There is no way that managers and their subordinates see eye to eye on social networking in the workplace. Why should they? To employers and employees alike, most social networking sites are about entertainment. Tweeting about Gail’s birthday party decorations is only in the remotest sense “team-building.” So, the question remains: at what point will consumer-oriented social networking get past the fun-factor and really become a force multiplier, driving value for business?

Most of today’s social networking sites only differ in attitude, not in deep technical ways. Flickr, Facebook, LinkedIn, even David Hasselhoff’s fan site, all have networks of friends with whom you share digital media, status information, location and comments. So looking for innovation by comparing brands is not the place to start. The game changing transformations that businesses have to watch for now, will be found in how people begin to use these sites as tools in surprising new ways to manage and work. Once these new uses crystallize only then will the technological support emerge that will accelerate these new usage models, dwarfing what is being done today.

Consider the simple status line made famous by Twitter. Facebook’s recent redesign has elevated the status line to an even more central position in their user experience. But there are subtle shifts that are beginning to appear in the way that status is being used. The predominant use is as a personal headline that tells the world what quirky thing you are thinking about. This is now widely known as microblogging. But in parallel, though flying under the radar, is a shift to a less
entertaining and more practical application of status updates, which is called “micro-presence.” This type of status update got its start with IM status messages, predating micro-blogging and internet-based social networks.

Jennifer Leggio, aka "Mediaphyter," writes about the "social business" side of social media - including enterprise, security and reputation issues. See her full profile and disclosure of her industry affiliations.

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