Social Media Adoption

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COLLABOR8NOW : SUPPORTING "KNOWLEDGE" ORGANISATIONS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Overcoming the obstacles to enterprise collaboration

BY STEVE DALE

Taking the plunge into the shiny world of enterprise social media

So, your organisation has taken the plunge and invested in a shiny new enterprise social media platform. Everyone is talking about the enormous benefits to be had through collaborative working and better employee engagement. At last, you can throw off the shackles of that email inbox and really start to become more productive. But is this vision we're being sold by the social technology vendors actually being realised, or is life just a bit more complicated than that? The answer – as usual - lies somewhere in between.

Part of the problem is our increasing reliance on technology, and a belief that it can solve all of our problems. No matter how many times we hear the mantra that "*it's not the technology, it's the people that matter*", the task of implementing social software within the enterprise is - more often than not - addressed as an IT project. But technology doesn't provide a solution for social interaction and human relationships. What is becoming increasingly apparent to the early adopters is that the real challenge with introducing social software is not the technology itself, but the introduction of new modes of behaviour. The reality is that the cultural aspects of the social collaboration journey are far more rigorous and require more serious attention than the implementation of technology. It really is *the people that matter*!

Until and unless organisations treat the implementation of social software as an organisational development (OD) activity, taking a more holistic perspective of culture, education, business processes and technology, they will struggle to gain widespread adoption across the enterprise and only partial realisation of the benefits of a more engaged and collaborative workforce.

In order to address some of these wider OD issues, it helps to understand the potential obstacles and barriers to change that are rooted in the legacy environment. These are the behaviours and conditions that have

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evolved over time and now rarely questioned or challenged. They are the "norm" and even new employees will adopt these patterns of behaviour in order to conform. Either that or they will decide to leave the organisation. It's all part of the corporate survival game. Mavericks are rarely tolerated.

What do we mean by enterprise social media?

It is worth pausing for a moment to examine the flurry of new terms and buzzwords that broadly mean the same thing. The term "social media" continues to divide those who associate it with frivolous use of time, using services such as Facebook or Twitter, and those who recognise the potential value of having a far more connected and engaged society. This will ever be the case, and more of this later when examining the obstacles to collaboration.

What started as personal and consumer-led adoption of tools that enable sharing of ideas and conversations (broadly categorised as "Web 2.0") has, over the past several years, become an integral part of new business thinking as increasingly organisations have seen the benefits of having a more joined-up workforce.

"Enterprise 2.0", a term first coined in 2006 by Andrew McAfee to describe emergent collaboration technologies, is synonymous with the integration of social media tools and services with the corporate intranet, extranet and business processes. This term is now gradually morphing to "Social Business", and embraces the technologies and strategies that support collaboration between the workforce, partners and stakeholders.

Enterprise Social Media is the set of tools, services, policies and protocols that have been integrated into business processes in order to facilitate and encourage engagement, collaboration and knowledge sharing within and across the organisation. These may be free-to-use services, homegrown solutions, or vendor products/applications. The potential benefits are faster access to experts and knowledge and more agile processes delivered via a people-centered organisation. Adoption of enterprise social media solutions can spur efficiency,

productivity and innovation by encouraging employees and other stakeholders to share information and discuss business problems in an open, collaborative setting.

Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing

Given that one of the many benefits of enterprise social media is to encourage more collaboration and knowledge sharing, it is useful to look at why and how this happens. If employees are given the right tools and the right environment, will they spontaneously collaborate and share knowledge? Why do some people find it difficult to share and collaborate? If we understand these behaviours we can reinforce the ones that facilitate engagement and sharing, and discourage the ones that do the opposite.

What do we mean by collaboration?

COLLABORATION IS WHEN INDIVIDUALS OR GROUPS WORK TOGETHER, COMBINING THEIR STRENGTHS AND NEGATING WEAKNESSES TO ACCOMPLISH A SET OF GOALS.

The important point about this definition is that the outcomes are more likely to be amplified when working together as opposed to individually

Obstacles to collaboration

Understanding the barriers and obstacles is the first step to identifying potential solutions. Individuals acting alone may not be empowered to make the desired changes, but if there is a real desire to collaborate and share knowledge, most if not all of these obstacles can be overcome or circumvented.

The potential obstacles to effective collaboration have been categorized into three groups:

➢ **Group 1** issues are the hardest to identify and address because they are based on emotion not logic. Persuasion, peer pressure, coaching etc. are all needed in some form.

➢ **Group 2** is more logical so there will be answers to these questions that can increase motivation and turn it around.

➢ **Group 3** is a question of investing resources to address the gaps and build the skills. Not always cheap or simple, but logical

1. EMOTIONAL: resistance based on real or perceived threats

A. Knowledge is power

Knowledge and information hoarders exist in every organisation. However, their knowledge is likely to be one-dimensional, potentially very specialised and limited to their own small network. This can't compare to the wealth and dynamic nature of knowledge in social networks. A case of "none of us is smarter than all of us". Specialised and narrowly focused knowledge can soon become out of date and irrelevant, just like the knowledge hoarder

B. Command and control/hierarchy advantages

Some people don't collaborate because there's a real or perceived hierarchy in the workplace. Over the years, the leadership may have developed a culture that appears to value one person or group over another. Sharing knowledge with those higher in the hierarchy may not be welcome or valued. Sharing knowledge with those lower in the hierarchy may put you at a disadvantage, so knowledge is hoarded. Communities of Practice and Social Networks will only function effectively if there is no hierarchy, enabling knowledge to flow freely. It's worth remembering that *hyperlinks subvert hierarchy*!

C. Sceptical middle management

Sometimes called the "marzipan layer". You may have support from the top (the icing), and bottom-up encouragement (the cake).

But middle management acts as a barrier between the two. They are more likely to understand the detailed processes that provide the foundations for how the organisation operates. They are likely to be risk-averse, since any process changes may have unpredictable consequences, and for which they may be ultimately accountable. This can have a dampening effect on the social collaboration advocates, and only persistence and demonstration of the benefits will convince middle management to support the initiative. Accept that middle managers will be the laggards and build a support network of change agents.

D. Fear of rejection

You have something to contribute, but previous experience leads you to believe that your opinion is not valued. Typically seen in hierarchical networks

E. Afraid to ask

Asking for help is a sign of weakness. Most prevalent in hierarchical structures where some perceived loss of credibility or power would results if the person had to ask for help or advice. This would, after all, put them in debt to the person, people or group that they could have consulted. Typical of opaque working practices and can result in missed opportunities for adopting good/best practice.

F. Fear of change

None of us like change. A familiar routine avoids having to think and enables us stay within our comfort zone. A bit like wearing a comfortable pair of slippers. But the reality is we need to change and adapt to the environment, or we don't survive. Complexity is all around us, and change is happening with increasing velocity. Holding back change is a bit like King Canute – with the same outcome! Introducing something which forces change is often the only answer, but the 'disruption' needs to be sustained in order to avoid returning to the previous status quo. Integrating social software with established business processes will create the desired change, so be clear about which tools and systems are optional and which are mandatory.

"If you don't like change, you're going to like irrelevance even less."—General Eric Shinseki, retired Chief of Staff, U. S. Army

2. RATIONAL: Lack of willingness due to current ways of working

A. WIIFM/Lack of clear business case

What's in it for me? It's reasonable to seek value in what you do; otherwise you'll consider your actions as being a waste of time. Sharing knowledge establishes a level of trust and understanding, and it's more likely that sharing will be reciprocated, and hence reinforcing collaborative behaviour.

B. Lack of support from the top

Bottom-up initiatives will more likely fail to take hold unless there is some support from senior managers and directors. Ideally, collaboration initiatives need to be aligned with business or service goals. However, sometimes a degree of subversion may be the only way of gaining the attention of senior managers to the benefits of social collaboration. Freemium services such as Yammer can provide a secure and private external environment for corporate collaboration, and there are a number of examples of how an informal Yammer network started by one person has gained sufficient traction amongst employees to become officially recognised as a corporate asset.

C. Rigid job descriptions

Tightly written and prescriptive job descriptions will create real or perceived boundaries that inhibit initiatives and taking on new responsibilities.

D. Micromanagement

Once assigned a task or objective by a manager, most knowledge workers will just want to get on with it, with a degree of autonomy on how they go about it. Some managers or supervisors feel the need to oversee every small detail, which discourages initiative and dis-incentivises the worker. Collaboration will probably be limited to the constraints set by the manager/supervisor.

E. Dissonance

This happens when managers tell people they want everyone to collaborate. But at the same time, they independently assign tasks, targets and goals to various individuals and teams. Agendas and priorities will vary and can range from complementary to conflicting.

F. Geography

The layout of your workplace can help or hinder collaboration. The greater the distance between colleagues, the greater the chance of miscommunication. This is not just over-reliance on e-mail when face-to-face conversation is needed, but genuine "out of sight, out of mind" lapses that keep smart people out of the brainstorming, decision making or socialising that leads to positive outcomes.

G. Language

Collaboration is always going to be difficult if the parties cannot make themselves understood. Try to be flexible with the communication media available; some people are better able to communicate verbally, others prefer written communication.

H. Culture

Not every culture is open and transparent. Employees need to be aware of rules and protocols that define collaboration with other cultures.

3. RATIONAL: Inability to collaborate due to lack of skills/tools or other structural issues

A. No tools/ poor tools/ too many tools

To be effective, collaboration has to be made simple. Intuitive tools accelerate user acceptance and can maximise the outcomes. However, tools need to be relevant and optimised to the task(s) to be completed. Too many choices result in cognitive dissonance (confusion on what to use for each task). If no tools (other than email) you belong to a dinosaur organisation. It will eventually become extinct. Decide when to move!

B. Digital divide

Hopefully less of an issue than it used to be, but there is no doubt that anyone not able to connect to the Internet is likely to be at a disadvantage for knowledge and information sharing compared with those who are more digitally networked. Providing access to enterprise collaboration facilities via smartphones and tablets may go some way to narrowing the digital divide.

C. Can't teach and old do new tricks

If people are given the appropriate incentives, or they can see some benefit to themselves, they will usually make the desired behaviour change. However, some people will never change. Don't waste time. Accept it and move on.

D. Information overload/ Lack of time

Research papers and employee surveys have consistently identified that the two biggest time-consumers are (1) attending meetings and (2) servicing the email inbox Employees may not have very much control over what meetings they are required to attend, though they can reasonably ask to have input to the agenda and ensure they go fully prepared in order to avoid any time being wasted debating information that has only been partially shared.

Email is a topic in its own right, and will feature in a separate paper. Suffice to say it has evolved to become:

➢ a chat-messaging platform (we send an email and get one back right away!)

➢ a personal intranet for storing and searching for old information or documents

➢ a broadcast channel for distributing information regardless of topic or relevance

➢ asking a question that can't be answered by the recipients, who then forward the email to their contacts…and so on.

➢ a calendaring and event management system where we set up meetings.

➢ a note-taking solution, for typing meeting notes and forwarding to yourself for saving in your email folders.

Most people would agree that email is not the best tool for collaboration and knowledge sharing, but it might be the only tool available. It requires discipline about what is shared: does everyone need to know this snippet of information? Can people collaborate on a document more effectively if it is placed in a common workspace rather than being sent as an attachment to multiple email accounts? If there is a social software solution then use it for anything other than 1 to 1 communication. Better still if the social software can be integrated with the email client. Think more critically about using the right tools for the job. If all you have is a hammer, then all you can do is bash, regardless of whether there is a nail there or not!

E. Inadequate training/ Education/ Support

Collaboration needs to be recognised as a key workplace skill, and included in personal learning & development plans. It's not something that can be taught in a pedagogical sense, but can be encouraged through coaching and mentoring. Learn from those around you who freely share knowledge. How do they engage with and grow their networks? What tools do they use?

F. Legal /Compliance/ Security

It's not always possible, or even desirable to have open and transparent discussion. Closed groups or communities can be used in some circumstances, but we have to accept that there are times when wider collaboration is not possible.

SOME SIMPLE STEPS TO SUPPORT ADOPTION OF ENTERPRISE SOCIAL MEDIA

1. Don't think of social media as a technology; think of it as a business solution.

2. Be clear about the purpose and objectives of your social media strategy. What problems will it fix? What opportunities will it unlock?

3. Don't assume that users will immediately see the benefits. Adoption is not something that can be forced on people. Adoption occurs when users decide for themselves that the solution provides them with a net benefit. Users very quickly weigh "what's in it for me?" against any perceived pain, such as giving up the comfort of an old way of doing something.

4. Ensure the solution is intuitive to use and broadly consistent with standards used for Web 2.0 services and applications. Love it or hate it, Facebook has educated a whole generation of people on social technology, personal profiles, data privacy etc. An enterprise solution that is unusual or quirky will have difficulty in gaining traction.

5. Where possible, integrate any new social media solutions with existing technology and business processes. Since employees rely heavily on email, email integration is critical.

6. Find opportunities to apply collaborative solutions to business challenges where risks are minimal and business value is clear. In cautious and risk-averse organisations, safety trumps business value, so choose low risk over high business value in the early days.

7. Seek out social media advocates and early adopters. Promote and endorse any successes and quick wins.

8. Social behaviours develop over time. One successful example of collaboration is not enough. Reinforce and repeat good practice, and give sufficient time for new working practices to emerge.

9. Don't give up at the first hurdle. **No one ever said this was going to be an easy journey!**

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COLLABOR8NOW: SUPPORTING KNOWLEDGE ORGANISATIONS

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Knowledge Support High-level advice and influencing to support more effective knowledge sharing within and across teams.	KM and IM Strategies	Community development	Community Manager Training & Coaching	Community Facilitation – Tools, Training, Coaching
Collaborative Systems Support Professional development resources to build collaborative solutions.	Business Scenarios	Use Cases	Technical and Functional Specs	Technology Procurement

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Collabor8now Ltd provides strategic advice and practical expertise in the development and support of knowledge sharing communities and collaborative technology solutions. We work with enlightened individuals who wish to build sustainable success through the liberation of knowledge within their organisations. Our approach is to offer building blocks of service that can be tailored to our clients' individual needs. We are able to support our clients in developing strategies for change, performance improvement, knowledge management, and the end-to-end procurement process for collaborative technology solutions.