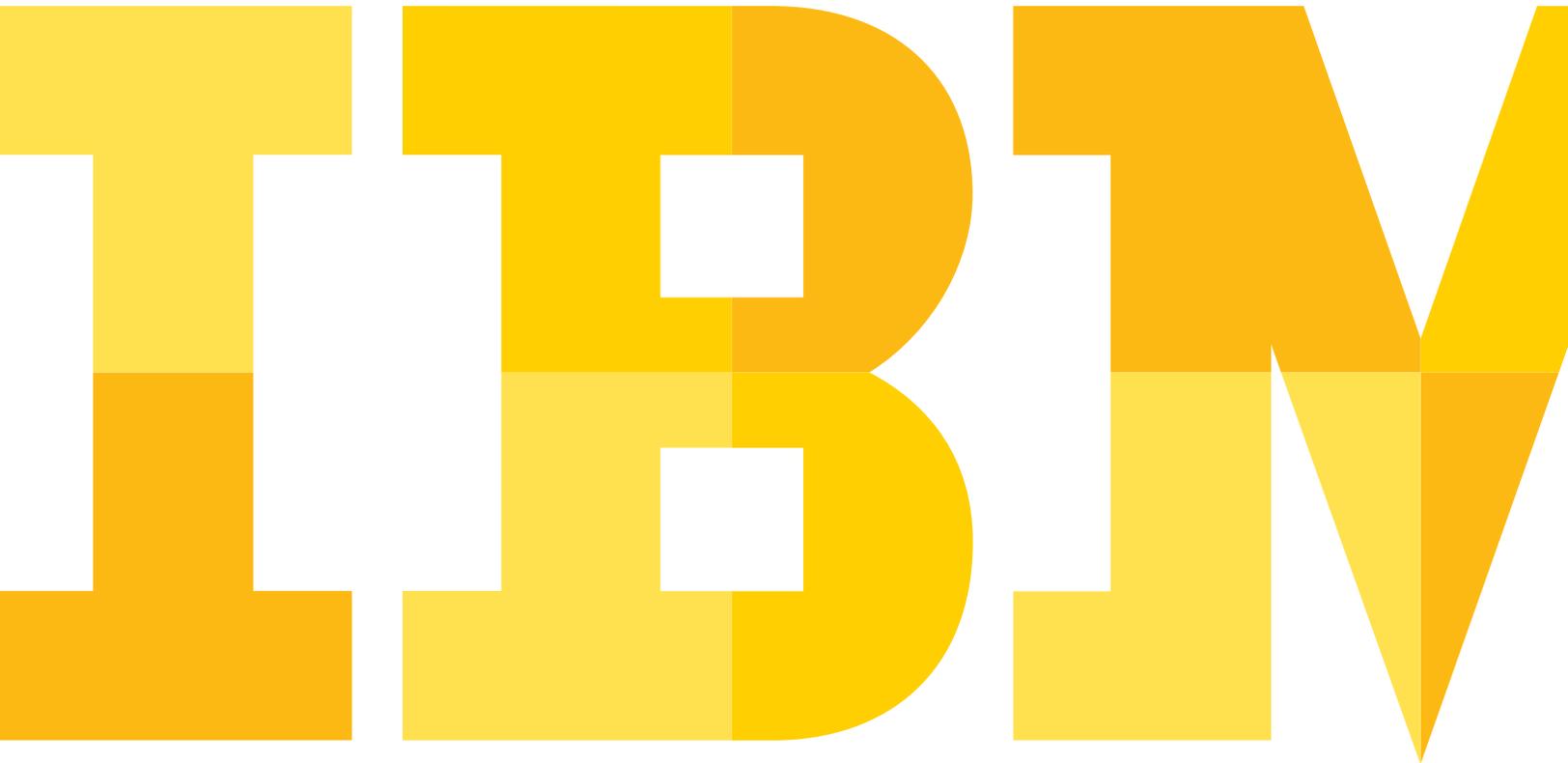


# Collaborative connectedness

*Using social business to empower your people to create  
and share knowledge*



## Introduction

---

*“The only source of knowledge is experience.”*

— Albert Einstein

---

An organisation’s knowledge is one of its greatest assets but, rather like the human brain, only a fraction of it is accessed and deployed to carry out the business’s objectives. While many enterprises have made a conscious effort to identify, gather, collate and disseminate corporate intelligence through structured knowledge management processes, the net result (albeit beneficial) often represents no more than ‘scratching the surface.’ In general, knowledge remains trapped within the documentation, hard-drives and heads of employees—and this is ‘real’ knowledge: insights and information that are derived from direct interaction with customers and experience of executing the organisation’s work processes. The ability to tap this knowledge is a critical means of building organisational agility. Doing so should provide swift, accurate and meaningful feedback concerning what customers are saying, what works and what doesn’t and how issues and problems have been resolved.

Of course, failure to access ‘experiential’ knowledge leaves an organisation open to the risk of it dissipating as people move on. The exit interview may support the ‘check-in’ of the leaver’s laptop, mobile phone and company car but he or she will still walk out of the door without leaving behind the wealth of lessons and insights that have been amassed during their years with the company. Staff turnover is not just about the costs of

temporary operational inconvenience. The associated loss can also be expressed in terms of the leaching away of the expertise and knowledge assets that have failed to be captured.

This paper argues that knowledge management is most effective when it is based on collaborative principles and is supported by carefully selected technologies and organisational constructs that create a culture where knowledge is shared as part of a natural way of functioning within the business. Specifically, social business tools can be highly effective contributors to creating the desired ethos. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the IBM Global CEO Study 2012<sup>1</sup> found that organisations outperforming their peers are 30 percent more likely to emphasize an open culture—often characterized by a greater use of social media—as a key enabler of collaboration and innovation. It seems, therefore, that internal application of social business approaches is an important part of a strategy for success.

There is, however, a risk that associated initiatives become too techno-centric and that, as a result, they give insufficient consideration to putting in place an environment in which people have the disposition and skills to exploit the investment in technology and deliver the business benefits.

Adopting a new model for collaborative knowledge management is a courageous act. It means setting aside a natural instinct for many senior managers to exercise ‘command and control’ in setting the requirements for the knowledge to be captured and, then, in enforcing the processes to fulfil these. Mass engagement in knowledge-sharing is heady stuff and requires a level of faith that the organisation’s people will rise to the challenge. But this belief is not unthinking: it is derived from knowing that some key actions have been taken that will dramatically increase the likelihood that the new model will take root successfully.

## Social business as a supporter and driver of collaborative knowledge management

---

*“As people embrace social media in their private lives, they naturally expect to use similar tools within the enterprise. This is especially true for younger workers who use these tools in everyday life. Open communication, collaboration, and content generation are as much a part of their standard toolkit as using a computer or mobile phone.”*

— Jakob Nielsen, Global expert — Web usability<sup>2</sup>

---

The growth in the population of Web 2.0 users has been exponential since its inception circa 2009. Today, there are over 1 billion people who log-on to ‘social’ or ‘participatory’ web tools<sup>3</sup>. There is an increasingly widespread understanding and appreciation of these which greatly assists their adoption in the workplace. Just as the use of telephone and e-mail has become all-pervasive in both the home and business, these new tools are evolving to support people carrying out both work-based and personal and social functions.

Effective use of these tools is designed to:

- **Increase personal productivity:** people can use their business network and access to information to answer questions and solve problems more quickly;
- **Extend individual capability:** people can develop further their skills and knowledge as ‘learning’ becomes inherently integrated with ‘work’ through the process of sharing and discovering from others;
- **Facilitate collaboration across functions and geographies:** this can result in cooperative working in order to address specific challenges—for example, to agree standard, best of breed ways of working or to build new products and services;
- **Drive innovation:** creating a context and spaces for community-based ‘knowledge accidents’ (the coincidental coming together of strands of thinking or information) to inspire novel, break-through thinking;
- **Assist organisational agility:** the business can process and use swiftly the information captured within the tools in order to act insightfully in relation to customers and operations;
- **Enable faster, more meaningful organisation-led communication:** people can be engaged in ‘big’ conversations about business vision, strategy and other important topics in a way that reflects their circumstances and interest;
- **Support a stronger sense of belonging:** social business helps to present the organisation as a network of people who have shared interests and goals with which everyone can interact—rather than as a faceless, monolithic bureaucracy ruled by process.

## The benefits of collaboration & networking are significant to both individuals & organisations

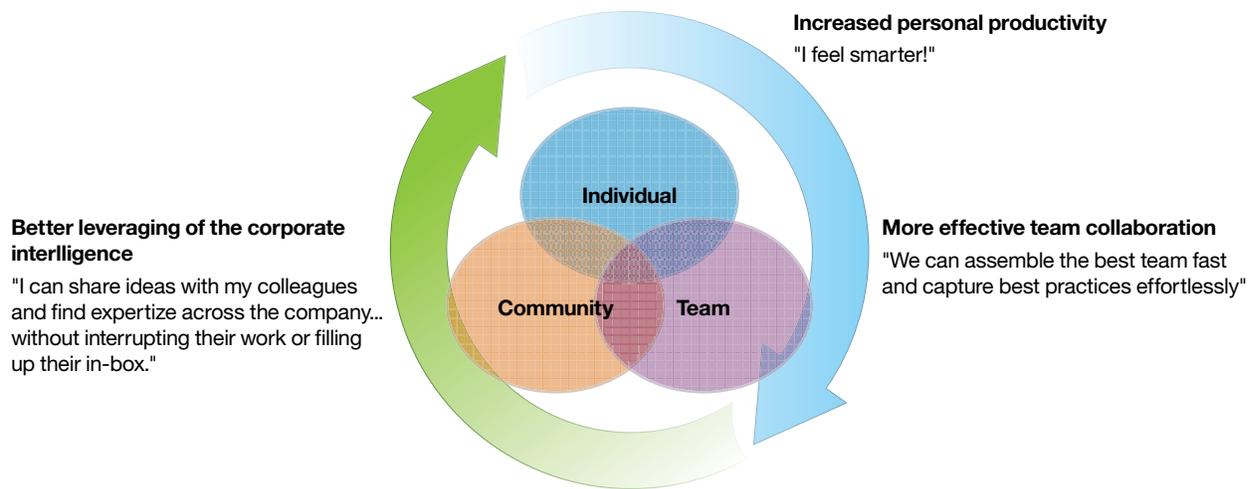


Figure 1: The benefits of collaboration and networking.

Every day, within every organisation, thousands of connections take place between people who are trying to find information to answer a question, ask for advice, trial an idea, obtain another opinion, recycle experience and techniques to carry out work, or for a multitude of other reasons. The reality is, however, that there is too much information for us to manage by ourselves. We need some ways of navigating through the mass of data that we could access and the potential contacts that we could make. Social business tools provide help here.

IBM has adopted several social business tools and techniques during the last few years:

- **Instant messaging (IM):** this provides instant, anytime access to people and information while allowing users to register their availability for communicating and, thereby, integrate IM into their working in a way that suits them and avoids undue disruption. In addition to IM's value as a means of exchanging information, its use can also reduce costs. For example, IM helped IBM to avoid approximately \$1.3 million per month in telephone usage. IM tools may also use audio integration to offer a single interface to both audio and web conferencing.

- **Virtual meeting spaces and webinars:** multiple users meet at a common virtual venue where information is shared through voice, video and electronic files (for example, a slide-by-slide presentation). Again, this tool can reduce travel costs while delivering an experience of interacting with others, which is superior to a teleconference.
- **Collaborative jams:** jams provide an internet-based platform for innovation through enterprise-wide brainstorming, connecting any large population of individuals across boundaries and jobs to develop actionable ideas around business-critical or urgent societal issues. Typically, they take the form of a high-profile online event for a specific duration (for example, 72 hours) with a defined agenda, focused on strategic and critical enterprise issues and supported by a real-time discussion database to capture ideas, best practices and employee sentiment. Real-time text mining and analysis surfaces and steers live discussion trends, and an event report contains key conclusions and an action plan. For example, IBM managed a jam for a major mobile telephone manufacturer, involving more than 9,000 staff, to tackle a variety of strategic issues such as “How to win and lead in devices”. The result was a tremendous list of ideas for the CEO and board to help drive forward the new strategy of becoming an internet company.
- **Community sites:** IBM’s own equivalent of Facebook, community sites connect people with shared interests (which may concern a specific customer account or an area of professional or technical expertise) into a virtual community.

This is usually integrated with an employee’s intranet profile and enables viewing of updates from his or her network or from the entire company—with the ability to post updates on other people’s profiles. The sites contain threads of discussion and comments that can be used to announce status updates on topics of interest. Starting a community can help to build a valuable repository of information and expertise about a specific subject. In addition to sharing files, bookmarks and other resources, when members need the solution to a specific problem, they can post questions to the community forums. Experts within the community can answer the questions and share their insights with other members. IBM hosts over 3,600 public online communities, each with shared resources and discussions, with the participation of around 195,000 unique members.

- **Blogging and micro-blogging:** blogging is the creation of journals that communicate information or experience with a dynamic, personal style, while micro-blogging consists of publishing short messages or status updates either publicly or to a select group. For example, people may use a blog to let others know about a new product, to inform colleagues about experiences at a trade show or to share tips on using new technology. Blogs are a fast, effective way to share news and views. They can have a single author or allow for multiple contributors and invite others to provide feedback comments. By their nature, blogs tend to be ‘of the moment’ rather than long-lasting reference sources. This latter function is provided through wikis.

- **Wikis:** wikis are collections of pages about a particular subject. Wiki members can edit or comment on the pages, or add their own pages. Teams can use wikis to create a central place to collaborate on a project. Typically someone creates a wiki, gives it a title, adds initial members, and adds a description and some tags. On the first page in the wiki, they provide information about the subject, and then they tell the members that it is available. Depending on their access, members can read the wiki, edit pages, comment on pages, and add their own pages. On average, there are 1.3 million user visits per month to over 5,000 IBM internal wikis with 5.5 million page views and 33,000 contributions.



Figure 2: Bluepedia is an example of an IBM wiki.

- **Collaborative file-sharing tools:** these tools enable employees to upload files and let other people see and work with them, as well as seeing and working with other people's files. They provide a simple way to share files, information, communications and ideas with other team members without sending large files through email. Each individual can set the access rating of uploaded files, differentiating those that he or she wishes to keep private—but which can be accessed remotely when required—from those to be shared with specific people or communities and those to be made public so anyone inside the organisation with access to the tools can read them.
- **Portal content management software:** most organisations view their intranet portal for staff as a 'top down' content channel, providing broadcast or mass communications services—with some degree of search facilities. While retaining the features that support these objectives, a Web 2.0 portal embeds social collaboration, combining corporate news and messages with user-generated content.

## Delivering benefits from technology investment

Investing in the right social business technology to deliver a collaborative knowledge management strategy is an important step. However, in our experience, there are other activities that need to be undertaken in order to convert this strategy into tangible business benefits. These activities are not specific to a particular set of tools and are concerned with stimulating usage and building confidence through demonstrating success. Adopting a collaborative approach to creating and sharing an organisation’s knowledge assets, therefore, needs to be planned and managed as an initiative to deliver solutions that address organisational, people and process issues, as well as those relating to technology.

Figure 3 illustrates the IBM Social Business Framework that we use to help our customers and partners to capitalise on the opportunities described earlier. Effective change management is inherent within the framework to deliver solutions that are centred on providing exceptional user experiences to exploit social collaboration and social analytics capabilities. Mapped onto the framework are eight sets of change management activities to ensure benefits delivery. These activities are embedded within the overall approach — not discretionary add-ons.

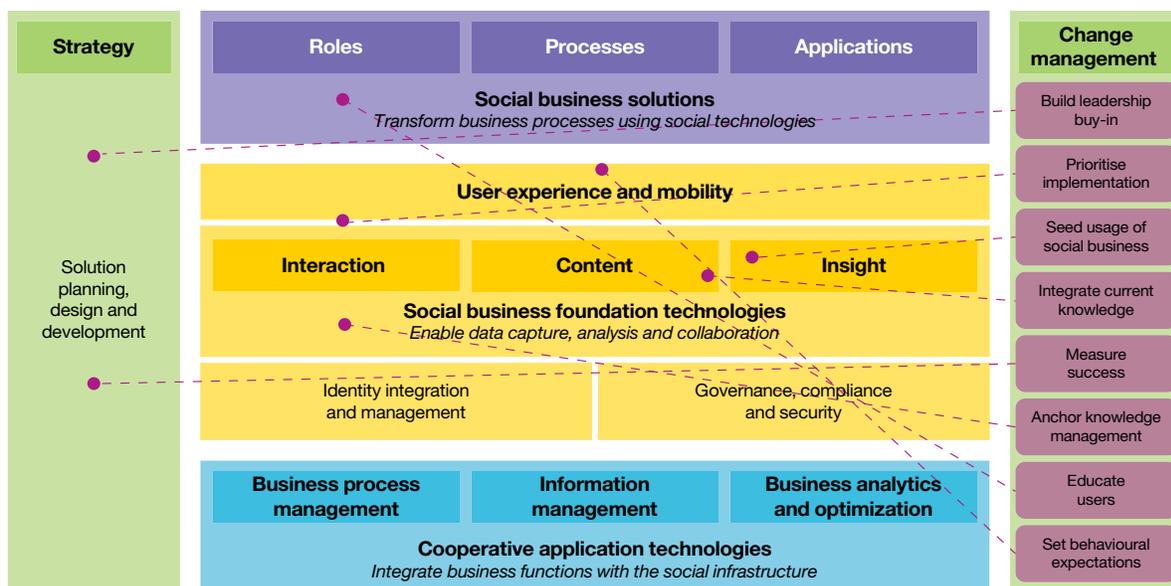


Figure 3: The IBM Social Business Framework.

- **Build leadership buy-in to a new approach to knowledge management.** Adopting a collaborative approach to knowledge management attracts at least some degree of healthy scepticism at senior levels of the organisation. In part, this may be a generational issue—leaders may have built their careers prior to the Web 2.0 revolution and may simply not understand the opportunities to be realised through working in a different way. Collaborative working may also intuitively run counter to their experience of how organisations are managed successfully, in other words, through considered, top-down planning and delegation. Making knowledge management dependent on mass participation may seem both threatening to those who, in the past, have carefully assembled and managed existing repositories and unwise to those who believe that the best outcomes are those specified in detail by the leadership.

However, leadership behaviours are central to the success of the collaboration initiative. Without their overt advocacy and willingness to encourage and recognise supportive employee behaviours, it will soon founder.

When IBM embarked on this approach internally, 135 ‘ambassadors’ were paired with IBM’s top 300 leaders in order to leverage and role-model the use of social networking tools internally and with clients. These ambassadors met with each top leader for one hour per month, coaching them on using social computing and collecting feedback on how to improve the tools that were being used. As a result, the leadership drove this transformation of IBM through better interaction and collaboration, both across the leadership community and within their own teams.

- **Focus on initial adoption within those parts of the organisations that have the greatest need for sharing knowledge.** In order to build early usage, the collaboration strategy should identify where there is likely to be a ‘natural’ compelling need to share knowledge and information. For example, efforts to launch the new approach could focus on:
  - Those who are involved in researching technology or market trends and want to draw on the insights of others;
  - Those who are tasked with generating new product or service proposals;
  - Those whose work involves cross-disciplinary interactions (for example, policy makers and researchers)

While much of the future growth in collaboration will be organic (generated in a spontaneous and unpredicted manner); some initial intervention always helps to ‘get the ball rolling.’

- **Seed usage of the new social business tools.** There is a balance to be struck between having confidence that people will take-up and find business uses that had never been anticipated for the tools, and taking some early actions to encourage initial take-up. There are a number early actions that can be taken, for example:
  - Prime some subject matter experts to start to load content into the tools—engage a group of influential people in identifying some big return applications for the new tools and follow these up with some pump-priming investment;
  - Create some integration between the new tools and existing business processes so people are drawn to and become familiar with the new social media as a natural part of their job;
  - Arouse curiosity through the delivery of novel employee communications that signal that “there is something different happening;”
  - Incentivise engagement: offer recognition and small rewards for early collaborative contributors (for example, entry into a prize draw to win a tablet computer).

- **Integrate current knowledge management with the collaborative platform.** Access to knowledge should be made as easy as possible with minimal uncertainty about ‘what to use when.’ Users should be able to access both current and historical knowledge through a single portal and, therefore, existing repositories need to be integrated with the new social platform. However, complete legacy knowledge migration is likely to require considerable effort and is probably unnecessary. Moreover, the new social content takes different forms from traditional content and comes from multiple sources, both internal and external to the organisation. A more productive focus for the investment of development and set-up resources examines and selects data mining technologies to discover the right content (including data from existing knowledge sources) and analytics makes sense of it and makes it visible to the right people.
- **Measure success.** The initiative must be able to demonstrate that it is delivering benefits. A set of metrics needs to be in place, therefore, to monitor and help to evolve collaboration

efforts. As far as possible, some quantitative metrics should be used to document the business value derived through collaboration across the enterprise (for example, identifying impact on productivity, revenue generation, gross margin, market share) though this may need careful consideration in order to isolate the impact of this factor relative to others.

In addition:

- Qualitative metrics can be used to identify improvements in the environment that facilitate collaboration: for example, the ease-of-use of collaborative tools, the accessibility of experts, increased innovation, reaction time, customer satisfaction;
- Participation metrics indicate the relative pervasiveness of collaboration and its enablers: for example, usage of specific tools such as wikis, the number of communities established and their membership numbers. Some of these measures may become part of existing reporting, perhaps by modifying a current, periodic employee survey.

- **Anchor knowledge management within the organisation.**

The deployment of collaborative tools may follow the setting up of organisational constructs that promote ownership of knowledge development. For example, competency-based communities may be set up as part of ‘professionalisation’ within some organisational functions like procurement. Along with the development of community-based career structures, competency frameworks and learning and development roadmaps to support professional development, people’s engagement with the community and its subject matter experts stimulates them to contribute actively to knowledge capture and sharing and, thus, exploit the new tools.

- **Provide user education and guidance.** While many people are familiar with social media from its use in their personal life, others may not have encountered tools of this nature. Tool selection may include an assessment of the extent to which their use is intuitive, but some degree of learning provision might still be required. This needs to cover the

vision and purpose of introducing the new collaborative model as well as supporting familiarity with the specific functionality of the tools.

This learning experience should itself reflect the desired collaborative ethos. Online learning modules can be supported by ‘hints and tips’ blogs, more detailed wiki-based explanations of functionality and access to a network of ‘collaboration champions’ who can be contacted for specific help and support.

- **Set expectations of behaviour through social computing guidelines.** Providing the means for collaboration carries some risks, of course, and these may be high on the list of the concerns of senior stakeholders. For example, the availability of internal social media may distract from doing real work; or the media may be used inappropriately—for instance, to issue abusive or other undesirable communications.

IBM's experience is that these risks rarely become issues—people respond positively to these new opportunities for interaction and use them constructively. However, we always recommend establishing some clear ground rules. These should be expressed in positive terms (for example, setting expectations that people contribute and share knowledge) rather than just comprising a proscriptive series of rules that must not be broken. They should also reflect where there may be new ambiguities introduced as a result of using social media, for example:

- When you blog, are you speaking as an individual or as the holder of a specified role?
- Is it acceptable to combine the use of business and personal bookmarks in the system?
- What types of topics should be discussed on community sites?
- How will the authenticity and accuracy of information be monitored?

### **Designing a social business-based knowledge management initiative**

In order to transform and rethink your organisation's key knowledge management processes, you need to consider the complete set of capabilities needed to integrate this with your current IT investments. Our view of what's needed for a social business platform is broad:

- A set of tools to help you reach, engage, discover, and act across your business;
- A core platform to enable social networking internally and externally in a secure manner;
- The linking of different styles of communication into a cohesive whole wherever you are, on whatever device you are using.

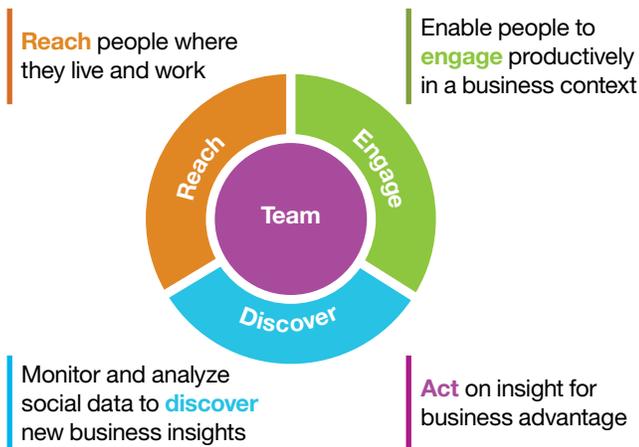


Figure 4: The four capabilities of social business-based knowledge management.

Any future social business-based knowledge management initiative, therefore, should be designed to:

- **Reach** people where they live and work through the identities they maintain on the social networks that are enabled through the initiative;
- **Engage** people productively and in a business context, connecting them to diverse types of business content with the ability to discuss, rate, co-create and organise it;
- **Discover** new business insights from social data through monitoring and analysing identities, social graphs, communication channels and social content;
- **Act** on insight for business advantage through exploiting the knowledge that is created to take advantage of new opportunities, make better decisions, optimise processes quickly and govern and manage risk.

### Considerations for organisations considering the introduction of social collaboration tools

If your organisation is thinking about launching a more collaborative approach to knowledge management, these are good questions to ask yourself:

- Are the drivers for introducing social business collaborative tools clear? Are you confident of selling the idea to an executive audience?
  - What will success look like? How will you measure it?
  - Do you have an over-arching strategy to exploit Web 2.0 externally as well as internally? Are there points of contact between these approaches?
  - Where in your organisation is knowledge development and management most important?
- To what extent are 'communities' in place today? Do they align with your competency and knowledge-capture priorities?
  - How will you ramp-up use of the new tools swiftly but in a cost-effective manner?
  - How familiar are your people with social media and tools? How steep is the learning curve that most of them face?
  - What are the main issues that you need to cover in social computing guidelines for your organisation? How will you promote adherence to these?
  - How will you manage the delivery of an initiative that spans technology, organisation, people and process changes?
  - How will you cultivate long-term capability in social business collaborative technologies and approaches?

## Conclusion

Social business collaboration tools can provide significant opportunities for changing the ways that organisations capture and share knowledge and, more generally, build innovation into their business. Defining and detailing your social business goals is an essential first step to developing a social presence that is consistent with these objectives.

While selecting the right social business channels and tools is important, the focus of the initiative must not become so centred on the technology that it neglects how to create an environment in which the investment in collaborative technologies flourishes and delivers real benefits. Creating effective sponsorship for changing the knowledge management model is critical. Depending upon the profile and experience of the executive team—as well as the prevailing organisational culture—this may be a demanding challenge and may need a significant investment of effort to deliver the level of support required for success.

The nature of all of the improvements and benefits that flow from the adoption of collaborative technologies cannot be fully anticipated at the outset. The adoption programme will set loose the creativity of your people who, once informed, educated and empowered, will develop innovative ways of applying these tools to their work and deliver long-term shifts in your organisational capability.

There are a number of other things that can be done to accelerate usage and, ultimately, benefits realisation. Developing a comprehensive plan that recognises the need to implement changes in organisation, people and skills and processes, as well as in technology is the key to launching effectively this new model for knowledge management.

## For more information

For further information please contact:

### **Peter Smith**

Associate Partner—Strategy & Transformation

IBM Global Business Services

[peter.s.smith@uk.ibm.com](mailto:peter.s.smith@uk.ibm.com)

### **Alan Brookfield**

Senior Managing Consultant—Strategy & Transformation

IBM Global Business Services

[alan.brookfield@uk.ibm.com](mailto:alan.brookfield@uk.ibm.com)



---

© Copyright IBM Corporation 2013

IBM United Kingdom Limited  
76 Upper Ground  
South Bank  
London  
SE1 9PZ

Produced in the United Kingdom  
June 2013

All Rights Reserved

IBM, the IBM logo and [ibm.com](http://ibm.com) are trademarks or registered trademarks of International Business Machines Corporation in the United States, other countries, or both. If these and other IBM trademarked terms are marked on their first occurrence in this information with a trademark symbol (® or ™), these symbols indicate U.S. registered or common law trademarks owned by IBM at the time this information was published. Such trademarks may also be registered or common law trademarks in other countries. A current list of IBM trademarks is available on the Web at “Copyright and trademark information” at [www.ibm.com/legal/copytrade.shtml](http://www.ibm.com/legal/copytrade.shtml).

Other company, product and service names may be trademarks or service marks of others.

References in this publication to IBM products and services do not imply that IBM intends to make them available in all countries in which IBM operates.

- 1 IBM Institute of Business Value 2012 Global CEO Study, <http://www-935.ibm.com/services/us/en/c-suite/ceostudy2012/>
- 2 Jakob Nielsen’s Alertbox, August 3, 2009, Social Networking on Intranets, <http://www.useit.com/alertbox/social-intranet-features.html>
- 3 International Telecommunication Union, 2012. “Trends in telecommunications reform 2012: smart regulation for a broadband world”



Please Recycle

---