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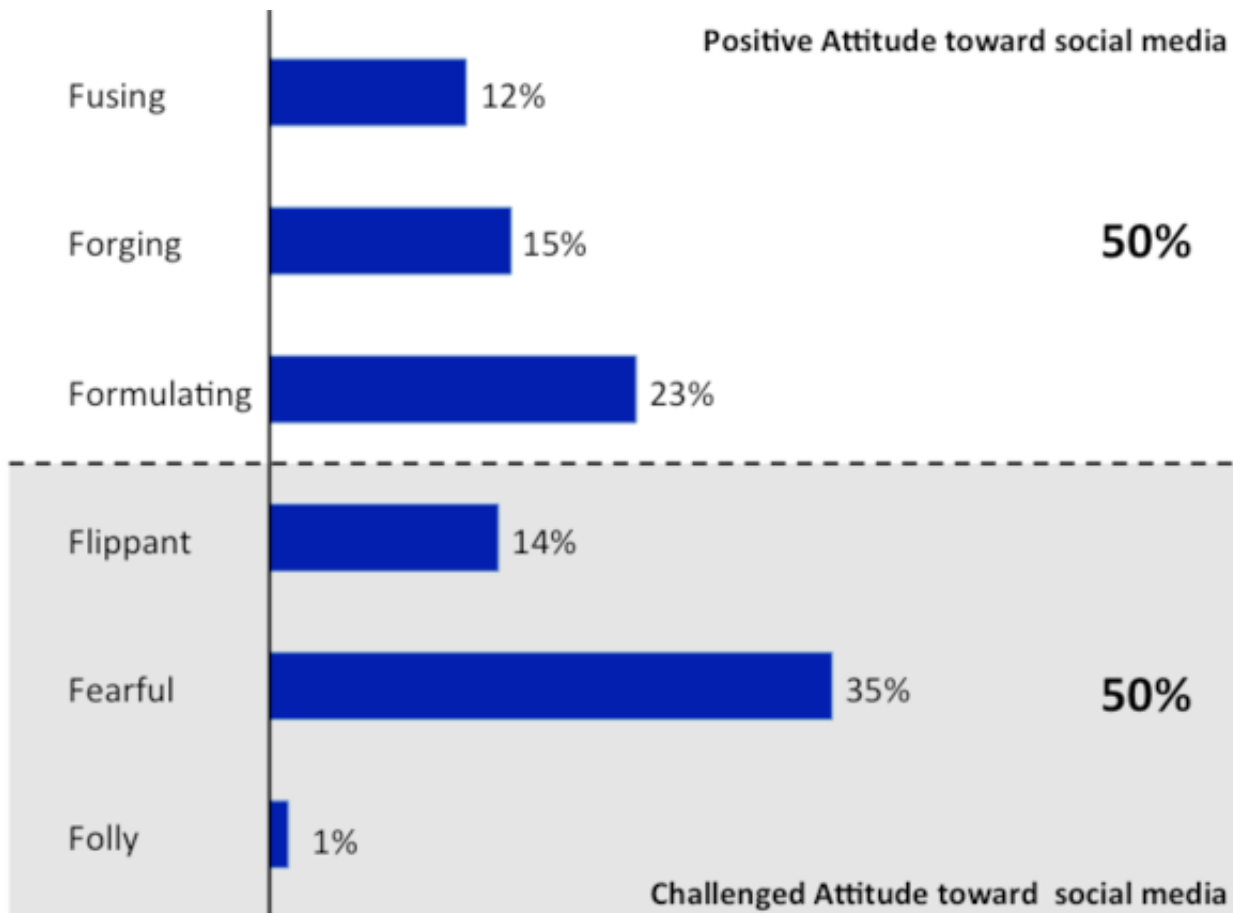
Most Organizations Still Fear Social Media

by Anthony J. Bradley and Mark P. McDonald | 7:00 AM July 20, 2012

In just a few years, social media has come to dominate many of our personal communications. We collaborate daily, sometimes productively, sometimes not. Most organizations, however, still view social media as a threat to productivity, intellectual capital, security, privacy, management authority, or regulatory compliance. In fact, this is the most common attitude among the more than 250 organizations that have taken our Social Readiness Assessment (<http://www.gartner.com/socialreadiness>) .

We're not surprised. When we first wrote about [The Six Attitudes Leaders Take Towards Social Media](http://blogs.hbr.org/cs/2011/10/the_six_attitudes_leaders_take.html) (http://blogs.hbr.org/cs/2011/10/the_six_attitudes_leaders_take.html) , our analysis showed that most organizations had yet to embrace a positive attitude towards using social media for true business value. Results of the Social Readiness Assessment reflect this continued struggle. But they also show progress. Overall, respondents were split 50/50 between a positive and challenged attitude towards social media with many indicating that they recognize the potential for social media to address strategic needs and generate durable change.

The figure below shows the distribution of the six social media attitudes we identified.



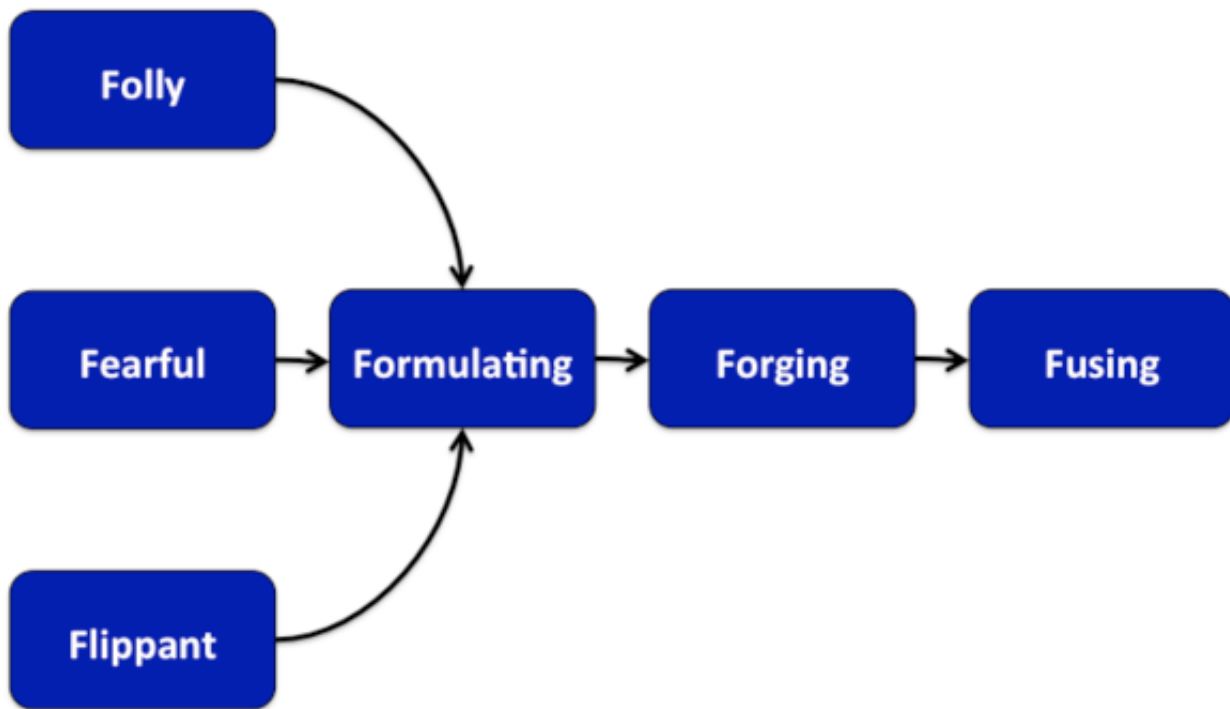
Source: The Social Organization

(http://blogs.hbr.org/cs/assets_c/2012/07/bradley-1-1978.html)

Fearful, folly and flippant attitudes keep organizations from realizing the benefits of mass collaboration. Simple social media solutions that generate 'likes' may be easier to embrace but they offer little in the way of meaningful change.

The trouble with a fearful attitude is that an organization often doesn't take a specific stance: it discourages and even prohibits the use of social media. While this approach reduces the potential for undesirable behavior — that's the reason for restriction — it also stifles any business value that might be derived from grassroots use of social media.

In companies with a formulating attitude, organizational leadership recognizes both the value of community collaboration and the need to be more organized and strategic in its use. They actively plan how to use it with well-defined purposes. They are no longer fearful of its misuse nor flippant about its potential to drive results back into the organization.



(http://blogs.hbr.org/cs/assets_c/2012/07/bradley2-1981.html)

Progression Path to Becoming a Social Organization

Source: *The Social Organization*

Moving Beyond Fear

Social media sponsors who want to move beyond the three negative attitudes tend to build their social media capability in one of two ways: They either use it to demonstrate executive support and build confidence throughout the organization, or they start small with a narrow and specific purpose. Note that this is different than starting with a pilot. Social media pilots don't work because they might limit the initial audience, which needs to grow organically and aggressively for success; or they tend to launch with a half-baked scope or technology that doesn't inspire the community to participate.

The large grocery retailer SUPERVALU provides a good example of how to overcome fear in an organization by demonstrating executive support. CEO and President Craig Herkert saw social media as a way to respond faster to market needs, create a flatter organization, and share ideas and innovations, according to Wayne Shurts, the company's CIO. To this end, Herkert uses social media both to communicate with the company and also to respond to questions and comments directly and quickly. He encourages his executive team to participate and even assigns comments and action items to them via social media where everyone can see. This creates a cultural intimacy in a company with multiple brands and acquired chains.

SUPERVALU's executive team's use of social media has encouraged the formation of collaborative communities across the stores and departments. Whereas ideas and experiences were previously kept within local store brands, now collaborative communities have formed based on commonalities that exist across the store brands. For example, a grass roots "Shores Stores Group" formed among the more than 100 store managers with stores located in vacation communities. These stores face unique challenges from staffing during the busy season to handling peak demand during the summer months. The tools, techniques, and approaches to handling these issues are unique to this type of store and social media provides a platform for sharing ideas.

The second option to overcome fear entails defining a purpose that engages people without threatening the organization. For example, instead of deploying a social network for all its employees to collaborate more effectively (but only starting with a pilot for the "western region"), a company can build a social media solution for sales people to network specifically on how to successfully identify and overcome the top three sales objections.

In other words, consider a starter set of social media purposes that are highly magnetic to individuals to attract them into collaborative communities. Purposes related to employee health and safety, customer support, or even organizing the company picnic have all been used to move beyond fear and into action and experience.

Any organization can get lucky and have a single successful implementation of social media. Social leaders, on the other hand, build collaborative capability through a learning process that starts with understanding their current attitude and taking the steps required to building confidence and trust. This turns a single social media success into a sustained source of competitive advantage.