

**3** big ideas for the future

*The*  
**Smart Manager**

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**choice  
conscience  
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Illustration by: nilesh jvalekar



Bhoje is Associate Vice President at Persistent Systems Limited and Chief Architect and Product Manager at eMee.

# redefining employee engagement

□ siddhesh bhoje in conversation with seetha natesh

**SMART SUMMARY** Social media is a double-edged sword that holds the power to create or destroy a business today. A survey conducted by Proskauer<sup>1</sup> revealed that 40% of the participating companies have had to deal with employees misusing social networks. With the internet becoming a platform for employees to vent their work frustrations, how can a company steer clear of negative PR? The answer may lie in drawing focus on an intra-organizational network that is both employee- and management-friendly.



It was a moment of truth for 21-year-old Gaurav Aradhya, when he first stepped into the atrium of Pune-based Persistent Systems. It was his joining day at work, his first step into an exciting IT career, and he had worked hard to get there. However, so had the other 250-odd bright engineers who crowded the large auditorium, where HR personnel were busy doling out

forms to fill. Gaurav was now one of the approximate 6,500 members of the Persistent family. But how would he be able to stand out from the crowd and get noticed?

Gaurav is not alone in his predicament. The Indian IT and ITeS industry today employs more than 10 million bright young engineers, and over 700,000 technical graduates join the industry every year. Some of India's top IT companies employ more than 100,000 engineers, each. In such a crowded, fast-growing industry, the adage that people do not leave companies, they leave their managers is more relevant now than it was ever before.

### the social network is no longer a fad

This is the 'Like Me' generation. Social networks like Facebook have developed in all of us the need to be constantly applauded and appreciated. The social web is no longer a fad restricted to the upwardly mobile or the geeky gamers. It has changed the way we share, communicate, collaborate, create, recommend, buy or sell products and services.

However, things change drastically when it comes to work environments. Most businesses do not encourage social networking and gaming for their employees while they are at work. Understandably, they have valid reasons for their apprehensions. Exposing the corporate intranet to hackers and unintended or undesired disclosure of information, clogging bandwidth, and of course, loss of employee productivity are genuine concerns.

On the flipside, for most young professionals today, peer recognition and a sense of purpose and achievement are as important, if not more, as salary. For people like Gaurav, lack of social networking could leave them feeling disconnected and craving for recognition from managers, and more importantly, peers.

### making social networking count at work

As a senior delivery manager at Persistent for 14 years, I have experienced firsthand the key roadblocks that HR faces in the software industry. These challenges include the need for better employee engagement, attrition control, knowledge management and transparency in performance appraisals. eMee was born as a result of our attempts to use enterprise social networking and gamification to convert mundane but critical management functions into highly effective and enjoyable activities for line managers.

eMee is a comprehensive employee engagement platform with a unique game-based visualization that combines social collaboration, performance management and rewards and recognition. This leads to much-improved employee-manager interactions, brings transparency in performance appraisals and provides employees with a platform to showcase their skills and achievements across the organization. All this in a unique, gamified way that encourages interactions and free dialog.



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## eMee will play a significant role in inducting and assimilating employees across various concerns into a single, common, value system.

### exhibit01: key features of eMee

- online profiles with rich visual interface allow every employee to consolidate and show off their certifications and special skills, connect with their mentors and mentees and build their professional reputation within the organization
- continuous performance assessment modules bring transparency and fairness in the performance assessment process through virtual gifts, reprimands and 360-degree feedback
- the Personal Den, a private space for employees to meet and greet colleagues virtually, helps build friendships, allows them share hobbies and interests
- online quizzes and competitions inculcate a spirit of learning and promote the company's values, as well as help with the induction of new employees
- an internal 'Hall of Fame' provides employees global visibility for their work and achievements
- other applications including Garage Sale, Share a Ride, Shopping Wish Lists and Carbon Footprint

### tangible results of a virtual system

I believe this innovative approach can fundamentally change the way companies engage with their employees. At Persistent, where eMee has been in use for the past twelve months as part of a concerted effort at better employee engagement at all levels, the results have been phenomenal. Nitin Kulkarni, Chief Operating Officer, Persistent Systems says, "Attrition has dropped by more than 350 basis points, customer ratings have consistently

gone up over the last four feedback cycles and employee satisfaction scores are higher than ever before."

"As a technology-based company, we are seeing some very innovative ways of influencing desired behavior with the use of gamification and social media concepts," says Tarun Sharma, Vice President – R&D and Head, BMC Software, India. "We have launched Ninja Club on eMee, which provides a platform for recognition and growth of capabilities and expertise. Our technical team can now connect with likeminded people in order to practice and enhance their technical skills in spite of their current assignments, organize and participate in common-interest activities, and mentor others while being mentored by experts. We believe that eMee is a very promising and valuable HR asset," he adds.

In the age of globalization and consolidation, large enterprises also face the challenge of assimilating employees from varied cultures and backgrounds into a common value system. At two large enterprises that we are in talks with, eMee will play a significant role in inducting and assimilating employees across the various sister concerns into a single, common, value system. When employees across the organization see their colleagues being appreciated and rewarded for their performance in accordance with the corporate values, it will ensure that the value system gets tremendous visibility and becomes a part of the conversations and discussions around the office coolers.

### effective R&R holds the key

Companies spend millions on reward and recognition schemes for their employees. However, as many HR executives would agree, the effectiveness of these R&R schemes and their impact on employees is less than desirable. For most employees, it's not about the money.

Public acknowledgement of their good work, and gifts with a personal touch, which demonstrate that the company looks at them as individuals and not just a billable resource with an employee ID, hold the key to effective R&R.

With a strong and vibrant enterprise social network, a company's investments in R&R can bring huge dividends. eMee matches the knowledge of employees' personal preferences and activities on the social network with exciting deals in the market through its partner product Klisma. With this, the company can offer the most relevant rewards to its employees, while realizing the best value for money. By extending the ability to reward and recognize colleagues seamlessly and across the organization, and not just HR or direct managers, eMee encourages teamwork and improves bonding and team spirit.

### but don't get carried away

It is easy to get carried away and end up adopting a corporate social network without ensuring that it crosses all the Ts and dots all the Is. There are a lot of products that offer basic collaboration and social networking. However, it is critical to ensure that data security and privacy concerns are addressed in line with the company's HR policies and culture.

eMee supports role-based access control as a fundamental building block of the platform. This ensures that organizations can align access to every data element and workflow to their HR policies and

guidelines. For example, at Persistent, the virtual gifts that represent kudos or performance notes are visible to all, but the candid feedback given by managers in the continuous feedback module is visible only to direct managers. Reprimands are visible only to managers, which is in line with the policy of appreciating in public but reprimanding in private. Also, personal preferences and updates are displayed only to friends.

Effective enterprise social networks also play a big role in addressing concerns and frustrations of employees. If employees do not have a way to vent frustrations at work easily, they will do this on public social networks, which can lead to disastrous consequences. eMee is different from other social networks in that it is a closed network, thus ensuring all information is local and restricted to the company's intranet. All data belongs solely to the organization, and is not shared or used by eMee in any way. By ensuring employees stay connected and engaged on a secure, closed social network, a company can drastically reduce, although not eliminate, the chances of a full-blown PR nightmare.

### social networks cannot operate in silos

Companies that deploy enterprise social networks need to ensure that these do not operate in silos. The real advantage of a social network is felt by seamlessly bringing together data, workflows and people across the organization. Existing investments in MIS, CRM and HR systems need to be retained and exploited.



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## Like all social networks and online games, the key to a successful enterprise social network is freshness and change.

Therefore, it is critical that the social network deployed within the organization is easily integrated with the existing applications, whether home-grown or off-the-shelf.

“We have invested heavily in MIS and HR systems, and it was essential that eMee builds on top of these systems for maximum effectiveness,” reiterates Nitin Kulkarni. “Today, employees and managers have a single window into all aspects of an employee’s performance such as KRAs, objectives, training needs and certifications, among others. It has an invaluable advantage.”

### pay-per-use

Like all social networks and online games, the key to a successful enterprise social network is freshness and change. Investing millions in a large enterprise license is passé. eMee offers various pay-per-use pricing models that offer multiple benefits to customers. A low initial start-up cost, flexibility to start with a smaller pilot group and gradually expand to other parts of the company, and the ability to budget the expense as HR opex rather than a large capex are a few of these.

A vibrant enterprise social network need not be an expensive proposition, with the per-person monthly cost being a fraction of what companies spend on coffee dispensers for employees, for instance. Considering the cost of hiring, training and getting new employees to be productive, companies can recover the costs of deploying an enterprise social network many times over within the first year.

### gamification is a lot more than badges

There is a lot more to gamification than points and badges. The ability to map core management activities

and operations as gamified actions will play a significant role in how an organization exploits the same core human tendencies and habits that made computer and online games a multi-billion dollar industry. From better handling of sales pipelines to conducting effective meetings, eMee’s roadmap includes a slew of gamified social applications that promise to fundamentally change the way we work, bringing fun and excitement back into the mundane as well as the critical, resulting in higher productivity and happy employees.

It will soon be inconceivable for an organization with global ambitions to not have an enterprise social network. Without a clear social media policy, companies will flounder and make mistakes that could cost heavily in terms of reputation, customer satisfaction and employee retention. It is imperative for organizations to realize this and get social media savvy as soon as possible. □

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reference:

01 <http://www.proskauer.com/files/uploads/Documents/Survey-Social-Networks-in-the-Workplace-Around-the-World.pdf>