

Briefing

Avoiding Social Entropy - Getting out of Your Social Silo and into the Big Tent

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Key Concepts

Most organizations we've worked with have taken a siloed approach to the enterprise social space and lack an integrated strategy to take advantage of the somewhat elusive benefits of these relatively new capabilities. As a result, they are experiencing what we like to call "social entropy".

To help re-orient customers towards a more concerted approach to this area, I recommend taking a "big tent" approach to social, whereby all the vendors, products, styles of social computing, user types, usage scenarios, and potential business impacts are looked at holistically at the system level, and opportunities for consolidation, integration, and further development are identified strategically.

Introduction

I've always been a fan of "Big Tent Social", eschewing the more siloed notion that social computing in the enterprise equates to an individual *product* (e.g. Yammer, SharePoint, Jive, Chatter) or *style* of enterprise social computing (e.g. social networking, social collaboration, communities, socially-enabled LOB apps etc.); or that "social" is really some sort of discrete activity performed by itself – it's almost always part of some "context": a work-related scenario involving an integrated set of communication, collaboration, application/workflow and content-related activities.

In fact, because most social initiatives start out with a somewhat narrow focus in mind – either at the enterprise or business-function level, I've seen lots of work performed that's related to rationalizing the social landscape in large organizations and addressing the rather pervasive problem of "social entropy". This is in contrast to organizations that had the foresight to see the wave coming and develop an all-encompassing, forward-thinking social strategy before things got too out of hand. If you're in this latter category and you are executing flawlessly along your planned course of action, then you probably don't have that much of a problem and can read

this just for fun, patting yourself on the back as you go because we validate everything you've already done.

If you're in the former category (like most people) and need to take a more remedial look at your social portfolio and its context, then you're in luck. Extending a previous paper and blog post on this subject (see: [Adapting Social Solutions to Modern Workstyles](#), Nov. 2013), our focus here is to drill down a bit more into how you approach the "rationalization" problem and the different decisions that typically need to be made.

To get started, we'll present an example from a recent customer named "BlueCon" (name changed to protect confidentiality), an international shipping and logistics company wishing to take a remedial look at the use of social collaboration tools in its extended sales function (i.e., across business units).

BlueCon Sales' Social Landscape/Problem Space

BlueCon has approximately 5,000 individuals that perform some sort of sales function across its six main business segments, with about 15,000 people in total needing to interact with sales-related information overall. While customer types, deal types/sizes and sales roles vary across and within segments, BlueCon's sales professionals also need to communicate and collaborate with one another and with other business functions (e.g. marketing) to carry out their day to day sales activities and meet BlueCon business objectives.

To meet its sales force communication, collaboration, and account management needs, BlueCon's central IT function currently provides a number of tools (SharePoint, Office/Outlook, Lync, etc.) that are complemented by those provided by the IT Sales Support group (Salesforce, Chatter) and the business units themselves (Jive). These are shown in the following portfolio view:

Category	Capability	Product/Tool
Sales Force Automation	Prospect and account management/tracking and workflow	Salesforce
Communication	Newsfeeds/Social Networking	Salesforce Chatter (sales function only)
		Jive (select business units)
		Yammer, integrated with a custom, SharePoint-based Enterprise Portal (enterprise)
	Messaging - synchronous	Lync IM
	Messaging – asynchronous	Outlook/Email
	Published corporate and department news/information	Custom, SharePoint-based portal/collaboration environment
	Web Conferencing, VoIP	Lync Meetings, Voice
Content Production	Proposal production, marketing collateral, spreadsheets, etc.	Microsoft Office ++
Collaboration	Content co-editing/sharing	SharePoint (enterprise)
	Content sharing	Jive (select business units)
	Content sharing	Salesforce Chatter (sales function only)

Given this multi-vendor, multi-product/solution space, four primary issues have been identified:

- **Functional overlap** - end-user confusion as to which tool to use for what purpose in different contexts. For example:
 - I have a question I need to ask related to a prospect – do I email it? Post it in a Chatter feed? Yammer? Jive?
 - I have file to share with a select group of individuals – do I attach it to an email? Post it in on Chatter? SharePoint? Jive? Yammer?
- **Integration.** Lack of integration between tools
- **Adoption of tools.** Some tools are initially embraced and then fall by the wayside (e.g. Chatter)
- **Cost and Complexity.** With the high degree of functional overlap within the tool-base, BlueCon's IT group has been tasked with highlighting ways to reduce the number of tools (if possible) and to cut costs overall.

Considerations and Options

Large, federated organizations like BlueCon almost always have a fair amount of friction between autonomous business units wishing to control their technology destiny and more centralized shared service functions like IT. This is one of the reasons these same organizations end up with a number of overlapping tools, complexity and rising costs.

To address this problem, companies have a range of options when it comes to reconciling a capability set, including the following 4 main types:

1. **Doing nothing.** Staying the course.
2. **Consolidation.** Selection of a standard for a given capability type, phasing out redundancy over time, and migrating information off of applications to be retired.
3. **Integration.** Implementing strategy that allows co-existence of overlapping platforms and integration between solutions, where it's technical feasible and there's a strong business case.
4. **Hybrid.** Some combination of (2) and (3)

Of course the selection of one of these options over another is a function of a number of variables, perhaps best elucidated via Scenarios A and B below.

In Scenario A, the organization has a strong executive mandate to reduce the number of vendors, projects, complexity and overall costs by 15% in say, an 18 month period. Here, Option 2 is the likely course of action, regardless of business disruption.

In Scenario B, though SharePoint, Yammer, Jive and Chatter all have some degree of overlapping functionality, they may have different ownership/sponsorship and have significant adoption in different areas that would make any sunsetting disruptive, regardless of cost efficiencies and complexity reduction. In this case, the organization should look into integration options where there's a functional need and business reason to do so (there are known integration methods and tools for integration between SharePoint and Yammer; SharePoint and Jive; SharePoint and Chatter; and Jive and Chatter). This obviously maps to Option 3, above.

In BlueCon's case, they decided to back up and take a closer look at the business users, tool usage and usage scenarios prior to making a decision. This approach is described in the next section.

Approach Taken

At BlueCon, a sales-driven organization, it was recommended that their Sales Support IT function perform an assessment of its user base and the primary information usage scenarios important to various user archetypes.

Along with this assessment, BlueCon base-lined its current footprint of enabling tools/technologies and identified opportunities for increased integration where there was a clear business need.

More specifically, the following approach was taken to enable the development of the strategy:

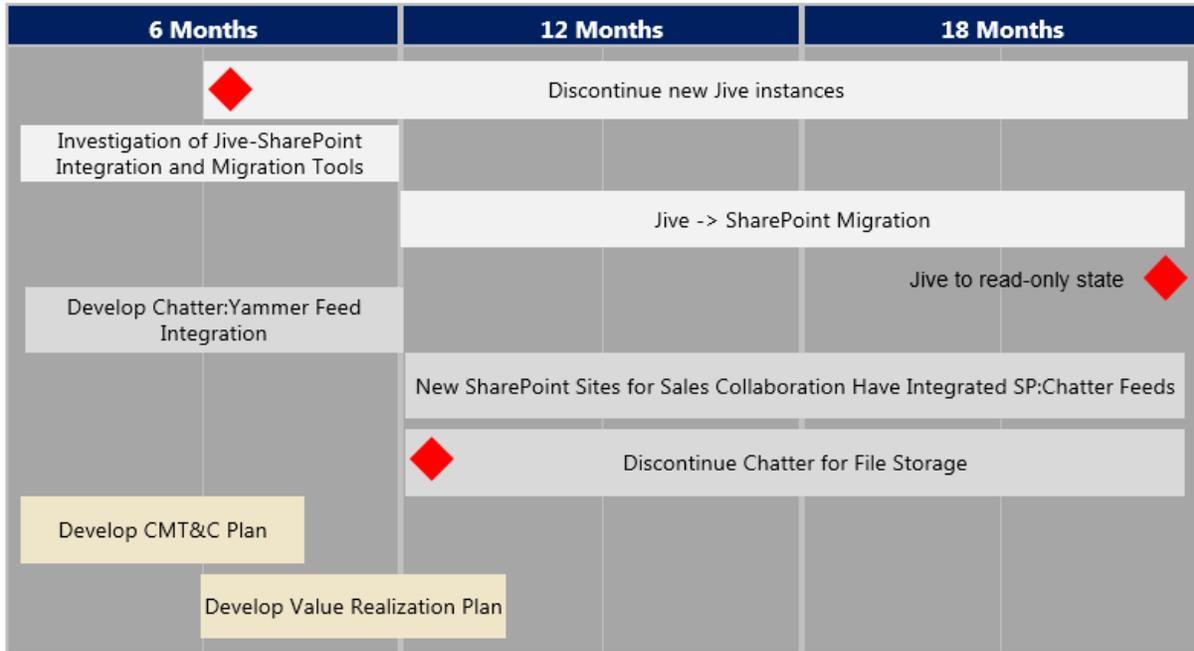
- Identified stakeholders
- Base-lined cultural/organizational factors impacting communication and collaboration practices
- Assessed existing user segmentation work-to-date and developed 6 user archetypes specific to the sales function
- Developed a finite set of 8 sales function usage scenarios
- Base-lined the supporting technology portfolio
- Developed preferential path alternatives and recommend prescriptive paths for different use cases based on collaborative best practices and cultural factors
- Evaluated technical alternatives, integration opportunities and made recommendations
- Developed roadmap and execution plan for future work streams
- Developed an "Adoption and Value Realization Plan"

Strategy

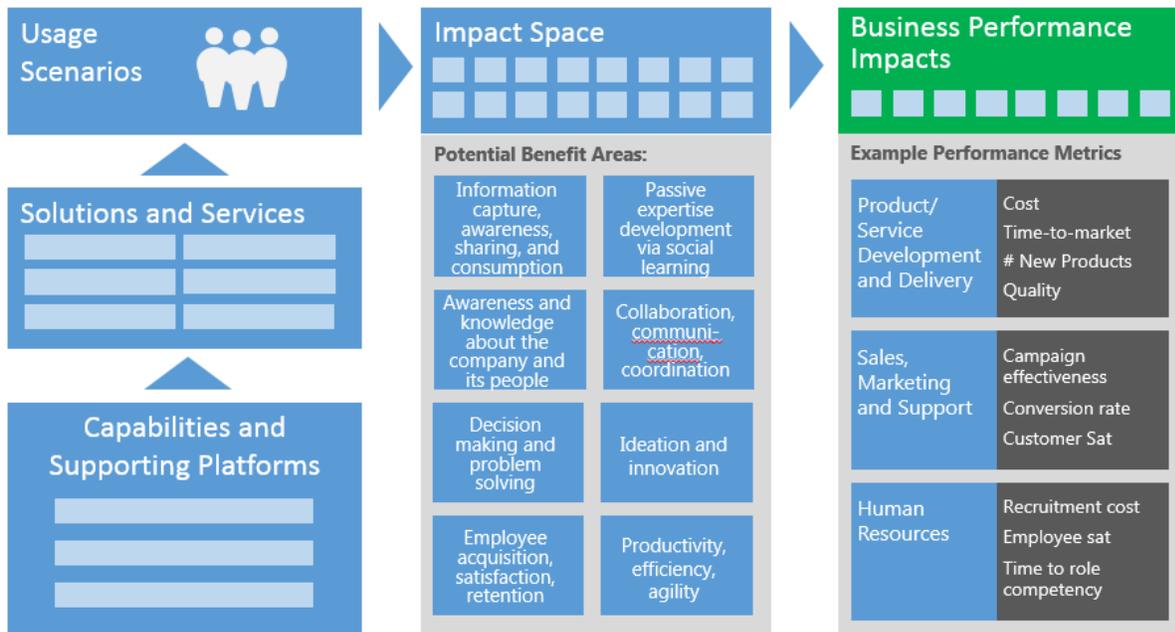
As a result of the approach summarized above, Option 4 was selected as the go-forward strategy, whereby the following actions were selected:

- Due to the degree of overlap between SharePoint/Yammer and Jive, discontinue new Jive instances starting in 3 months and provide tools for business leads to move content and discussions into SharePoint starting in 6 months. Further investigate tools for integrating between SharePoint and Jive in the interim. Plan for sunsetting the platform after 18-24 months.
- Develop the capability to integrate Chatter feeds into Yammer feeds where the scope of the audiences map directly to one another (within 6 months)
- Discontinue use of Chatter for file storage in favor of SharePoint, where the content lifecycle can be managed more formally (within 6 months).

BlueCon Sales Strategy



Finally, BlueCon developed a high level “Change Management, Training and Communications” (CMT&C) plan to promote preferential usage patterns where warranted (e.g. where to post a question related to an active sales engagement). They also developed a high level “Value Realization” plan to ensure measurement and tracking of progress relative to the business impact model shown below.



Benefits

The benefits of the addressing this opportunity space included the following:

- Improved sales performance
- Increased utilization/adoption of the BlueCon Services organization's IW-focused assets
- Alignment with impact areas and business performance categories of interest
- Improved knowledge management, reduced IP loss/leakage, improved security
- Reduced redundancy, complexity and confusion

Conclusion and Recommendations

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To help re-orient customers towards a more concerted approach to this area, I recommend taking a "big tent" approach to social, whereby all the vendors, products, styles of social computing, user types, usage scenarios, and potential business impacts are looked at holistically at the system level, and opportunities for consolidation, integration, and further development are identified strategically.

For more information on developing a social strategy for your organization, please contact toddray@alumni.stanford.edu, and also refer to my previous paper on the subject here: [Adapting Social Solutions to Modern Workstyles](#).

Here we introduced the terms:

- Social Impact Space
- Social Options Overload and IW Fragmentation
- Modern Workstyle Dynamics
- Changing Consumption Patterns
- Full-plate Syndrome
- MindShare Deficit
- Casual Computing

We also have a much more comprehensive treatment of the subject in whitepaper form, available upon request.