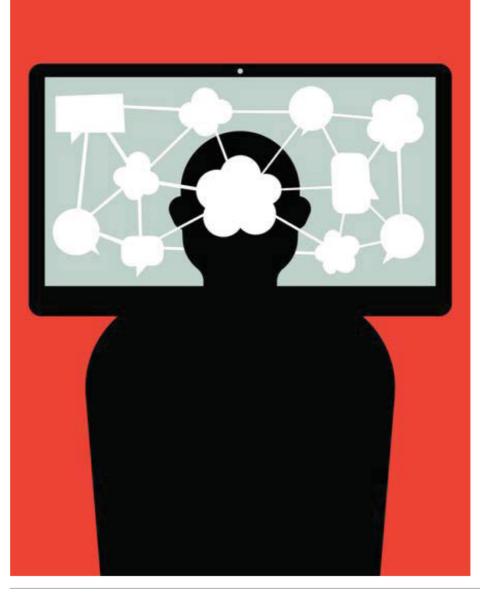# THE Brief.

DO YOU LISTEN, ENGAGE OR YELL?

CEOs are using analytics to gauge how well execs collaborate with teams.

STORY JOANNE GRAY   **ILLUSTRATION** THE PROJECT TWINS

Brian Hartzer, Westpac's chief executive has a dashboard app on his desktop computer that tracks how effectively his senior executives are getting cut through with their teams on enterprise network Yammer. Hartzer isn't alone. NBN chief executive Bill Morrow uses the same social media sentiment analytics tool, Swoop, to measure how well his top managers are engaging with their staff.

Their focus on collaboration and productivity isn't new. What has changed is they have much better ways to measure it. The old workplace tools – emails and meetings – are being replaced by more open communication and analytic tools, that show which executives can get their team's attention.

Swoop was a wake-up call for Westpac's leadership team, says Christine Parker, Westpac's group executive, human resources, corporate affairs and sustainability.

"When it first came in I thought, 'Oh my

Which one are you? The common personas that characterise interaction in online networks

Engagers connect and sustain relationships. Organisations do better with more engagers.

Catalysts energise networks by seeding conversations that lead to replies.

Responders prefer to react, not initiate conversations but they often reply or like.

Broadcasters send messages but do not engage much with their teams or communities.

Observers consume content but do not actively participate or create organisational value.

God, I'm going to have to pick my game up here,'" says Parker.

The shift to enterprise social media and collaboration software such as Slack, Yammer and Facebook at Work (Workplace) is gathering pace. Leaders can have conversations at scale with teams members everywhere. As CEOs seek to shake up siloed organisations they want to see staff engagement. The next questions is what kind of engagement is it?

Swoop sentiment analytics tools analyse online exchanges in real time and score them for positive and negative emotions. It can figure out how teams collaborate, who is productive and which leaders get a response.

"We can get a really good sense from the pattern of conversation that goes on with online meetings, how that group is collaborating," says Swoop Analytics co-founder Cai Kjaer. "It's kind of like a health check for how energetic a group is."

Swoop's chief scientist Laurence Lock Lee identified five personas that characterise how people interact online at work. The three most valuable personas to an organisation are engagers, catalysts and responders.

Engagers connect and sustain relationships, they're the engine room for collaboration networks. The higher the number of engagers, the better, says Swoop. Catalysts attract responses and seed lots of conversations that encourage replies and likes. Responders prefer to react to, rather than initiate conversations. But they will often reply or like.

Broadcasters are like an old style leader, dictating from on high. They send messages but don't engage with groups and communities. Observers consume content but don't engage.

EXECUTIVE WAKE-UP CALL

Westpac became Swoop's first customer after Ben Kimber, head of digital employee experience, met Kjaer and Lock Lee. Kimber has also found the 200 most connected people in Westpac and that group, the Mavens, is used to test new ideas and innovations.

Executives are now taking a bigger interest in how they communicate; Hartzer frowns upon broadcasters or observers, and Parker says most Westpac executives are engagers and catalysts.

Swoop's analytics also pick up staff discontent, or act as an early warning system for problems. If a policy change makes staff unhappy, remedial action can be quick.

"It's not a tool for witch-hunts," says Lock Lee. "It's a tool to detect what communities are thinking."

Kjaer and Lock Lee emphasise that organisations should encourage robust conversations, not mutual admiration clubs.

"If you only have happy discussions are we really challenging each other to get better?" asks Kjaer. "Innovation happens when we try to fix something that isn't quite working. Talking about problems and challenges should be encouraged. If management is signalling this isn't acceptable, conversations can end up being polite and happy. But that just means that real issues aren't being talked about."

POWERFUL LESSON

NBN's chief corporate affairs officer, Karina Keisler, says the business uses analytics as a tool to show the leadership team the impact their communication.

When CEO Bill Morrow lobbed an ask-me-anything post onto NBN's Workplace, it lit up with more than 2000 posts in a matter of days.

"In the end, he said, 'I don't have time for this kind of lengthy engagement. How do I control it?'" says Keisler. "It was everything from do you eat pineapple on your pizza to what's your star sign?"

But it was a powerful demonstration of the engagement a CEO can generate from business wide conversations. Keisler says that NBN uses Swoop and Workplace as a productivity tool. Interaction with a Workplace post is scored on its effectiveness, and on whether it was "a collaboration" or a mere broadcast.

"The direct impact of communications is hard to measure. If you can demonstrate the metrics, you'll get better buy-in [from executives]," she says.

Swoop's analysis is based on work by MIT Media Lab researcher Sandy Pentland who found that patterns of information exchange in a social network could predict how productive that network was. He found that high-performing teams tended to have short and frequent interactions. There's a lot of assumed knowledge and people speak in shorthand, as they're largely on the same page.

ANALYSING TRUMP V TURNBULL

Google's Aristotle Project found that psychological safety was one of the most important dynamics, drawing on the work of Amy Edmondson of Harvard. People have to feel comfortable they can air negative things in a group without being punished. (This has proved challenging for Google in practice – see Insight on page 36.)

To illustrate how Swoop works, Kjaer reveals how it analysed the heated telephone call between Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and US President Donald Trump over the refugee deal. Much of Trump's language was coded red: angry and bullying. Meanwhile, despite the onslaught, Turnbull's language stayed green (positive) or grey (neutral).

Swoop tuned into the emotional dynamics. Turnbull got what he wanted by keeping his cool, delivering the tough messages calmly and not reacting when Trump blew his lid.

"As shown in our Trump-Turnbull example, sentiment analysis allowed us to not only characterise behaviours like cyber bullying, but also identify successful response techniques that can turn a nasty conversation into a point of agreement, even if grudgingly so, as Turnbull demonstrated," says Kjaer.