Chapter 4
The Go-Betweens: Backstage Collaboration Among Community Managers in an Inter-organisational Enterprise Social Network

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Introduction

Enterprise Social Networks (ESNs) are increasingly considered a legitimate workplace tool. A level of ambiguity however remains as to whether time spent on an ESN is 'productive' or 'social' time. Will employees be judged harshly if they are seen to frequently post and reply on the company ESN? Are they 'slacking off' or are they being good organisational citizens, answering questions and contributing to innovative solutions? This ambiguity is central to the 'problem' of ESN implementation, not because it needs 'resolving' but because it requires a strategy that allows for both 'realities' of ESN use to exist at once, as they speak to different stakeholder groups within the organisation. Here we take note of the difficult task that falls on the role of the 'community manager'. A community manager is a member of the organisation whose job is to cultivate ESN adoption and use. They are usually not executives, nor are they amongst the worker cohort that they are trying to tempt onto the ESN. The community manager is 'stuck in the middle'.

They are tasked with brokering not only interest in the ESN but also the messaging around its value to the organisation. This message may need to be bifurcated, so that executives and managers are presented with stories of time saved and solutions found, while workers are shown how the ESN allows them to have their voice heard amongst peers and management. The community manager thus occupies a kind of role that is familiar to middle managers: they are a "go-between" (Goffman, 1959), a "master and victim of double talk" (Roethlisberger, 1945), who is burdened with

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trying to influence two groups who have influence over them, while having only limited grounds for status and legitimacy themselves.

The anxiety that a "go-between" faces in trying to please two cohorts with sometimes opposing interests has been previously examined. In the following case we show how this phenomenon relates to ESN implementation. Using case material, we show how community managers are able to cope with the challenges of their go-between role by remotely coming together in an inter-organisational ESN of their own. We draw on the work of Erving Goffman to theorise how such a 'backstage' space operates and what it offers the community managers in their efforts to roll out ESNs in their organisations.

Background: ESN Adoption and Sense-Making

Enterprise Social Networks (ESN) are a set of technologies that include the foundational features associated with social network sites but which, sanctioned by management, are implemented within and have the ability to restrict membership to certain members of an organization (Ellison, Gibbs, & Weber, 2015).

ESNs are said to hold great promise for organisations. According to a report by McKinsey (2012), effective use of such technologies can result in a 20–25% improvement in the productivity of knowledge workers. Another study by Forrester Research in a large organisation found a return on investment of 365% on an investment in an ESN platform over three years (Dodd, 2011). Not surprisingly, enterprise social networks have gained increased interest from organisations, with more and more businesses adopting such platforms (Bughin, 2015).

At the same time, decision makers have voiced concerns that by employing social media within the organization, businesses are at risk of importing some of the typical behaviours associated with the use of social media on the public Internet (e.g. Howlett, 2009), such as hedonistic, egocentric, and leisure-focused behaviours observed on Facebook or Twitter (Naaman, Boase, & Lai, 2010). It is not surprising then that management in charge of the roll-out of ESNs are often highly focused on demonstrating economic returns from employing ESNs and similar technologies. The confusion and debate over ESNs and their role in organisations can be taken as evidence that although they are quite well understood from a technical perspective (i.e. as a fairly familiar instantiation of Web 2.0), what exactly ESNs 'are' and the role that they play in work practices is anything but settled. While the ambiguity inherent to ESNs is in its own right a worthy topic of investigation, we here focus on how community managers, who are tasked with gathering support for ESN adoption, come to collectively learn how to draw on this ambiguity in a strategic way in order to convince both management and worker cohorts, in different ways, that the company ESN is worthy of their time and attention.

Enterprise Social Networks

ESNs are platforms, typically accessed through a web browser or mobile app, that allow people to (1) communicate messages with their coworkers or broadcast messages to everyone within the organisation; (2) explicitly indicate or implicitly reveal particular coworkers as communication partners; (3) post, edit, and sort text and files linked to themselves or others; and (4) view the messages, connections, text, and files communicated, posted, edited and sorted by anyone else in their organisation at any time of their choosing (Leonardi, Huysman, & Steinfield, 2013).

As such, ESNs can be viewed as a subset of the Enterprise 2.0 phenomenon (McAfee, 2009), which refers to the application of social software more generally (von Krogh, 2012), such as social networking sites, blogs, wikis, or group communication services (Razmerita, Kirchner, & Nabeth, 2014), in an organisational context. Today's ESN applications, such as Yammer, Workplace, Slack, Chatter, Jive or IBM Connections resemble public social network sites in that they are aggregations of different tools including instant messaging, wikis, and microblogging.

ESNs have been linked directly to individual employee performance in recent research. Riemer, Finke, and Hovorka (2015) found that individuals draw social capital and associated benefits from their use of ESNs in day-to-day work. Further research found that ESNs can help overcome the challenges associated with knowledge sharing, such as locating of expertise, motivation to share knowledge and developing and maintaining social ties with knowledge bearers (Fulk & Yuan, 2013).

Hence, the business case for introduction of an ESN generally involves benefits that derive from better connectedness between employees. Indeed, past research has shown a variety of organisational ESN uses, such as for communication and collaboration (Riemer, Richter, & Böhringer, 2010), knowledge management (Levy, 2009) or crowdsourcing (Schlagwein & Bjorn-Andersen, 2014). ESN benefits are linked to increased efficiency as employees communicate and solve problems more quickly. A more ambitious hope is that improved communication will lead to the generation of more innovative ideas, because issues are made visible and accessible to a diversity of people and functions within the business; some early research has shown applications of ESN in contexts such as open innovation (Dahlander & Gann, 2010) or open strategy (Tavakoli, Schlagwein, & Schoder, 2015).

Essentially, ESNs serve as infrastructure that enable digitally supported work in many different ways. But while its open infrastructure character is at the heart of an ESN's capacity to support many different uses and contexts, this characteristic is not without problems when it comes to the adoption of ESNs.

ESN Adoption Challenges

Since any organizational benefits of ESNs will materialize only through sustained use of the platform (DeLone & McLean, 1992), and given its network nature, it is

important that ESNs are adopted by a significant number of users within an organization. Adoption of ESNs however has proven elusive in many organizations. An important reason for this is that ESNs are "malleable" technologies (Richter & Riemer, 2013) that afford many different uses and can be appropriated for a variety of purposes, but for this very reason require an active process of interpretation, sense-making and appropriation to find a place within a particular organisation (Riemer & Johnston, 2012).

Malleability also implies that any efforts to 'prescribe' ESN use in a top-down way are bound to be problematic as it is difficult to determine ex-ante and at a distance how an ESN might best be used in a given context (Richter & Riemer, 2013). Rather, what an ESN will become in use within a particular organisation, or organisational unit, can ultimately only be uncovered through experimenting and local sense-making in concrete business practices, bringing about what Orlikowski, 2000) refers to as "technologies-in-practice". Consequently, unlike more traditional technologies that are employed to support the core business processes of the organisation, and thus are always associated with a concrete task and purpose, ESNs are best understood as infrastructure that is not intended to support specific predetermined tasks (Riemer, Steinfield, & Vogel, 2009). In other words, as malleable technologies ESNs are intended as platforms upon which users explore and negotiate *new* ways of working (Richter & Riemer, 2013). Consequently the proliferation of ESNs in the enterprise typically follows, at least in parts, a bottom-up approach of implementation, a more inclusive and egalitarian process (Schneckenberg, 2009), referred to as appropriation (Carroll, Howard, Peck, & Murphy, 2002) during which potential uses are discovered in a process of practical sense-making (Riemer & Johnston, 2014).

However, while top-down approaches to implementing ESNs appear antithetical to the open nature of the technology, our understanding of how bottom-up processes of sense-making and appropriation unfold in organisations is still in its infancy. Significantly, it is even less clear how such a process can be actively managed or guided to achieve positive and lasting outcomes for the organisation. Investigating how the roll-out of an ESN can be managed or guided is all the more important given typical managerial scepticism around 'social' technologies, concerns that social technologies lead to unproductive "wasting of time" or that economic benefits and return on investment are fundamentally unclear initially. One response to this challenge, which has not yet received significant research attention, is the hiring of so-called community managers, employed by organisations to look after their internal ESN implementation/adoption processes.

ESN Community Managers

Community managers are a relatively new role created to aid the implementation of ESNs, a person tasked with promoting and supervising the adoption and use of an ESN. The role is essentially caught between the notions of implementation and adoption—the community manager is employed by management to 'implement' a

technology by stimulating the grass-roots 'adoption' of workers in the organisation. Because an ESN is supposed to involve members of the organisation at all levels and across divisions in daily conversational interactions, for the ESN to be successful, the community manager will need to wrangle support from individuals and cohorts who have not directly endorsed the introduction of the ESN. The biggest challenge facing the community manager is thus to, on the one hand inspire participation amongst workers, and on the other hand maintain support and even participation from managers/executives.

The malleable nature of ESN and the open nature of the adoption process is a double-edged sword for community managers, as this openness can be drawn upon in promoting the technology in different ways to different audiences, but this can also cause problems, for example when management promotes an ESN based on certain instrumental expectations of its benefits for collaboration and productivity, community managers are faced with the task of reconciling an open-ended process of sense-making and appropriation, so that the ESN can unfold its potential for local work practices in the best possible way, with management expectations of clear economic benefits in terms of return-on-investment of the 'ESN project'.

We further note that these complexities and struggles are usually burdens that are carried alone. It would be unusual for a company to hire more than one community manager. The position itself is somewhat precarious, as it depends on the 'success' of ESN implementation and adoption and therefore the support of both management and worker cohorts. Although ESNs are productively thought of as open-ended and in need of gradual, localised nurturing, community managers face an existential need to speed up the adoption process and communicate this in terms of 'value' to different stakeholders. Against this backdrop, in this paper we investigate the following research question: How do community managers deal with their conflicted position in the process of ESN implementation and adoption?

Case Study: A Community of ESN Community Managers

For this study we had access to data from Beta,[1] an international ESN provider. Beta provides a typical ESN platform, which is hosted as a software service in the cloud. Corporate clients will create their own private network on the platform, so that employees from each organisation become members of the network belonging to that organisation. Additionally, clients are able to also create dedicated inter-organisational networks, to which anyone can be invited. Each network on the Beta platform comes with a 'General stream' as the default for sending messages, but users can also create groups which are either public (accessible to anyone who wants to join) or private (protected and only open upon invitation). The particular data set we had access to for this study came from an inter-organisational network that was

[1]The name of the company, its products, and any other aspects have been changed to ensure anonymity.

managed by Beta itself in the form of an electronic hierarchy (Klein, 1996), in that this ESN was administered and controlled by Beta, with membership made up of those employees from each of its corporate clients serving in community manager (or similar) roles and a number of Beta employees. True to its make-up this network was called the Beta Community Network (BCN).

Data Collection: The Beta Community Network (BCN)

For Beta, the BCN was a strategic device for providing help and advice to its corporate clients. One of Beta's stated aims was to use the BCN to drive user adoption and engagement within its client networks. The BCN served at once as a suggestion box and discussion space for new product features and as a community for client community managers, tasked with the roll-out, and more generally the success, of the Beta ESNs within their organisations.

Accordingly, Beta made available via the BCN a range of different employees, most notably product managers and so-called Beta community network advisors (CNAs). Yet, rather than merely establishing bilateral relationships between client community managers and 'their' CNAs, Beta—out of a deep belief in transparency and the usefulness of its ESN for facilitating discussion—opted to create a space in which CNAs and client community managers were able to freely communicate and share their experiences with each other. It is this communal aspect of the BCN that is of most interest to our study.

We obtained from Beta a structured file of all public messages exchanged on the BCN between January 2011 and April 2013. This data set contained a total of just over 90K messages, around 15K of which were automatically generated bot messages. For each message the data set contained the actual message content, a time stamp, the ID of the sender of the message, the ID of the message it was in reply to, and a thread number that allowed sorting messages into communication threads to follow unfolding conversations. It also indicated if a message was posted in a group and the group name. To protect the privacy of its clients, the data set did not contain any identifying details about its users or their organisations, beyond numerical IDs.

The data is suitable for our study for a number of reasons. Firstly, it provides unique access to the first hand conversations among ESN community managers which allows studying the sense-making process of this group of people as they are involved in the roll-out and appropriation in their organisations. Secondly, the data stems from a period (2011–2013) when ESN was making inroads into organisational workplaces as an innovation that had yet to be fully understood. This time period is thus ideal to study how community managers jointly coped with the resulting ambiguity and uncertainty that each faced in their organisations. And thirdly, the data set includes the voice of Beta itself, in the form of the CNAs and other Beta employees.

Data Analysis and Initial Findings

As our interest in this paper lies with studying how community managers go about dealing with the conflicting requirements of stakeholders involved in the roll-out and adoption/implementation of ESN in their organisations, we focused on the ways in which they shared experiences regarding those matters within the BCN, rather than other conversations, such as those about technical ESN matters. Given the subject matter we proceeded with a qualitative, iterative analysis approach. Due to the size of the dataset this involved in a first step the identification of those conversations relevant to the topic. We began with one author reading the entirety of the main feed of the BCN, making notes of what stood out as surprising and interesting (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2013). The resulting set of conversations was then discussed with her co-author in an attempt to make sense of what was found and to identify a suitable lens through which to understand what was going on in the data (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012; Weick, 2012).

In our initial reading of the material we found a number of different conversations in which community managers reported on tensions that stem from what we came to understand as a 'caught in the middle' position in their organisations, in that they had to rehearse different ways of communicating the value of ESN to different cohorts. This was most notable in a number of discussions that revolved around the following matters:

- *How do managers and the broader workforce view the ESN?* Some community managers reported that it was surprisingly difficult to convince managers of the benefits of employees using the ESN, as any such benefits were predominantly parsed through a productivity lens, at the expense of a broader understanding that included 'socialising' among employees, which was conversely often used as a drawcard to motivate employees to join the ESN.
- *How are benefits of the ESN demonstrated to the two stakeholder groups?* On the one hand, community managers saw a strong need to be able to defend the ESN's worth in terms of economic value vis-à-vis corporate managers. For example, a published report commissioned by Beta that reported on a particularly high ROI when employing Beta's ESN was said to be useful in doing so. This helped them construct the ESN as a *productivity tool* that was 'good for business' because it could be linked to efficiency and ultimately profitability. At the same time, BCN members also discussed the ESN as a *discussion space* with the capacity to break down silos and encourage workers to voice their opinions and get to know one another across business functions, regardless of status. Given that those two framings are at odds with each other, it led to visible confusion, anxiety and discussion among the community managers.
- *How is participation in the ESN viewed?* The differences in understanding of the ESN were further reflected in discussions about how 'engagement' on the ESN was perceived differently in different organisations. In one organisation, a high engagement score (meaning many workers were performing at least some actions on the ESN) could be taken to mean that workers were being *unproductive*,

as they were wasting time on a "social" platform. In another organisation high engagement scores could be seen as a success indicator in that the ESN was supporting productivity.

- *Should management participate in the ESN?* There was also disagreement among community managers about whether it was desirable to have executives join their local networks. Some thought that the presence of executives was a necessary way of lending credibility to the use of the ESN as a work tool, while other community managers thought that an executive presence would hamper workers in speaking their mind or deter them from contributing altogether for fear of being seen as lazy or unproductive.

Given the ways in which the ESN was portrayed very differently not just across organisations, but more importantly within the same organisation, by different stakeholder groups, meant that community managers had to at least juggle, if not reconcile those conflicting viewpoints. These initial insights reinforced that the community manager role is indeed characterised by a need to sustain more than one message at a time while coping with the pressures that such a selective and strategic presentation of information requires. This led us to search for an appropriate theoretical lens that would aid us in interpreting and theorizing the role of the ESN community managers, as the nexus of ESN appropriation practices. We were particularly interested in the kind of work that was being performed by the community managers on the BCN, and making sense of what was happening when community managers shared their frustrations, tips, strategies, and suggestions with one another and with Beta representatives.

In Search of a Theoretical Lens

The situation of the community managers being 'stuck in the middle' reminded us of the story of the "foreman" as reported in some of the early management literature (Roethlisberger, 1945). This literature typified the foreman's dilemma as stemming from being both the "master and victim of double talk". The foreman had to deal with being 'stuck in the middle'; between management and the factory floor, an awkward position that Roethlisberger associated with a near constant state of anxiety. Today, this position is commonly associated with the 'middle manager', who similarly needs to keep two cohorts happy at once, even when the aims of these two groups (management and workers) are in conflict with one another.

The notion of the foreman thus provided a starting point for illuminating the community managers' problems, and the way in which the community managers frequently appealed to their CNAs, and to one another, for help in 'managing the message' in a dual direction. We sought to further understand this middle manager perspective and found that sociologist Erving Goffman (1959) drew on Roethlisberger's ideas and developed a detailed theoretical discussion of the foreman role, which he characterised as an example of a 'go-between'. Thus informed by the work

of Roethlisberger and Goffman, we developed a perspective with which we were able to ask new questions in a second, more targeted, analysis of the data. In this analysis we became sensitised to the uniqueness of the BCN setting: as a *place* or 'region' (Goffman, 1959) where community managers could come together, to share the burden of their position and to develop strategies with which to more effectively "talk out of both sides of his mouth at the same time—to become a master of double talk" (Roethlisberger, 1945, pp. 7–8).

We found that our data offered the opportunity to employ theoretical categories from Goffman to shed light on the community manager role. Further, this perspective enabled us to see the BCN as a particular kind of space which allows community managers to privately come together and make sense of ESNs and develop strategies that support the complex 'performances' involved in gaining and sustaining support for ESN implementation and adoption. In the following section we introduce several conceptual tools from Goffman (1959) that we subsequently put to work in interpreting our case data to gain insights about the community manager role and how the BCN supported their ability to cope with both the ambiguity of ESN and their two-sided role in promoting its use. In the subsequent section we work with this theory to make sense of our data, bringing in further concepts from Goffman (1959) where needed to analyse our case material.

Goffman's Theatre Metaphor for Theorising Social Life

Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* outlines a way of understanding everyday life through the metaphor of theatrical performance. His concepts of 'front stage' and 'backstage' regions have found some purchase in Information Systems literature concerned with unofficial 'backchannel' communications (Orlikowski, 1996). Goffman's wider corpus and reference to the materiality of social life has also been championed as useful to scholars interested in technology by Pinch and Swedberg (2008). Overall however Goffman's influence in Information Systems and Organisational research remains marginal and we acknowledge that readers may not be familiar with the nuances of his approach. We therefore introduce key concepts and give brief context to his thinking here. Our introduction to Goffman is attuned to those aspects that we find relevant to the study of ESN, and we recognise that this precis is selective and is of course interpreted in a particular way. We direct interested readers to the original text as a primary source with, we argue, the potential to inspire further thinking and research on the topic of ESN use and implementation in particular and IS more broadly.

Table 4.1 Performances require information control

Term	Definition
Secrets	The concealment of destructive information is necessary for teams to maintain a particular impression of reality; teams keep one another's secrets and conceal destructive information from their audiences through impression management techniques
Destructive information	Provided by facts that, if attention is drawn to them, would discredit, disrupt or make useless the reality that the performance fosters in relation to a particular audience
Information control	A key problem for performing teams is to prevent the audience from acquiring destructive information; "a team must be able to keep its secrets and have its secrets kept"

Performances and Secrets

Goffman (1959) uses the metaphor of theatre to study and understand the dynamics of everyday life. He claims that we are always engaged in a performance of one kind or another, in relation to a particular audience. A performance is the endeavour of enacting a particular reality in relation to others (Goffman, 1959; Hafermalz, Riemer, & Boell, 2016). This is usually a collective effort—for example a team of consultants help one another in enacting professionalism and authority in relation to their client. These impressions that are fostered in the process of performance are however always partial and fragile, meaning that a team needs to work together to emphasise information that supports the reality they are trying to sustain, while de-emphasizing and concealing information that is incongruent with it. As a consequence performances to a large extent rely on the keeping of *secrets*—the suppression of certain facts from the audience to whom one is performing (Table 4.1).

A key aspect of being part of a performing team in the Goffmanian sense is that teammates help keep each other's secrets, explicitly or even at times without being consciously aware that such secrets are in play. *Secrets*, characterised by the containment of destructive information, can only be kept when there are adequate means of separating teams from one another, in that there needs to be a degree of separation between the performing team and the audience, so that the performing team has ways in which they can present certain realities while concealing others (for example costumes hanging in a theatre dressing room or piles of laundry in an expensive hotel). Secrets cannot be kept when there are no boundaries between performing teams and audiences. It is thus in relation to secrets that the notions of the 'front stage' and 'backstage' become important.

The notion of performances and secrets is relevant to our case because it provides us with a way of understanding the interaction between community managers on the BCN. Access to the BCN is restricted, and it is this privacy that supports the sharing of 'destructive information' that is useful to fellow community managers but could be harmful if it were to be accessed by workers or managers in their respective organisations. We also note that privacy achieved through restricted access to ESNs

is important, and that it is possible to see the 'same' ESN platform as being very different in practice, depending on what cohorts have access to it and what kind of information is shared there.

Regions for Information Control

Goffman's notion of 'front stage' and 'backstage' are often introduced in a purely spatial sense, to delineate between one geographic area and another. What is often missed is that it is a need for information control that drives the construction of the boundaries that generate the front/backstage distinction. More than a fixed cordoned off place, backstage regions are a *means* of enabling the concealment of certain facts, or secrets, in the process of staging performances. Storerooms, changing rooms, and bathrooms are typical architectural examples of dedicated backstage spaces where individuals or groups of people exercise 'information control' by concealing 'tools of their trade', whether it be stacks of an item of clothing that on the store floor is presented as 'one of a kind', or an office lunchroom where workers take a break, relax, and speak candidly about the daily goings-on of the organisation.

Temporal and spatial separation between groups allows for the alternate concealment and strategic presentation of information in a team's pursuit of sustaining "the definition of the situation that its performance fosters" (Goffman, 1959, p. 141). *Backstage regions* are thus primarily of importance because they offer a mechanism that affords concealing a team's secrets from the audience they perform to. Any reader who has had the experience of being shown 'backstage' after a performance will know that what is revealed there interrupts (sometimes to disappointing effect) the illusion that was fostered during the staged performance.

The analogy of a backstage can and has been translated to technologically-enabled environments. We have long used spatial metaphors to discuss online communication venues, e.g. a 'chat room' and scholars have explicitly used Goffman's work to describe situations where an online communication environment is used as a kind of 'backstage' that allows users to communicate in an informal capacity about what is happening on the 'front stage' (Hafermalz & Riemer, 2016; Orlikowski, 1996).

Under this analytical lens, both secrets and the spaces that enable their confidential transmission and concealment are essential elements of performance, both in the theatre and in everyday life. While prior IS research has focused on the spatial aspect of this point by discussing particular types of space or 'regions' for communication (see Table 4.2), so far the link to the importance of *secrets* in the wider process of staging a performance that involves technologically enabled communication has not been fully explored. As we will show however, appreciating the importance of secrets is key to understanding another element of Goffman's framework, "roles". Goffman's analysis of roles is closely linked to the concepts of regions and information control, and his notion of "discrepant roles" in particular proves useful to our analysis of community managers.

Table 4.2 Regions and their translation to the case

Term	Definition	Goffman example	Case example
Region	'any place that is bounded to some degree by barriers to perception' more or less bound, e.g. a room with glass panels (aurally bound) versus brick walls (visually and aurally bound)	Doctor's consulting room	Beta ESN: 'general stream', or group
Front region (front stage)	The place, relative to a given performance, where the performance is given, where aspects of activity congruent with the impression of reality that the performing team is trying to maintain are expressively accentuated and discrepant information is suppressed	Floor of a shop	The client ESNs; a boardroom during a meeting with executives; at-desk training sessions with employees
Back region (backstage)	A place, relative to a given performance, where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course. Commonly located near but away from where the performance is located, cut off by a partition and guarded passageway	A hotel kitchen	The BCN network; private ESN groups

Discrepant Roles

Goffman (1959) posits that in relation to a particular performance, everyone takes on a particular *role*. The main roles, found in most performances, are that of: performer, audience, and outsider (see Table 4.3). Usually the staging of a performance requires that people fall clearly into one of these roles (keeping in mind that both roles and regions are never essential to a person or place, they derive their meaning from their position within the performance): (1) A *performer* is a member of the performing team and possesses the most information about the performance; (2) *audience* members have access to the information that is presented to them, but may also be able to glean insight to destructive information through careful observation (for example by noticing a misplaced prop). (3) There are also always *outsiders* who are excluded from both the front stage and backstage and generally have no knowledge of the performance.

The need for regions to be accessible by different kinds of people at certain times is common to everyday life because "destructive information" (Table 4.1) needs to be kept concealed from the audience to whom a team performs if a particular enactment of reality is to be maintained. So both in a theatre performance and in 'real life', backstage spaces are generally protected and only accessible to the performing team (e.g. a 'staff only' sign on a hotel door). However some roles are more complicated than those shown in Table 4.3. In some cases, an audience member may be 'in' on

Table 4.3 Main roles in relation to a performance

Role	Information possessed	Accessible regions	Case example
Performer	Impression they foster and destructive information about the show	Front stage and backstage	Community managers traverse both their organisation's ESN and the BCN
Audience	What they have been allowed to perceive and what they can glean from close observation	Front stage	Managers and workers who use the company ESNs do not have access to the BCN
Outsider	Neither the secrets of the performance nor the appearance of the reality fostered	Excluded from both regions	ESN non-adopters

the performance, for example a 'shill' in a circus surreptitiously plays along with the circus performers in order to facilitate the exploitation of the 'marks'. The shill has knowledge of the performers' secrets even though she acts as if she is a member of the audience.

Goffman is interested in such exceptions and refers to all such roles, which do not fit neatly into the categories shown in Table 4.3, as "discrepant roles". *Discrepant roles* are roles where peculiar *vantage points* lead to incongruences in the categories shown in Table 4.3. Such roles are possible when someone has access to more regions, and therefore information, than is usually available to either a single performing team or single audience, e.g. the shill. Another example of a discrepant role that we will focus on in this chapter is called a mediator, or "go-between". A *go-between* is characterised by access to some of the backstage regions and secrets of *two* teams. This is different from the shill, who only has access to the secrets of one performing team. Instead, the go-between is an example of a discrepant role because they perform to two audiences and are knowledgeable of aspects of both of these teams' secrets. Go-betweens are in essence 'double-shills' (Goffman, 1959, p. 93).

One famous organisational example of a go-between, which we mentioned earlier, is the factory foreman. The foreman was a fairly new, prominent, and curious position in Goffman's time. Building on a well-known article by Roethlisberger (1945), Goffman writes:

> One illustration of the go-between's role appears in recent studies of the function of the foreman. Not only must he accept the duties of the director, guiding the show on the factory floor on behalf of the managerial audience, but he must also translate what he knows and what the audience sees into a verbal line which his conscience and the audience will be willing to accept (Goffman, 1959, p. 159).

Here we get a sense of how the foreman must be a part of two performances that occur in different places and in relation to two different audiences—one in the manager's office to management and one on the factory floor to workers. The foreman as go-between is aware of secrets which one team does not wish to share

with the other, and must be very careful in what facts he presents and conceals to either team. The foreman as go-between is thus an historical example of a discrepant role and illustrates the complexities that come from needing to act out one's role in relation to different teams and performances where the concealment, sharing, and maintenance of secrets through the use of spatial divisions is vital to fostering a successful impression of reality and keeping the show going.

We have already characterised the community managers as playing the role of such 'go-betweens'. They occupy a discrepant role that has them caught between management and worker cohorts. They have special access to the 'secrets' of each of these cohorts, and need to be careful about how they exercise information control both in relation to their own and their two audiences' performances. As we will explore in the following, the BCN offers a unique opportunity for these go-betweens to gather in a space that affords them the privacy needed to carefully share such destructive information in a candid and constructive way. We will show that this sharing not only of information but of *secrets* plays a vital part in the construction of a collegial relationship that supports them in the local performances of their roles.

Analysis: Interplay of BCN, Community Managers and CNAs

Encouraged by our initial insights we set out to better understand the nature of the BCN from a theoretical perspective, by employing Goffman's regions and roles concepts. Making use of Goffman's concept of the go-between made it possible for us to appreciate the uniqueness of the BCN as a space for this cohort to congregate, interact, and collaborate. It was also initially unclear to us what role the CNAs played in this arrangement, as a group of people dedicated to assisting the community managers (as go-betweens) to better manage the duality of their message. We find that Goffman (1959) provides a way of analysing our data that accounts for the complexities of these roles by offering concepts that are sensitive to spatiality. In the following we show how the BCN is constructed as a "backstage" space for community managers who are geographically dispersed and we consider how use of this space facilitates them in making sense of ESN and how to facilitate its adoption in their respective companies.

The BCN as a Backstage for Sharing "Secrets"

We introduced concepts from Goffman's work on performances in some detail because we found that this perspective assists our analysis of the BCN case. We first draw on Goffman's notions to argue that in our case, the BCN acts as a back-stage space for community managers, who we come to understand as go-betweens.

We found that there is a tendency for the content of the community managers' conversations to directly pertain to these groups and their respective 'secrets'. For example, in the interaction in Fig. 4.1 between community managers, the challenge of getting leaders and executives to participate in ESNs is discussed. These community managers come from different (perhaps even competing) companies, and yet here they are exchanging suggestions and insights about how to present information (about ESN use) to one of their audience cohorts (executives/management). The advice centres on how to craft and sustain a particular reality in relation to this audience. In the exchange below, certain 'destructive information' pertaining to management audiences is shared—for example, the notion that executives are susceptible to flattery is discussed as a tactic for assisting other community managers in sustaining the impression that Beta is a worthwhile tool for executives; while another community manager reveals that their manager is insecure about being seen to condone unprofessional behaviour at work and that this needs to be overcome if Beta is to be seen as worth adopting.

The above exchange demonstrates how the BCN provides a 'backstage' space that permits the candid sharing of secrets pertaining to community managers' management audience, for example in relation to the strategies that community managers use to 'manage upwards' in influencing their executives. Because the BCN is accessible only to those who have been invited to it, there is little chance that the audience members to whom the community managers usually perform will 'walk in' and see that they are being talked about. It is therefore a private space where performers can run through their performance and rehearse how to best enact a particular reality when they will be 'on stage'.

We have already explained that such backstage spaces are integral to all performances as all performing teams need to keep secrets from their audiences in order to sustain the "illusion" that their performance fosters. However appreciating the uniqueness of the BCN case requires a consideration of what it means for community managers as *go-betweens* to have a space to gather, engage in sense-making, and share secrets about their dual audiences.

The ESN Community Managers as "Go-Betweens"

The role of the go-between is one marked by anxiety (Roethlisberger 1945), to do with needing to manage two impressions at once and needing to gain the "spontaneous cooperation" of the workforce, while meeting managerial imperatives at the same time. The excerpt below in Fig. 4.2 illustrates a discussion where the need for this kind of worker co-operation in the face of managerial imperatives leads to an exchange of advice. The community managers share their strategies and suggestions for engaging employees in the use of their company ESNs.

We interpret this exchange as the community managers collectively making sense of ESN and rehearsing different impressions of what the ESN is and what it can offer workers, seemingly in preparation for a future front stage performance (i.e. on the

User ID	Message	Time stamp
4315712	Starting a new thread about convincing execs to participate in an open and realtime format. I'd imagine that can cause some discomfort. How do you convince people otherwise?	2012-10-02,15:40:27
10489280	I think that helping your leader understand the value, first, is key. Stress to them that they can really connect with employees in a new and effective way. Then, draw a comparison that you think will appeal to them. I've used "online press conference" before; I've also said that it's like them being in New York's Central Park, being that cool guy who's playing five games of chess at once. I also assure them that I'll be there with them to support and help. They're not doing this alone; I engage subject matter experts ready to watch and be called or jump in.	2012-10-02,15:43:20
7242819	We had to work hard with this one particularly with our parent company, [client name removed], actually. They were worried because Beta had such a 'facebook' feel to it, but we emphasised that our code of conduct still applies to this the same way it applies to emails, etc... As far as getting a tricky question, we did some practice runs where I asked the exec some of the worst ones I could think of (or that I got from some of our brokers in the past) and showed him that no matter what people ask, as long as it's not offensive (in which case we'd delete the comment and they'd have a serious word from their manager) then we were very capable of answering any question. For example we've had complaints about the sales budgets being set too high and it gave a great opportunity to demonstrate how the targets are set and what factors are taken into account.	2012-10-02,15:44:30

Fig. 4.1 The BCN as a backstage space that permits the sharing of secrets

ESN itself or in training meetings or company presentations). What is noteworthy about it is that the community managers are not actually technically on the same performing team—they do not work in the same company, and so are never 'on stage' together when performing their role in relation to either management or other workers. Whether we take 'on stage' to refer to company ESNs or physical organisational spaces, the community managers are only ever in the same space when they interact on the BCN—they do not share the same front stage, because their daily performances (managing their respective company's social networks) are geographically, temporally, and organisationally separated. How then are we to understand the community managers' relationship to one another? This question leads us to consider an additional term from Goffman's vocabulary: that of the "colleague".

User ID	Message	Time stamp
1487147343	That would be great to see [User:1366087]. We're struggling with the same behavioral shift here at [client name removed]. We're about to launch Beta ESN to the enterprise and I'm struggling with how to communicate it's benefits to a population of 160K plus who have very particular ways of doing what they do...	2012-10-18,09:49:12
1366087	In October one of my HR colleagues set a Beta ESN Challenge to all HR colleagues - to go into Beta ESN and like a message, follow someone, post something or make a comment. We had a huge spike in activity which seems to be sticking!	2012-10-18,09:49:32
9558806	I'm working with a company who has consultants that have to jump from project to project at a moments notice. I've been talking to them about the benefits of moving their project comms to Beta ESN because it makes their project activity available more quickly to people as they move from team to team. Having project conversations happen in email distribution lists silos it off and slows down the onboarding process for new team members. So, if you have employees that have to move between projects fluidly, Beta ESN can really help get them up to speed on projects MUCH more quickly than before.	2012-10-18,09:49:45
1366087	Maria, we established a group of Social Media Champions late last year who help to promote the use of the network, demonstrate responsible behavior, connect people, answer questions, train, etc. You should consider this for your rollout. It's been huge for us!	2012-10-18,09:50:47
1366087	And, Karyn, we are constantly reminding people it's not about the tool it's about the behavior. Because if you don't change your behavior, the tool (Beta ESN) won't work for you. We hear "it's just another thing to check" but it's not if you change how you work. It's part of your workflow and can save you time. Good luck!	2012-10-18,09:52:07

Fig. 4.2 Discussing audience secrets

The BCN as a Place for Fostering "Collegiality"

Goffman (1959, p. 159, our emphasis) describes the colleague relationship as follows. We quote him at length because our findings suggest that this relationship of collegiality is significant for understanding and appreciating the work of the ESN community managers more fully:

> Colleagues may be defined as persons who present the same routine to the same kind of audience but who do not participate together, as team-mates do, at the same time and place before the same particular audience. Colleagues, as it is said, share a community of fate. In having to put on the same kind of performance, they come to know each other's difficulties and points of view; whatever their tongues, they come to speak the same social language. And while colleagues who compete for audiences may keep some strategic secrets from one another, they cannot very well hide from one another certain things that they hide from the audience. The front that is maintained before others need not be maintained among themselves; relaxation becomes possible.

Here we find in Goffman's work an insightful and useful way of thinking about the nature of collaboration that emerges on the BCN between community managers.

We argue that, in being able to communicate with other community managers from all over the world and from different organisations using the BCN, the community managers are able to "come to speak the same social language" (Goffman, 1959, p. 159) *about* ESN community management. As this is quite a new job title/position, the opportunity to make sense of their own role and identities, and to discuss the nature of their performances, audiences, and the challenges they face, allows them to devise implementation strategies and to give voice to their anxieties, while being able to relax in the knowledge that others share similar experiences. As Goffman points out, while they may not tell each other everything, it is futile to try to fully keep up appearances as certain trade secrets would be familiar to all. We found evidence of the 'venting' aspect of the collegial dynamic in the way in which community managers would complain in an almost exasperated tone about the challenges of their role and equipment—reluctant executives, paranoid employees, poorly executed updates.

At first, this exchange seems to indicate a negative tone in the BCN interactions, but employing Goffman's description of collegiality we find in these calls for help and advice evidence of collegial relationships emerging. The episode in Fig. 4.3 illustrates how community managers share their frustrations and experiences, engage in sense-making to devise strategies and pass on 'narratives' that each can use in local performances to be successful in their roles. It is significant that these community managers refer to one another as "we", and share details of their experiences in a way that reveals a degree of vulnerability, which comes from struggling with their go-between positions.

Here again Goffman (1959, p. 160), now quoting Hughes (1945, pp. 168–169), offers a way of understanding the nature of these confessional interactions that take place between colleagues, where privately sharing experiences and 'tricks of the trade' helps to build a bond that in turn facilitates ongoing work:

> Part of the working code of a position is discretion; it allows the colleagues to exchange confidences concerning their relation to other people. Among these confidences one finds expressions of cynicism concerning their mission, their competence, and the foibles of their superiors, themselves, their clients, their subordinates, and the public at large. Such expressions take the burden from one's shoulders and serve as a defence as well. The unspoken mutual confidence necessary to them rests on two assumptions concerning one's fellows. The first is that the colleague will not misunderstand; the second is that he will not repeat to uninitiated ears.

User ID	Message	Time Stamp
8779454	Just finished an interesting phonecall from one of our ESN members. A new member, keen to see what this “social media/ESN stuff” was all about. He called me as he couldn’t understand why his ESN feed was full of “people I don’t follow”. I explained that those he followed had contributed to other user’s posts, and Beta was bringing these posts to his attention. He didn’t like this approach, and said that with all the noise, he would probably not be much of a [social media user] after all. He has quite a small and selective group that he follows, and I think his expectations were that he would only see “main posts” from these people, and not the threads that they had contributed to too. And as such, I think we may have lost him! So what can we do? Is there an option that allows him to only see the threads that the people he follows have started? I appreciate that the way the Beta ESN operates now means you get to see those conversations you might have missed, but it does confuse the follower network principles for some.	2012-01-05,03:42:36
6862681	Does he have his my feed settings set to "top message threads" or "followed message threads"	2012-01-05,06:51:53
6717568	He could try following Groups, but no people, or he could hide conversations that are not of interest. You could explain to him that, just like in the office, he will sometimes "overhear" a conversation or be cc-ed on an email that is not relevant to him or to his work. But sometimes overhearing a conversation is beneficial - he'll learn info that he otherwise wouldn't have learned.	2012-01-05,09:34:49
8779454	Thanks [User:6717568], that's the angle I went with - overhearing and picking up on things that are useful. But he's quite firmly in the 'only want to see what I want to see' camp, which is at odds to the fluid nature of Beta ESN conversations! [User:6862681] - he had 'followed message threads' ticked, but again it appears the Beta ESN pulls in *anything* any of his network posts, even if it's only a comment in a wider thread. To be honest I think it's more a shift in his thinking and behaviours that is needed, and I wonder how best to make this shift?	2012-01-06,02:36:56
8751865	I have been facing exactly the same issue with members of my Team and am still confounded on how to resolve this. Part of me feels that there will be a level of early adopters that "get it" straight away and then there will be a gradual shift towards mass adoption as it becomes more apparent that this technology is not going away. I'm sure there must have been a level of reluctance to embrace email when it first became available and now I believe there isn't a single employee within our organisation that doesn't use it. Maybe we have to take the approach that we can't convert everyone overnight and that some people will make the decision in their own time?	2012-01-06,03:09:58

Fig. 4.3 Forging collegial relationships

Here Hughes highlights the importance of secrets (and the 'spaces' that allow them to be kept) for the development of collegial relationships. When read through this theoretical lens we see that the BCN offers community managers an opportunity to bond, to share and make sense of their mutual struggles. As a consequence of sharing destructive information, they become responsible to one another and this plays a role in helping them to build a community of colleagues, that we suspect in turn helps them to improve their performance. Although at times negative in tone, we find that the BCN conversations between community managers may in fact be a sign of the process by which collegiality is established.

We have so far shown how our analysis, using Goffman, allows us to productively interpret the community managers as 'go-betweens', a type of discrepant role that is marked by the burden of performing to two audiences at once, without much existential space for a sense of being one's own kind of team. By offering a private space where secrets can be shared between go-betweens, the BCN affords the development of collegial relationships and thus of a community of geographically and organisationally disparate community managers. In order to give a fuller picture of the role of the BCN, we now consider the remaining participants on the platform—the CNAs, who are employees of Beta tasked with advising the community managers via the BCN platform, along with additional on-phone and in-person support. To do so we draw on Goffman's notion of a 'service specialist'.

The CNAs as "Service Specialists"

Service specialists, according to Goffman (1959), help their clients (members of the performing team) to present their performances. Service specialists are not a part of the performing team and do not go on stage. Instead they assist with the construction, repair, and maintenance of the show their clients maintain before other people. In the theatre, service specialists include set designers and costume makers, whose job is to support the performance and not to be seen by the audience. 'Real world' examples are architects, stylists, and consultants who specialize in supporting performing teams in presenting a particular impression to their audiences, again by assisting in the concealment of certain 'facts' and the strategic presentation of others.

We theorise that the CNAs who interact on the BCN are directly involved in helping the community managers in their performances, particularly in maintaining the dual impression of the Beta ESN as both a productivity tool in relation to management, and as a social tool in relation to employees. The CNAs and other Beta employees who participate in the BCN are responsible for assisting the community managers in managing the complexity of their performances. Although there is a separate help desk available for technical problems, the CNAs listen to the community managers' stories and help to identify their needs. In response to requests for support, the CNAs create training videos and presentation slide decks that community managers then use to help 'stage' their performances, as discussed in the interaction between community managers and CNAs in Fig. 4.4.

User ID	Message	Time stamp
2672589	Question re. training videos, narrated PowerPoints w/ screen shots, user documentation, etc. -- any updates as to ETA? [User:3525521] [User:1365639] I think I remember reading that videos and some other material would be ready by early Feb. Any updates?	2011-02-04,09:09:36
2604000	Hi Tina, I've requested our marketing team provide updates for all mentioned above. We are all chomping at the bit :)	2011-02-04,09:25:24
3525521	We are on schedule for delivery of these materials. We will be approving internally end of next week and will have materials ready for distribution the following week. Things are looking good I believe everyone will be happy.	2011-02-04,11:28:55
2672589	Great, Stephen! Can you give us a sense of what will be made available in a couple weeks in terms of format and topics? (e.g. video modules on X, Y, Z; narrated PPT with screen grabs covering A, B, C; Word doc with FAQs -- etc.) I know there was a long wish list; just curious about what we can look forward to seeing in this wave. Thanks much.	2011-02-04,13:20:48
3525521	Of course I should have mentioned it in the first place: Instructional Videos and One Sheeters for... The Network Feed, Profiles, Follow Buttton, Groups and Topics. Also we will be providing assets and a suggested layout for an intaranet landing page. We are also working on an animated Beta ESN overview video that is several weeks away. We are in production on everything above but will need final internal approval before we can release them. Following the delivery of these materials we will be working with your CNAs to select the next round of materials. Hope this helps.	2011-02-04,13:39:44

Fig. 4.4 Discussing 'staging' with 'service specialists'

To better appreciate the role that the CNAs play in our case we learn from Goffman (1959, p. 152) that service specialists are in a unique position because "they are like members of the team in that they learn the secrets of the show and obtain a backstage view of it". This is indeed the case in our data—the CNAs are party to all discussions taking place on the BCN and are 'let in' on trade secrets and privileged information. However, because these service specialists do not themselves need to partake directly in the ESN implementation performances, "the specialist does not share the risk, the guilt, and the satisfaction of presenting before an audience the show to which he has contributed" (Goffman, 1959, pp. 152–153). So, while the service specialist learns secrets about members of the performing team, "the others do not learn corresponding secrets about him" (Goffman, 1959, p. 153). This imbalance leads to a phenomenon where clients try to convert their service specialists into what Goffman refers to as confidants.

Walking a Fine Line—Turning CNAs into "Confidants"

With the *confidant* role Goffman describes someone who shares their secrets with others, without a transactional basis for the relationship (Goffman, 1959). Goffman observes that often clients will try to turn their service specialists *into* confidants. This comes to bear due to the information asymmetry or power imbalance that emerges in the service specialist/client relationship, whereby the 'weaker' party over time tries to break down the power distance by establishing interactions that are more informal or intimate in nature than the relationship between the parties would otherwise warrant (Goffman, 1959). Hairdressers provide a good non-theatrical illustration here: a client who has been disclosing destructive information to her hairdresser (as service specialist) for years may eventually try to coax the hairdresser into a friendship relationship, where services are no longer paid for and the hairdresser divulges their secrets to their (former) client in equal measure.

We see some evidence of such attempts to convert CNAs as service specialists into 'confidants' in our data as well—on the platform, community managers emphasise experiences of meeting their CNAs at conferences and events and often encourage interactions that are personal in tone, for example making jokes and recollecting memorable events. Towards the latter sections of our data, the interactions between CNAs and community managers become more and more friendly and familiar in tone. The following excerpt gives evidence of one such exchange where community managers and CNAs exchange praise and flattery, breaking down barriers by voicing their intentions to meet in person outside of the BCN (Fig. 4.5).

This exchanges provides evidence of how community managers and CNAs over time have come to appreciate their mutual presence and collaboration, which results in active attempts to break down the transactional distance between the two groups, so that members of the two groups come to interact in ways more befitting of colleagues than of clients and service specialists. We note that the initiative for such attempts to reduce distance and engage in more informal exchanges usually come from within the community manager group.

According to Goffman this renegotiation of boundaries may occur in part because there is an asymmetry of information that develops over time, as service specialists gain access to secrets about their clients' performances and audiences, all the while not being required to offer much in the way of confidential information in return. We can thus read the shift towards a more familiar tone as a possible attempt to restore a sense of informational balance between the two cohorts, as well as potentially an effort on behalf of the community managers to obtain 'extra' assistance, special treatment, or insider information in relation to Beta and its future plans. We speculate that as a result of these tendencies, the dynamics of such relationships (i.e. between service specialists and their clients) will change over time, and that it is therefore unlikely that the dynamics that we identified in the BCN can be manufactured, or at least not sustained indefinitely. We thus find that even in the primarily digital setting of the BCN there is a 'fine line' between service specialist and client that is open to negotiation, and which is sometimes crossed.

User ID	Message	Time stamp
1488746532 {CM}	[Tag:1994679] time! To parlay off of a Wednesday activity from a few weeks ago... Who is the one person you have NOT met from the BCN but would most like to meet? Make sure you tag them in this post!	2013-04-10,06:19:27
1488746532 {CM}	To kick things off... I would like to meet [User:5565721{CNA}] Anyone who puts a period at the end of their name means business! Not to mention, I bet you'd have a lot of stories to tell from "behind the scenes".	2013-04-10,07:16:50
5565721 {CNA}	It's true. Its amazing how much you can get done when your name is a one-word sentence. Obvs, id like to meet [User:1488746532 {CM}] as well, but id like to have more than a friendly nod across a sea of people with [User:5464938 {CM}].	2013-04-10,08:09:11
1495290168 {CM}	This activity has risk of being flagged by HR... haha! Of course I'd like to meet [User:1488746532 {CM}] - but I'll call out [User:4315712 {CNA}] and [User:1488164017 {CM}] as being high on my list. Also [User:3413805 {CM}].	2013-04-10,08:41:03
1366110 {CM}	I have been so lucky in being able to meet so many great people from the BCN but I must say that there are two that come to mind. [User:9034364 {CM}] has help so many on the BCN and has published brilliant analytical data regarding ESN's, including the BCN. The other is [User:6126537 {CM}] because in the many years we have been members and as many times as we have collaborated together and given the fact that we live in the same state/city I have need actually met her in person.	2013-04-10,09:16:26

Fig. 4.5 Reducing distance between community network advisors {CNA} and community managers {CM}

Summary: The Value of a Community of Go-Betweens

Through a Goffmanian lens, we have come to see the BCN as a 'backstage' space that is uniquely able to facilitate relationships of collegiality amongst the geographically and organisationally disparate community managers. As such, it is important that such a space is not accessible by either the management or worker 'audience' cohorts to whom the community managers 'perform'. The restricted permissions of the BCN thus played an important role in rendering the platform a place where secrets could be shared and kept. It was through this sharing of secrets (for example about how community managers 'pitch' ESN as a different kind of technology depending on who they are speaking with) that the grounds for collegiality was established. In turn, this collegiality made it possible for community managers to share tips, vent, and rehearse

and improve their subsequent 'performances' pertaining to the implementation of ESN in their respective organisations.

We note that the BCN worked as a backstage space *because* there was grounds for collegiality amongst its participants: the community managers shared a 'community of fate' because they all have a stake in implementing ESN, and can share their experiences of staging the kinds of performances that this activity involves. Because they serve similar kinds of audiences and share the experience of being 'stuck in the middle', sufficient common ground exists for collegiality to be established, and the BCN provides the space for this kind of relationship to develop over time.

We further found that the presence of the CNAs, as 'service specialists' was important in two ways. Firstly, the service specialists treat the community managers as clients, which gives these otherwise put-upon individuals a sense of status and identity. The presence of the service specialists creates an opportunity for the go-betweens to be a collective: the CNAs want to impress *them*, and for once they can complain and make demands and assert a degree of power. Secondly on a pragmatic level, the CNAs as service specialists are tasked with assisting the community managers in staging their complex performances. Upon request, training materials, videos, slide decks, and even an occasional system alteration to the Beta ESN platform itself are created to improve the credibility of the 'impressions of reality' in relation to ESN use, that the community managers are working to maintain in their organisations.

Finally, we found that the tendency, which Goffman identifies, for clients to try to convert service specialists into *confidants* also appears to occur in our online case context. Over time, and driven by the group of community managers, the conversations between them and the CNAs became more and more personal and convivial.

Conclusion and Implications

In this paper we have investigated the role of the 'community manager' that emerged recently in response to the challenges of implementation and adoption of Enterprise Social Networks (ESN). ESNs are malleable technologies and thus come with the need to be interpreted and appropriated by workers into their local business practices. This requirement brings about a tension between the expectations of managers and executives as the sponsors of ESN roll-out and those of the workers who have to engage in an active process of experimentation and sense-making to find appropriate use for the ESN in their practices. This puts the community manager in the position of a "go-between", who has to mediate and manage the tensions between the expectations of these two groups. Consequently, we set out to investigate the following research question: How do community managers deal with their conflicted position in the process of ESN implementation and adoption?

We had access to a unique data set for studying how community managers communicate and collaborate to help each other make sense of and cope with their roles, in the form of communication data from the Beta Community Network (BCN), a

dedicated, inter-organisational ESN made up of community managers of Beta's corporate ESN clients and Beta employees. An initial analysis of our case data made us reach for the work of Goffman (1959), as a way to understand the particular role and place of the community managers in the process of ESN implementation, as well as the role of the BCN in facilitating coordination among them. The answer to our research question lies in the insight that community managers cope with the demands of their position by seeking to build a community of their own, which serves as a place for joint strategizing and identity-building with their 'colleagues'.

Implications for Practice

Our findings have surfaced useful implications for various stakeholders involved in the development, implementation and use of ESN specifically, and malleable technologies more broadly (see Table 4.4 for a summary). For organisations implementing malleable, infrastructure-like technologies (such as ESN) we note that such technologies require organisations to coordinate a multi-stakeholder process of sense-making and appropriation to find appropriate uses for the technology. Often a dedicated role is created and put in charge of this process—so-called community managers in the case of ESNs, who not only observe, encourage and curate communication on the ESN itself, but otherwise work with stakeholders to find appropriate uses for the ESN and encourage adoption.

Our study was motivated by the observation that the in-betweenness of such roles can be challenging and uncomfortable. We reasoned that people in such go-between roles will benefit from connecting and collaborating with people in comparable roles in other organisations, with positive effects on their respective implementation and adoption projects. If suitable spaces for building a community of go-betweens do not exist, people in such roles might want to consider creating dedicated inter-organisational online spaces that are restricted to people in comparable positions in other organisations, in order to provide a safe space for collegial exchange between them. Such spaces can be private groups in public social media, or dedicated inter-organisational ESNs.

For providers of malleable technologies our case shows that organising such an online community of go-betweens can be a valuable business strategy, in particular when the provider makes available personnel who encourage, facilitate and support the sense-making activities of the community managers. More broadly we argue that providers of malleable technologies will benefit from explicitly recognising the open platform or infrastructure character of their technologies, subsequently treating it as a service rather than a product, which deserves explicit support to increase the success rate of implementation and adoption in client organisations. Finally, we note that the tendency of client go-betweens to try and reduce the distance between them and the service managers presents a potential risk that the transactional nature between the provider and the client company representatives is compromised.

Table 4.4 Practical implications for stakeholders involved in malleable technology implementation

Stakeholder group	Advice
Client organisations	Malleable technologies, as open and flexible platforms, require user experimentation and sense-making to find appropriate uses Looking after such a process of experimentation and sense-making requires the creation of a dedicated go-between role
Go-betweens	People tasked with the success of malleable technology implementation find themselves in a challenging position between diverging management and worker expectations Given their precarious position people in this role will benefit from exchanges with people in comparable positions in other organisations The building of a private community of go-betweens affords strategizing and identity building for the benefit of both the go-betweens and their implementation projects
Technology providers	Providers of malleable technologies might consider building and moderating a community of go-betweens for the added benefit of learning and client relationship building Creating of a dedicated service or relationship manager role will benefit the sense-making of the group of client go-betweens and thus might drive success of the technology in client organisations A risk is presented by the tendency of client go-betweens to make service managers their confidants, thus compromising the otherwise transactional nature of the relationship

Implications for Future Research

Our work has direct implications for the future study of ESN. We have drawn on a unique data set that allows us to see ESN operating as a private inter-organisational space, rather than only as a public, company-wide activity stream that facilitates impression management more explicitly. We have shown that an ESN can act as an important, and to an extent protected/private, space where an otherwise disparate 'community of fate' can come together to work on understanding the complexities of their role in a way that informs refinement of their performance in another context. Future research could investigate these ideas by interviewing and observing network members in their everyday work to better understand how the sense-making that takes place online informs broader practice and vice versa. In particular we suggest that seeing such an inter-organisational network as 'a backstage space for go-between collegiality and community' can inform further research concerned with ESN use and implementation. As we have shown, there is still an unresolved tension in organisations that are trying to understand the use value of ESNs—are they a productivity tool, or a social infrastructure?

More broadly, our work suggests that Goffman's analytical framework, as we have introduced it here, can generate further insights in future research on ESN because his theatre metaphor lens is sensitive to the relationship between space, boundaries, information, and roles. These elements are all relevant in an ESN because there

are always dynamics of information concealment and display. While Goffman is often considered in relation to impression management (Gardner & Martinko, 1988; Wiesenfeld, Raghuram, & Garud, 2001), we argue that his work is concerned with the social and material production of reality more fundamentally. ESN data gives us a unique opportunity to see the process of such productions play out in a relatively 'naturalistic' way over significant periods of time.

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