

Social Business adoption - the business implications, benefits, and challenges of creating a collaboration platform

Summary

The rise and practice of Social Media as a global cultural phenomenon has now permeated inside the firewall of organizations and begun to challenge traditional business processes.

The way in which employees at all levels engage with each other, business partners and customers is changing.

Companies who have understood and embraced the technology have seen the need to rapidly adjust their corporate culture and policies in order to create the right conditions for the enterprise wide collaboration.

For their troubles, these companies have begun to enjoy the benefits of speed, agility, reuse, efficiency and innovation that are the innate byproducts of any healthy Social network.

This paper outlines the key benefits on offer and the core foundation steps that companies need to follow to make the necessary cultural and business process shifts.

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The Collaboration Revolution

Collaboration inside organizations is not new, nor is the use of Social Tools. Telephone and email are both examples of Social Collaborative technology that are well used (perhaps over used) in most companies.

The key difference between standard document or e-mail centric modes of collaboration and the new web 2.0 tools is that whereas the traditional tools are used to ostensibly support and strengthen traditional processes and corporate silos; the new tools have the effect of increasing transparency, removing silos and flattening corporate structures. They achieve this because they are people focused rather than process focused.

Social software can deliver the following business value when applied effectively to the enterprise:

- 1. Tap deeply into the collective intelligence of an organisation.** It can elicit participation, build network effects (cf wisdom of crowds, Wikipedia) while simultaneously reducing complexity.
- 2. Introduce potent new motivations for contributions to an organization's objectives.** Studies have shown (and Facebook, Twitter etc have proven) that under the right conditions people like to share what they know and to receive peer recognition- they do not necessarily require financial incentive to do so . This is actively remaking the business landscape, collapsing costs, and greatly expanding the creative and productive capacity for organizations willing to engage in social business models.
- 3. Collect and aggregate corporate knowledge for reuse and leverage like few other methods.** Just as Web 2.0 at its core is about harnessing collective intelligence, Social Business is about the same thing (unleashing the human ingenuity and insight of workers), but aimed at business objectives and with associated benefits.
- 4. Engage, react and respond on a shorter time scale than most other modes of business interaction.** While all digital communications are in a sense immediate, social software is more effective in terms of its general ability to spread change rapidly and creating ripple effects across large numbers of workers. Mobile devices and pervasive connectivity are only accelerating this.
- 5. Break down barriers, silos, and tribal boundaries while maximizing inbound participation.** The viral nature of social software encourages relationship capital to be built and cultivated over time. Subsequent worker activity in an enterprise's social IT systems spreads information and ideas much farther than the standard sphere of influence of normal IT systems, which are primarily limited to the users directly engaged in them.

The Key Benefits – ROI

1. Time Saving – one of the easiest and immediately observable return on investment of a successful collaborative platform is the time saved through:
 - the reduction of emails circulated with attachments which make it difficult to find relevant information as time passes and which increase storage costs
 - less time spent on finding the right expertise in the organisation
 - speed of response to customer issues
2. Direct cost saving:
 - E.g. reduction in travel costs, phone bills, and hardware(storage)
3. Employee – Partner - Customer - engagement
 - Boosts morale and leads to all sorts of innovation as employees see that their input is both valued and visible by all.
“Deploying web 2.0 technologies to create networked organisations that foster innovative collaboration among employees, customers and business partners is highly correlated with market share gains”
(McKinsey, 2010)
4. Corporate communications
 - Real time interactive corporate communications delivered in a timely, personalised, social business tone (e.g. CEO blog) achieves far greater cut through and buy in than the traditional broadcast corporate speak newsletter.
5. Starters / Leavers
 - For new starters the ability to tap in to the company wide people and knowledge base of the organisation without having to disturb other employees improves the speed and efficiency of the on-boarding process.
 - When people leave an organisation the loss of expertise and momentum is reduced if most of what these leavers is already part of the ‘institutional memory’ and is easily accessible by all.
6. Service everywhere
 - As your customers are now able to talk about your organisation at anytime and in an ever increasing number of on-line public places, it becomes more and more important for you to be able to respond quickly and with an appropriate, often personal answer (not just with a standard corporate response). In order to do this organisations need mature collaborative platforms built on deep employee engagement and trust. A customer with an issue is far more likely to be converted into a product champion if she receives a response from the person responsible for the design of a particular product, for example, as opposed to someone from marketing or the customer complaints department.

Until 2013, Over 70 per cent of IT – dominated social media initiatives will fail (Gartner)

IT organizations are accustomed to providing a technology platform (such as, e-mail, IM, Web conferencing) rather than delivering a social solution that targets specific business value. As IT departments struggle with this shift from providing a platform to providing a solution failure rates will remain high for implementations that are purely led by IT.

All social networks live or die on user adoption. For people to interact and collaborate, the right conditions have to be in place. The ability to create these conditions is actually greater in an Enterprise platform where the areas of focus are more concentrated.

Enterprises will need to develop entirely new skill sets around designing and delivering social media solutions. These new skill sets will help them address the most common reasons why Social Business initiatives can suffer poor adoption rates:

- 1. Motivation** - where intended users have not been properly consulted there is a real danger that they already feel the deluge of information and cannot see how yet another tool will help them. They end up looking at these initiatives as yet another layer of information management, which it is clearly not. By the same token, they end up considering its output as meaningless interactions and content, and see it as additional work when they already have so much to accomplish in their daily work routine. They sense a lack of time to contribute and moderate the generation of knowledge content and may end up considering it as an effort-intensive activity.
- 2. The Solution Design** – where there is a lack of alignment between the functionality of these platforms and the working practices, adoption will be poor. It is important to understand current employees' processes and put together these technologies as a comprehensive solution that is easy to understand and use. Often this will involve integration with existing infrastructure and legacy applications – a sometimes difficult and complex job that many IT departments do not have the skills or the appetite for. For certain users they will need the platform to be open to their partners (or selected customers) for the platform to deliver benefit. For all of the above reasons a timely rollout of collaboration functionality based on a stakeholder / user validated technology roadmap is essential. For instance it may be strategically important in Company X to begin collaboration with a company Wiki whereas in Company Y the appropriate strategy for optimum adoption of the platform is to start with rolling out the CEO Blog.
- 3. Resource** – Since these technologies are new and represent real change, there is a need for volunteers and champions to drive it. However, in many organisations, there is a lack of dedicated resource to drive it. This lack of resource often proves detrimental to its adoption while the blame is attributed to the solution. If the required drive is missing, especially during the initial phases of the implementation, sufficient content and interaction will not be generated.

- 4. Management engagement** – The mandate from management, including practical sponsorship from the senior management is a critical success factor for any enterprise-wide solution that is offered as a change from the legacy system. But, because of the social nature of Social Business solutions, any lack of senior management sponsorship becomes much more apparent and negatively affects the overall adoption. Consider a situation where supervisors in various groups neither consciously use these tools nor push their subordinates to use nor pull them into this initiative. This has a rather negative and disorientating impact for employees because of the lack of perceived willingness of their immediate supervisors.
- 5. Culture shift** – For the collaboration platform to deliver real competitive edge to an organisation, there has to be a significant culture shift in an organization. For certain employees the use of web 2.0 tools will be alien and unfamiliar and so they will need training and reassurance that their input is valued and it is acceptable to spend company time in this activity. For those who are fluent in the use of social media the opposite applies in that some general company guidelines need to be in place to govern usage of the system whilst still encouraging freedom from overly formal processes.
- 6. Planning** – As with all major IT projects planning is essential to success. This is perhaps doubly so in the case of collaborative platforms where the factors resulting in poor adoption rates are more numerous and varied than say the implementation of a new e-mail system or accounting software package. A period of consultation - including a broad range of stakeholder and user interviews and education, technology audit and process mapping - resulting in a strategic roadmap and program for platform rollout and adoption is mission critical.

Conclusion

Social Computing both inside and outside the firewall is changing the way we work. For the 30% of companies who have embraced the technology and made it a success, they are putting clear water between themselves and their competitors. The efficiency savings alone from the reduction in emails, reduced travel expenses, lower phone bills, faster on-boarding, and less time finding the right information and more importantly the right person (expertise) all help to justify the necessary transition pains from a silo based organisation to a transparent collaborative one.

Beyond this hard ROI lie the more exciting area of unleashing innovation and the creation of an institutional memory both of which are delivered with a collaborative platform.

In the end of course, all companies will use Social Business tools and platforms just as all companies now offer all their employees corporate email despite their early misgivings. At this stage the important thing for companies seeking to gain early advantage is to be aware of the challenges in rolling out a collaborative platform and to have a plan in place to address them. There 3 key drivers for change that make enterprise collaboration a must do:

1. The inefficiency or inappropriateness of the current technology tool set - e.g. email is excellent as a one to one communication tool but is less effective when it comes to group interaction or document collaboration.
2. Growth in the workplace of Generation Y employees who are digitally fluent and expect to be able to get connected to both their friends and their colleagues at all times.
3. The rise and mass adoption of free on-line technology (Google, Facebook, Twitter etc.) by all generations of employees outside the firewall and their perception of the benefits – e.g. we no longer tolerate a search tool that is not fast and accurate.

For more information on the Digirati service offering go to www.digirati.co.uk or see white paper: “Digirati – Social Business offering”

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For further information on this topic please go to www.digirati.co.uk/solutions/collaboration.html

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