entitled Enterprise 2.0 (McAfee, 2006; Hinchcliffe, 2007b).

3 RESEARCH METHODS

This research is an interpretive study employing the case study method as part of a larger longitudinal study into social media in organisations. The case study method has been used extensively as a research method by many researchers (Benbasat, Goldstein & Mead, 1987; Lee, 1989; Smith, 1990; Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991). Yin (2009, p.18) describes the case study method as an empirical inquiry which: 'i) investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when ii) the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident'. It is considered a part of the qualitative strategy (Creswell, 2009), emphasising data collection from a variety of methods which include observation and in-depth interviews (Gable, 1994). It is also usually distinguished by a focus on a particular subject(s) and on the use of a variety of related information concerning that subject (Rubin & Babbie, 2008). Since the topic area of this research project is quite new, the case study method is very suitable (Eisenhardt, 1989) as a means of providing in-depth information to enable the development of a definite theoretical framework. Feedback from the case studies is used in this paper to support some of the theoretical work provided here.

Data were collected via interviews which took place between March and July 2010 and were informal and semi-structured with non-directive, open-ended questioning to encourage interviewees to describe the complexities of their practices, experiences and problems (Louis & Sutton, 1991). Sixteen interviews, ranging from 1-1½ hours, were transcribed, annotated and coded thematically, with descriptions and assertions (Creswell, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Supporting documents, blogs and social media websites within the organisation were analysed as part of the research data.

Hermeneutic analysis provided an iterative analytical approach (Lee, 1994) to the dialectic between the understanding of the text as a whole and the interpretation of its parts, in which descriptions were guided by anticipated explanations (Gadamer, 1976, p. 117). The SOMEOP framework is recently developed and explained in another publication (Husin & Hanisch, 2011). The framework has been applied in this paper from an analysis of the interviews and secondary research data.

4 DEVELOPING THE SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY FOR THE PUBLIC SECTOR

There are some initial concerns when using social media within the public sector, including the perceived fear of leaked sensitive information, and unethical activities; both of which tend to be associated with social media tools. However, interviewees from our research recall that most employees are usually more aware and more cautious when posting to a social media platform, as their identities are visible to everyone who has access to the platform. Hence, the author's identification occurring when an employee post items to social media tools, leads to an unconventional and informal method of control, without the need for intervention from the organisation. While this informal method of control appears a useful mechanism for maintaining responsibility and ethical action, most organisations, especially government agencies, require a more formal control method. This leads to need for the provision of a well written organisational policy concerning social media.

The Australian Policy Cycle has been published in Bridgman and Davis (2000) and later in Althaus et al (2008), and is represented in Figure 1. Figure 1 demonstrates the cyclical nature of organisational policy development from the consultation phase through to the development of the policy instrument. Colebatch (2005) considers that this model does not apply to a public sector organisation's objectives but 'is an exercise in compliance with the demands of a larger bureaucratised system'. However, Bridgman and Davis (2000) were concerned with ensuring a set of official routines were available for government employees to develop policy (Colebatch, 2005). Hence, we contend that this model represents the policy cycle as a 'guide' rather than an absolute process.

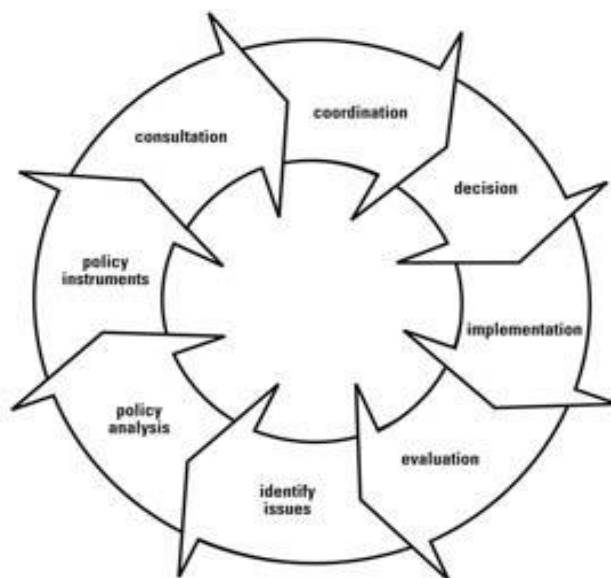


Figure 1. The Australian Policy Cycle (Bridgman & Davis, 2000 p. 27)

In a recent publication, Husin & Hanisch (2011) propose the Social Media and Organisation Policy (SOMEOP) model as a tool which adapts to situational changes, while highlighting the essential components needed to ensure the effectiveness of an organisational policy.

For this study we have applied the SOMEOP framework in practice in a State level public sector entity (agency) in Australia. The StateAgency¹ has recently commenced utilising social media platforms as part of their business activities. The StateAgency began developing a social media policy during the initial implementation plan; the initiative was led by an executive member of management. When reviewing its initial social media policy, it was evident that improvements could be made by applying the SOMEOP framework. The SOMEOP framework was developed to provide organisations with general guidelines concerning the components that are essential within a social media policy. Figure 2 shows the SOMEOP framework and the related components necessary for developing an effective and feasible social media policy for the organisation’s needs and goals.

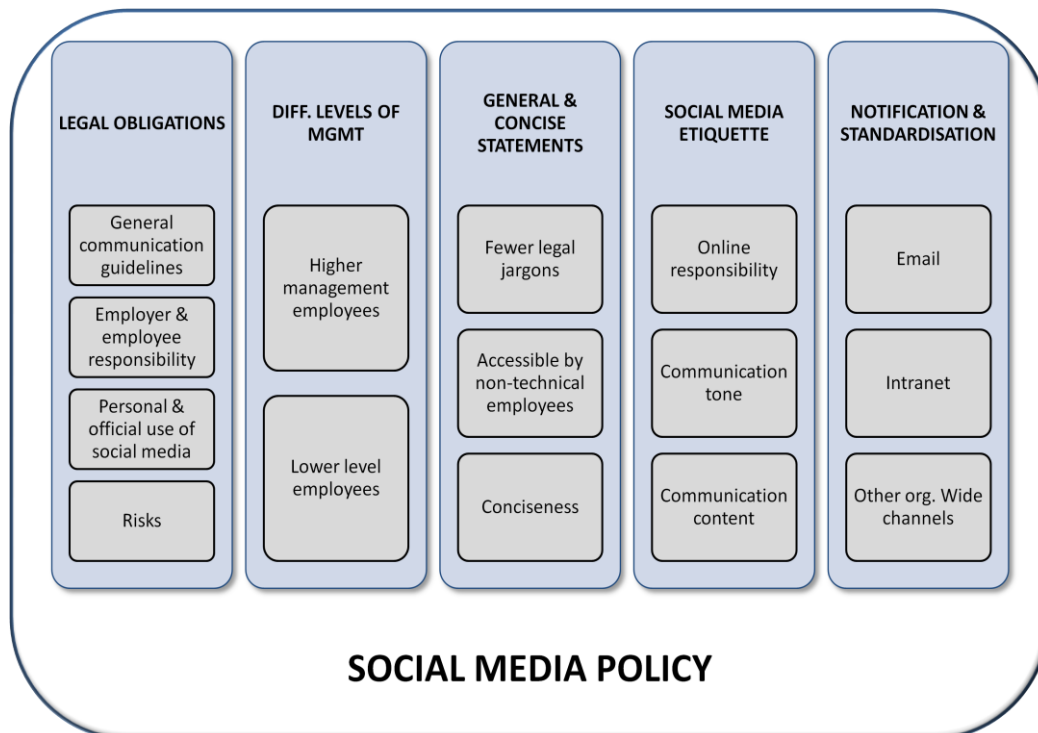


Figure 2. SOMEOP Framework (Husin & Hanisch, 2011)

Based on the SOMEOP framework in Figure 2, we identify essential areas of improvement within the StateAgency’s initial social media policy. These improvements have been elaborated separately into the respective components of the framework as shown in the following tables.

Table 1 indicates the StateAgency’s initial policy concerning legal obligations. For legal obligations the social media policy developed by the StateAgency covers the majority of the required components, with the exception of risks. Interviewee 13, who was involved in the policy development recounts that there was a concern that an additional ‘risk’ section might confuse the policy users, as well as repeating issues already covered in the Code of Conduct and the Public Sector Act 2010.

“Our organisation has a whole list of policies and guidelines (Code of Conduct and the Public Sector Act 2010)...We didn’t want the risk policy section to be big and a duplicate of what the others said” (Interviewee 13).

¹ Pseudonym for the organisation

However, according to (Hinchcliffe, 2007a) it is essential to include risks involved with social media to ensure that the employees are effectively guided in using the tools more efficiently. If the policy refers to an additional resource, employees require additional links to that specific resource particularly as the policy is available online.

Legal Obligations	Initial Comparison
General communication guidelines	The guideline that was provided within the policy was clear for their employees to understand easily but there was no link to the appropriate resource that was referenced such as their Code of Conduct
Employer & employee responsibility	The policy highlights the responsibility to which both levels need to adhere while using the social media platforms. However most of the responsibility is focused towards the employee level.
Personal & official use of social media	There was only a general indication of personal use and official use by referring to any references to StateAgency and its related activities. More resources are needed or links provided to more information on acceptable/unacceptable use.
Risks	This was not included in the policy.

Table 1 Legal obligation components comparison

Table 2 includes the application of the SOMEOP framework relating to the essential item ‘different levels of management’. Collecting different ideas and suggestions from both the senior and junior levels of management would be beneficial in ensuring the policy addresses issues that might not be recognised by the legal or executives developing the policy.

Social media platforms are self-promoting and include the concept of collaboration between users; with proven benefits for organisation (Bughin, 2008; Wallace, 2008; Stephens, Sayers & Cheetham, 2010). Another good example of effective social media use where feedback from both levels of management is beneficial is seen at IBM (DiMicco et al., 2008; DiMicco et al., 2009) where they created an online community called ‘Beehive’ IBM’s employees could interact with each other regardless of their level on different issues and business activities. Table 2 indicates that in the StateAgency, the process of policy development was top-down, and there was little to no involvement or feedback from lower level employees. As Interviewee 13 states,

“When we developed the initial policy, it was just a discussion between me and a small management team” (Interviewee 13).

For social media policy to be more effective, the inclusion of all levels of management is recommended.

Different levels of management	Initial Comparison
Higher management involvement	The process of developing the policy was led by the higher management.
Lower level employees	It does not indicate the involvement of any feedback from lower level employees.

Table 2 Different level of management components comparison

Table 3 represents the application of the SOMEOP framework to the essential item of ‘general and concise statements’ Moule and Giavara (1995) suggest that the reality within an organisation when it comes to policy is that employees tend to privilege or disregard the policy because it contains jargon to which they may not relate or even understand.

In this study, interviewees consider that they would prefer reading a policy that highlights the important aspect that is required of them without the additional jargon. Interviewee 4 recalls,

“...the biggest issue is being so prescriptive that our policy becomes so out of date or doesn’t evolve with the technology...but basing it on common sense, it encourages the employees to use these tools but also makes them aware to what they need to be worried about” (Interviewee 4).

Table 3 demonstrates that the StateAgency policy contains no jargon but lacked additional definitions on some of the tools that are available to their employees.

General and concise statements	Initial Comparison
Legal jargon	The policy does not contain any legal jargon which may confuse the reader of the policy.
Accessibility by non-technical employees	The definitions for social media was easy to understand but it lacked links to appropriate resources related to more definitions should the reader need more.
Conciseness	Overall, the level of conciseness is satisfactory for an initial policy.

Table 3 General and concise statements components comparison

Table 4 indicates the StateAgency’s initial policy concerning social media etiquette. Clearly defined responsibility for employees would provide them with additional reassurance especially when they are uncomfortable or unfamiliar using social media tools.

Interviewees in this study expressed that some managers and colleagues were still apprehensive when using social media platforms; and one reason stated was unfamiliarity with the associated responsibility with social media. For example, one interview recounts:

“Those senior managers have been in traditional media so they are much more inclining towards rejecting the technology...I think the biggest thing I notice is reticence among the users...it’s quite challenging for them to keep up to date (Interviewee 4)”

By providing examples and clear responsibilities for employees, this may attract other employees to start using social media in their work (Bermejo Garcia, 2009). StateAgency’s policy communicates the responsibility clearly but it would require more information such as examples and impacts of certain responsibility to the employees. Table 4 indicates that StateAgency contains appropriate communication content, tone and responsibilities; yet further examples would be beneficial to employees.

Social media etiquette	Initial Comparison
Online responsibility	This is covered briefly by the Roles and Responsibilities section but it would require more detail such as examples and impacts.
Communication tone	The overall tone promotes a sense of informality which would react positively with their employees.

Communication content	This aspect of the policy was done in a general view without much emphasis on which content was sensitive for publishing.
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Table 4 Social media etiquette components comparison

Table 5 includes the application of the SOMEOP framework relating to the essential item ‘notification and standardisation’. Without appropriate notification procedures, the knowledge that a social media policy exists within an organisation is limited. Most employees would not seek specific policies, unless a need arose, as this would not be deemed important in daily work. Hence, when drawing attention to specific policies for which employees should be aware, this would lead to a more effective and efficient work environment, with lower risks when using social media platforms (Cresson Wood, 2000).

Table 5 demonstrates that the StateAgency policy is not making the best use of all forms of communication channels when notifying employees about social media policy. There is no reference to the Intranet when disseminating information.

Notification and standardisation	Initial Comparison
Email	This is the official channel that has been chosen to promote the policy within the organisation.
Intranet	No reference to the internal intranet platform.
Other organisation wide channels	The social media policy would be made available on the organisation’s website.

Table 5 Notification and standardisation components comparison

From Tables 1 to 5 above, when applying the StateAgency’s initial policy, there are several recommendations based on the SOMEOP framework that would improve the policy development. It is essential to ensure that policies are well developed in order to avoid issues such as costs, legal vulnerability, security breaches, brand erosion, reduced competitiveness and decrease in productivity (Madigan et al., 2010) due to unclear guidelines for employees as mentioned by another interviewee.

5 IMPROVING SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY AT STATEAGENCY

Based on the initial comparisons, the main sections that have been identified within the StateAgency’s initial policy that require some improvements are summarised in Table 6: The key findings indicate that further information about legal obligations, with links to other resources where necessary, is needed. Feedback and communication channels between all levels of management are necessary to promote awareness of the policy and its application in practice. Feedback from bottom-up would promote improved understanding and ownership of the policy. This would also be enhanced by improved practical examples of social media etiquette.

Components	Initial Comparison
Legal obligations	Additional resources need to be linked to the policy such as Code of Conduct and also ensuring that the policy is more balanced in terms of responsibility by highlighting both the employees

	and higher management side. Risks associated with social media usage needs to be highlighted as well but indirectly without deterring the users from using the tools.
Different levels of management	Lower level employee involvement is not indicated clearly. This indication would help reassure employees that the policy is developed with inputs from their level.
General and concise statements	Definitions for some of the social media tools were made available but the inclusion of more would help employees familiarise with the tools.
Social media etiquette	Practical examples of the employee's online responsibility would better assist employee in conducting themselves online. These examples should be able to provide them an understanding of the do's and don'ts of online communication.
Notification and standardisation	Other channel of communications should be utilised as well such as the internal intranet to promote the availability of the policy.

Table 6 Recommended improvements using SOMEOP at StateAgency

From Table 6, the SOMEOP framework highlights some issues that existed within the StateAgency's social media policy. As a result, the application of the SOMEOP framework has been recommended to Senior Management at StateAgency; and the issues are being taken into consideration as their policy is further developed. Applying the framework, allows the user to effectively change or modify the required sections without any new issues arising. With the guidance concerning each component, we are provided with an overall view on policy areas that could be improved in future.

6 DISCUSSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The SOMEOP framework was proposed as a tool for organisations to develop their social media policies, effectively and efficiently. The key characteristic of the framework is to simplify the policy development process, especially for organisations that are planning to use social media tools as part of their business activities.

The analysis of StateAgency's social media policy as applied to the SOMEOP framework has shown that even when a public sector agency has developed a strong social media policy, there is room for improvement. During the analysis, by applying the model it is possible to identify specific issues, such as levels of management and the notification process, that were identified by the policy creators in their initial processes. The SOMEOP framework acts as a guide for policy development to ensure that all aspects of the policy are enacted and communicated. As this research is part of a longitudinal study, it will be interesting to note whether the results influence future policy development at StateAgency. While this is not considered "action research" (as the researchers have no authority to affect change), the benefit of a longitudinal study is the ability to assess improvements/changes over time.

We consider that SOMEOP is a worthy framework; yet it is also early in its development, and could be improved with further components. Identifying and incorporating further components would depend upon the technology and social changes that may occur in the future. The authors acknowledge that the SOMEOP framework is bound to the notion of 'social media' rather than being applicable to all forms of new technology; in essence, if the framework were applied too broadly it would not

remain relevant to social media. However, social media itself is a broad and current area of concern that warrants special attention. Current organisational policy models are inadequate to take into account the challenges arising from the implementation of social media tools.

The SOMEOP framework could be improved by emphasising other issues, such as security guidelines that are required while managing information in the global space. Incorporating further components could make the framework unwieldy and complex; hence a balance is needed between adding items that are necessary for future organisational policy development, and omitting items that are useful, but not essential. Further research is needed to develop both the framework and the social media policies in organisations.

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