

Deploying collaboration platforms intelligently



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We're all measured on productivity. Companies live and die by how much they produce and when. Getting new products released quickly and efficiently is critical to surviving in a global village where competition can come from any direction to seize your share of the market. Enterprises are always looking for ways to be more productive, and effective collaboration is key in this endeavor.

With players in the collaboration space that include Slack, Huddle, Microsoft Teams, Workplace by Facebook and a host of others, the choices are many and varied. However, while rolling out a collaboration platform is relatively simple, ensuring that it makes an enterprise more productive, and thus more competitive, is an entirely different matter.

Social collaboration platforms in the enterprise

In 2006 a new collaboration platform originally intended for U.S. university students moved into the mainstream. The concept that friends could communicate with one another to share information was not entirely new. Other platforms were available — remember Myspace and Friends Reunited? — but none of them quite caught the imagination the way Facebook did. Facebook focused not so much on the individual or on trying to meet up with old acquaintances, but on sharing “the now”: photos, feelings, memes, the zeitgeist. Since then, Facebook has become a global phenomenon that allows people to not only share their lives and memories, but also to collaborate on organizing parties, shows, picnics and events.

Facebook has such a firm place in our lives that we take it for granted. Now, Facebook has created Workplace, a platform for employees to communicate, share information and collaborate. Other vendors have also realized that enterprises can greatly benefit from mature and functionally rich platforms that drive new ways to be more productive.

Email has long been a scourge for organizations as employees struggle to cope with ever-increasing amounts of unrelated information. Workers have tried to cope with the deluge by setting up rules and other management solutions, but they've never been very effective. And none of these solutions ever overcomes the fact that an individual's email in-box is just that: individual. So much information is stored and siloed in millions of in-boxes, unable to be mined or analyzed, leading to an untapped data lake of information.

Collaboration platforms offer a new and more productive way to communicate. Several studies have shown that despite an increase in the use of unified communications (UC), universal collaboration across different communication modalities is where many employees see the most productivity benefits.

With any new technology, however, users will not naturally adopt the solution. And for users comfortable with using email, and more recently UC, collaboration platforms present a major paradigm shift.

Cultural transformation

To realize the greatest benefits from social collaboration platforms, it's critical to ensure that employees at all levels of the enterprise fully buy into the solution. Over the years, organizations have tried various ways of rolling out new technologies, including releasing the technology and letting users discover it, or letting it spread by word of mouth.

These approaches might work for small companies or for software that isn't too complex — perhaps even for solutions that require less cognitive investment. But the key to rolling out platforms such as Microsoft Teams, Slack, or Workplace from Facebook — and to ensure that they are used to their full potential — is to encourage workers to eschew email and work with their colleagues in a much more productive, focused and sharing environment. These platforms are necessarily feature-rich. They enable users to create content, communicate through persistent chat, view video content and interact directly with line-of-business (LOB) applications, as well as traditional websites and advanced automation. With a well-designed implementation, the platform becomes a focused hub with which users interact and which intuitively and intelligently focuses their work.

Where many rollout programs focus on ensuring that the solution functions properly — by carrying out testing, network assessments, pilots and the like — the concept of getting employees to buy in through management of change is often sidelined as being an extra, unnecessary expense.

Management of change, or adoption services, is the process by which business units and employees are taken through a program that gives them the best opportunities to fully realize the benefits of the new platform. They are encouraged to adopt a cultural transformation in which they employ new working practices that increase productivity. The expectation is that users will move away from using their siloed email solution, where documents are passed back and forth for editing and review, toward more productive and shared environments. This approach to deployment ultimately leads to a more intelligent use of the environment and a quicker return on investment. For enterprises serious about increasing productivity, management of change programs are essential.

Community management

Even if your company has bought into the change, and your workforce appears to be happily using the new platform, there is a world of difference between just using a tool and using it intelligently. Using a paintbrush to hammer in a screw provides some idea of how technology is sometimes used. While many workers will use modern productivity applications to only a small degree of their capability and never need anything more, understanding and using a collaboration platform intelligently will likely require more cognitive investment, or at the very least require the company to

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create some design principles and usage policies. These should be carefully tuned to the business's needs and should avoid causing users to become frustrated with the platform. It is critical to ensure seamless integration in the early adoption stage so as many employees as possible will have a positive reaction to the change. In addition, it's important to understand how workers are adapting to the new technology and how they are using the platform to ensure the organization is getting the best use from its investment.

As with an email inbox, one of the problems with so much data is how to manage it. Many collaboration platform options, and the proliferation of messages, files, videos, channels and links will require policies that reduce data sprawl and encourage compliance. Use of intelligent analytics can help manage the data lake that sits behind the social interfaces. Truly understanding how an enterprise works can help leaders realize where improvements can and should be made, and where investment is needed.

Community management is an ongoing service that proactively and intelligently monitors the collaboration platforms to provide feedback on a variety of aspects.

Examples include:

- **Adoption rates, including hot spots and “not” spots.** Where are employees most successfully using the platform? By canvassing their opinions, it could be possible to implement guidance from some of those successful users and provide mentoring for groups that haven't yet made the best use of the service.
- **Compliance.** Data loss prevention is an important element of protecting a company's intellectual property.
- **Profanity filtering and sentiment trends.** Ensuring that workers are using the platforms appropriately, while also gathering feedback on employees' feelings — both positive and negative — toward the company they work for can help organizations better understand their workforce.

Greater productivity in the digital world

Enterprises are always looking to embrace new ways of working to increase their competitive advantage. The move to digital and mobile, for example, has greatly changed the way companies do business. Now, to be even more productive in the digital world, organizations must empower their workforce with greater opportunities for collaboration. Intelligently managing a collaboration platform from concept to run is vital to ensure the best results and maximum return on investment.

About the authors



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