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# Three Key Tenets of Optimal Social Collaboration

## Introduction

Effective social collaboration is actionable, deeply contextual and inherently derives its value from business entities outside of itself.

How does an organization begin the journey from traditional, siloed collaboration to natural, business entity based social collaboration?

Optimal social collaboration requires a ubiquitous social fabric, the ability to extend collaborative lifecycles to commit decisions to back office systems and provide consistent context for enhanced decision support. This shift delivers business value in the form of previously unavailable process efficiencies within traditional, unstructured collaboration through a focus around social, contextual and actionable capabilities.



Figure 1. Three Key Tenets

What has kept organizations from embracing this approach in the past?

Enterprise collaborative solutions are far from new, but their lack of maturity within critical areas of social, contextual and actionable capability, has hampered their adoption and limited the return on investment for their respective owners. Due to historically resource intensive custom development to begin to achieve some of this vision, cost benefit analysis often concluded that the effort was simply not worth pursuing.

Organizations may have avoided these developments in the past, but a number of analysts view management of unstructured processes as a critical foundation for business, opposed to an optional addition. In the press release "[Gartner Says the World of Work Will Witness 10 Changes During the Next 10 Years](#)", Ben Tudor proposes De-routinization of Work will be the number one change, stating "... core value that people add is not in the processes that can be automated, but in non-routine processes, uniquely human, analytical or interactive contributions ... we cannot automate the process of selling a life insurance policy to a skeptical buyer, but we can use automation tools to augment the selling process."

To compound this challenge, rapid innovation in the consumer market has driven enterprise expectations around all aspects of collaboration at groundbreaking pace. Success in the consumer market is measured on the basis of engagement (e.g. "stickiness") and without question the biggest success stories satisfy all three tenets effectively. [LinkedIn](#) and [Facebook](#) implicitly offer a user a unified framework offering user centered actionable information.

How can we begin to achieve this within our enterprises?

## Key Tenets of Optimal Social Collaboration

Successful enablement of enterprise social collaboration requires that organizations embrace the following tenets and understand that traditional collaborative functionality has inherent limits- it is innovation and integration in accordance with the following tenets that will provide net-new efficiency benefits.

### 1. Leverage a Ubiquitous Social Fabric

Collaborative activities should be supported through a role-based fabric, providing personalized experiences that broadcast key events various people connected to the user and entities that the user is interacting with. This supports education of participants working in and around a specific business entity that will benefit from an implicit capture of tacit knowledge and provide continuity between participants. In the absence of this fabric activities could still occur within a unified platform, but are essentially be siloed causing frequent duplication of effort across similar tasks, with critical tacit knowledge eluding capture.

### 2. Supply Continuous Context to Support Decisioning

People generally engage in collaborative behavior to obtain a resolution for a specific issue. The time to achieve resolution is referred to as "Solve Time". Users have traditionally been forced to "alt-tab" (switch between) between business systems and synthesize their own context across disparate systems and processes. The constant loss of context forces end users to exert a large amount of effort that could be spent on higher value problem solving.

### 3. Extend Collaborative Lifecycle into Back Office

Beyond the solve time from decisioning efforts, additional time is expended formalizing the resolution that was generated from collaboration in a system of record. Extending collaboration to result in the capture of an explicit decision maximizes efficiencies, creating a closed circuit for a particular thread. This type of structured action may exist today within your organization's customer support system around opening, working around and closing support issues, but generally does not extend to other collaborative activities.

The importance of these tenets is supported by a knowledge generated through numerous efforts by organizations to refine unstructured collaborative processes and drive adoption of collaborative technologies within their enterprise deliver higher value to their business. A deeper examination reveals objectifiable benefits of each tenant and illustrates the power to be gained from the sum of the tenets in your social collaboration initiatives.

## Leverage a Ubiquitous Social Fabric - Water Cooler 2.0 & Participant Empowerment

As an enterprise grows, it becomes difficult to effectively scale business-specific knowledge. What was once learned through casual conversation becomes lost to geography and fragmented teams that are now focused on a narrow aspect of your business.

"[Who Moved My Cube?](#)", a Harvard Business Review article by Anne-Laure Fayard and John Weeks highlights additional benefits of a social foundation to provide a "sense of proximity". Anne-Laure and John state that "Open connections help foster the sense that geographically disparate groups share an informal space and that the casual interactions that might occur in a real-world common space are sanctioned there." They also go on to point out that findings from MIT organizational psychology professor Thomas Allen indicate "...it's not just the physical attributes of a space that influence informal interactions; "proximity," as we use the term, depends on traffic patterns that are shaped just as much by social and psychological aspects. In fact, physical centrality is often less important than "functional centrality" ... directors should create spaces containing several shared resources. The social geography of a space is a crucial component of its physical layout."

The article goes on to highlight the challenges of using tools like Skype, instant messaging and others, as they always have to be open on a user's desktop. Herein lies the benefit of the social aspect of optimal social collaboration - the person behind the process or the work within the process is readily identified, much like on Facebook, removing the abstraction that the application provides between the user and their peers. Furthermore, social collaborative tools provide a summarized digest of activity, enabling users to informally learn about the results and efforts of other participant's work that they are related to. This digest, or in Facebook vernacular "[Wall](#)", provides them the ability to engage the other participant around it to comment, ask questions and begin to form tangible bonds between participants.

Just as the business entities within the collaborative processes are focal points with associated information, the users also represent key parts of the system that process information and business entities begin to have relationships with. The relation of information to the user supplies a crucial thread that alleviates the disconnected nature of systems, turning the workplace from a series of disparate systems, into a user centric, role-based environment.

## Decisioning Support through Continuous Context – Entity in Question

Proponents of social collaboration understand the importance of executive support for their initiatives. While executive support is essential it may be surprising to learn that when dealing with internal collaboration the [McKinsey Global Survey Results: How companies are benefiting from Web 2.0](#) of nearly 1,7000 executives found that integration of Web 2.0 into employees' day-to-day work activities was viewed as the most effective aspect of success by 75% of the participants, with senior leaders role modeling /championing use of technology cited as the most effective by 59%. Executive support is essential, but the McKinsey survey underscores just how important context is to success.

Historically collaborative processes have not been in the context with the entity in question. This entity could be a key customer account, research and development initiative, a product development activity, marketing campaign creation or escalated customer support issue. Unless an organization customized or extended a collaboration tool, context was at best loosely coupled between the entity and the collaborative exchanges around it.

In a recent conversation with Dan Keldsen, a Partner at Human 1.0 ([human1.com](http://human1.com)), he reflected on their research over the last 4 years, in the Tribalization of Business research done with Deloitte and the Society for New Communications Research (SNCR). Mr. Keldsen elaborated on the importance of context under the theme of "Think Knowledge Networks" - one of the four pillars of Hyper-Sociality, covered in depth in the book published by Human 1.0's founders in 2010 by McGraw-Hill, "The Hyper-Social Organization."

According to Keldsen, "...employees should not have to use just ONE channel to get or ask for information, or more importantly, have to remember which channel it is that will actually get them the information they need. Environments that work best pull ALL (or many) sources of information into a single context - a contextual, knowledge network, that removes the divisions of the siloed way technology has typically been deployed in the past. The old way forces individual humans to be the glue that technologists have left out of enterprise applications, and fractures the natural flow we expect as humans with integrated senses into technical compartments that are completely out of sync with the way the human brain works..."

Regardless of particular capabilities within collaborative tools, if they organizations easily offer contextual integration of key decision data, as well as allow their capabilities to reside within the core systems that authoritatively hold the data - the end user will be faced to return to the world of "alt-tab" and lose the adoption benefits of a unified end user experience across processes for their role within their organization.

## Extend Collaborative Lifecycle into Back Office

The majority of collaborative activity results in objective output that it captured and applied within a separate system. In most instances some decisioning metrics or other information must be evaluated in relation to a business entity during a collaborative process that may include research or communication with various participants.

For instance, a clinical research organization (CRO) selecting a new site for a drug trial may have demographic information that requires analysis to finalize the selection process and understand what areas will offer the best selection of patients to participate in tests.

In legacy collaborative environments, a business intelligence tool would be used to present this information to the end users. The users from the site selection team would then have to drill down into the various business intelligence reports. Once they had located the information they would copy and paste a particular result from their reporting effort into a collaborative area for peer analysis. Peers would then review, have to open the reporting tool, drill down into and attempt to locate the data the initial user referenced.

This simple example not only illustrates continual loss of context and duplication of data, but also highlights that once the collaborative process is "complete" there is no location to capture a final decision and attach the authoritative decisioning information that supported the decision.

How do we bridge this gap?

The solution is similar to an evolution witnessed within some "dashboards". Dashboards provide at-a-glance views of critical business data. To make this data actionable and actively steer a business, decision cockpits – not dashboards - are required. This evolution enabled business users to evolve from a car with only a speedometer, gas gauge and navigation system, - to one with the addition of a steering wheel, brake and gas peddle. They now not only understood the health of their business, but could take action on the information coming back from the instruments to maneuver the business.

How does this relate to collaboration?

Today the majority of organizations have collaborative tools, but they are isolated from the systems that they ultimately support. Just as dashboards are to decisioning cockpits, collaboration is to optimal social collaboration. Social collaboration is not a bolt onto a business system, but an inherent part of business process DNA that should support actionable capability that extends into back office systems to close the loop around various decision points.

## Excelling in the Unstructured Future

We will always have to deal with unstructured collaborative processes within our organizations. Regardless of the participants and nature of the collaborate process, two things are certain – the origination and end points are generally known and relate to a business entity, perhaps a customer, order, shipping location, product or otherwise.

Imagine the benefits if an organization's key business systems supported a social fabric, provided continuous context and extended the lifecycle around the collaborative decisioning to include output into back office systems of record.

The technical hurdle to embracing optimal social collaboration would fall away, leaving the company with an opportunity to focus on and refine how processes were approached. Time and resources previously required could then be reallocated to focusing on innovation to support competitive differentiation unique to the particular business.



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