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A Tale of Two Changes

The last few years have seen the emergence of consumer and enterprise social and collaborative platforms. We've seen new agencies and analyst firms emerge and have also seen a flurry of new terms and buzzwords swarming the Internet like angry bees. Terms such as *social customer relationship management* (SCRM), *social business*, *Enterprise 2.0*, *social media*, and *social customer* are unavoidable. They all mean different things to different people. I can't tell you how many times I hear these terms used interchangeably at conferences and events, and I bet you are also having a hard time keeping up with the latest jargon. In fact, it has become such a problem that when writing this book I wasn't even sure how to refer to it.

I settled on using the term *emergent collaboration* because *emergent* means "becoming visible or being noticed" and *collaboration* means "working with someone to create something or achieve a goal." This sums up exactly what this book and this business evolution are about: new ways of working with people to create things and solve problems.

Social business has become a popular term. However, many executives and decision makers I have spoken with shy away from the term *social* because it is overused and has become synonymous with fun and time-wasting applications such as Facebook and Twitter instead of being associated with something that can provide real business value to an

organization, such as collaboration. If the term *social business* works for you, go for it but understand which type of community you are referring to (internal, external, or hybrid, discussed in the Introduction). I have found that *social* doesn't inherently convey any type of business value, whereas *collaboration* does; I like to joke that social is what happens when you remove the business value from collaboration.

One thing you will come to realize by reading this book is that none of the terms really matter; after all, it's not how you define something but how you actually implement it that really matters. Truth be told, it's easy to get lost in the jargon, the products, and the ideas that are making the rounds across the Internet. However, I believe that everything we are seeing today in the social and collaborative circles can be attributed to two key changes in the world: culture and technology.

Culture (or as Gil Yehuda Likes to Say, Observable Behaviors)

It's a bit weird to think that just a few years ago many of the tools and platforms we use regularly today didn't exist. What did we do before Facebook, Yelp, Wikipedia, and Foursquare? How did we find, communicate, and share information with one another?

Over the last five to seven years we have become much more comfortable sharing information publicly. Facebook allows us to share our hobbies and interests, Twitter lets us share our thoughts and ideas, Flickr gives us the power to share images, and platforms such as Foursquare allow users to share their physical locations. Yes, the world has become much more public. In fact, it is becoming hard to distinguish between our personal and professional lives. The time we spend on our personal lives and the time we spend on our professional lives are blurring. We frequently see employees take their work home with them or get things done from the road. It seems that we are always "connected" to the digital world. Not that long ago we had to make an effort to get connected; now we have to make an effort to get disconnected, and aside from moving to a remote location in the wilderness or cutting off the power to our houses, we don't have many other options (even

cutting off the power won't prevent you from getting Wi-Fi at the café just around the corner).

One of my greatest passions is traveling, and a few years ago I spent a month in China traveling all over the country to some of the large cities and remote villages. I was amazed at my ability to stay connected in virtually any location. This connectivity is virtually all we need to get our jobs done and manage many aspects of our lives.

Ten years ago if people would have told me (or you) that so much of our personal information would be online for the world to see, I would have told them they were nuts! Now look at where we are today. The Internet and social media have permeated every facet of our daily lives (at work and at home) from how we consume news and information, to how we communicate with one another, to how we share and create content.

As someone who has grown up using these tools and technologies I don't remember what it was like to conduct business when these platforms did not exist. In fact, my company, Chess Media Group, was built using these social and collaborative technologies; virtually nothing we did would be considered traditional. Younger generations are going to be even more fluent with and accustomed to using these tools and technologies as part of their everyday lives, and that includes time spent at work.

I always try to imagine my little brother Josh (born in 1992) working at a company that doesn't use emergent collaboration platforms, and I don't see how he would be able to get his job done. I was born in a digital world, but my little brother might as well have been born with a computer in his hands.

As the years go by, we are going to see this trend increase with younger generations entering the workforce and with our comfort with and fluency in social and collaborative technologies increasing. This isn't a question of if but a question of when, and I think the when has already happened.

The big challenge we see, however, is that there is a large gap between how social tools are being used by customers and how they are being used by organizations internally. If you think about it,

popular social media tools and platforms are now commonplace in our everyday personal lives, yet these tools and strategies are years behind inside organizations. We are gradually starting to see that gap close as more companies are starting to realize the immense value of connecting their employees and information.

Technology

There have been quite a few technological advances over the last few years, and in the social and collaborative software space we have seen the rise of platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Foursquare, among others. We have companies developing products that can scour the web for any and every relevant conversation about a brand, product, competitor, service, or company and deliver those searches in a neat little dashboard. There are other companies that allow organizations to develop active and thriving communities for both customers and employees that allow for two-way communication and collaboration, and we are starting to see effective data integration of traditional and social data into single systems. The way we communicate and share information with one another, with customers, and with employees has changed dramatically, and these technological advances are the enablers that are making it happen.

Together these changes we are seeing in culture and technology are propelling our world into a more connected and collaborative existence. People are now accustomed to interacting and collaborating with one another through social and collaborative platforms and are bringing these habits and methods with them into the workplace.

The challenge for organizations today is finding a way to continue doing business and improving the way they do business, but in the context of the ways in which these two changes are affecting them.

Emergent Collaboration Is Not Social Media

Platforms such as Twitter and Facebook are now virtually mainstream, but aside from the technological differences between these consumer

platforms and emergent enterprise platforms, there are some very different business dynamics. It's important to understand these business dynamics, so let's take a look at them.

Money

In general, with social media we can do pretty much what we want the way we want to do it; there aren't really any restrictions on how we can use these tools. This is not true in the workplace, and the fact that employees get paid to do work by the organization creates a very different dynamic. Organizations want to make sure that employees aren't wasting time with pointless activities when they should be working.

Legacy Systems and Multiple Data Sources

In most enterprises there are a plethora of technology solutions and data sources that all need to be weaved together to provide content and context to the employees. This is not something we need to worry about in the consumer social media world, but it's a challenge for many organizations today. These technology solutions are often outdated as well.

Team Dynamics

Hierarchies exist, and they will most likely continue to exist in the foreseeable future. This means that employees don't operate alone and that their actions affect others around them for better or for worse. In the social media world we often operate as individuals, but in the enterprise we work as teams.

Trust

Trust is a very important dynamic within the enterprise, and unfortunately, it's something that many companies struggle to create among their employees. Without trust it's very hard for employees to collaborate with one another and share information.

Workflows

Employees today all have a way they do things; this includes everything from creating proposals to following up on customer service requests.

Emergent collaboration affects these workflows (one hopes for the better) and augments the way employees do what they do in the workplace.

This is discussed more fully in Chapter 4, but it should be noted here that these are very real and different dynamics that affect emergent collaboration within the enterprise. There are perhaps other factors at play here that are specific to each and every organization, but the point remains the same: Emergent collaboration in the workplace is not the same as social media.

Summary and Action Items

Although it is possible to get swept away in the terms, definitions, concepts, and ideas that are being thrown around, the key thing here to remember is that everything we are seeing can be boiled down to culture and technology. These two things are the drivers for everything “social” and “collaborative” that we are seeing today:

- Look at how culture and technology at your organization have changed over the last few years (or how they have changed at various companies you have been with).
- Try to understand what causes these changes and what the results of these changes are. Where do you think things are headed?

To help us understand more about how culture and technology are affecting our work, let's hear what Augie Ray, the executive director of community and collaboration at the USAA, has to say.

It is vital for business decision makers to realize the accelerating pace of change that is occurring in technology, human behavior, and business culture; moreover, it is important to recognize that these three things do not move evenly but in fits and starts. An idea that is supported only by innovative technology but that fails to fit either current consumer behavior or organizational

culture is doomed to fail. Conversely, an organization that waits until technology, behavior, and culture are comfortably and adequately evolved can miss out on opportunities. A couple of examples help convey the importance of timing.

Back in 1997, the site *sixdegrees.com* was launched to allow Internet users to discover how connected they are to one another. It was an early precursor to LinkedIn and Facebook, but rather than enjoy the success of those social networking sites, *sixdegrees.com* shuttered in 2001. It was the right technology and the right idea, but human behavior was not prepared—people had not yet adopted the Internet into their lives sufficiently, nor were they prepared to share that much information so openly.

Another example is Napster, a file-sharing site that was shut down by court order in 2001 because of rampant copyright infringement. (It has since reopened as a legal music subscription service.) Before being closed, Napster had 25 million users and 80 million songs. In this case, the technology and human behavior were ready but the business culture was not. Even now, 10 years later, record companies and the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) struggle with intellectual property (IP) issues, but the industry has since embraced the online distribution of music.

Bringing an idea to market before technology, behavior, and the business culture are prepared is dangerous, but so is waiting too long. Blockbuster was considered a model of innovation in the 1980s and 1990s, when its scale and ability to customize a store to its neighborhood squeezed out smaller mom-and-pop video stores. But it waited too long to waive onerous late fees and adopt new technologies such as online streaming and kiosks. As Netflix approached 23 million subscribers in the United States and Canada and Redbox opened more than 20,000 kiosks, Blockbuster shrank from 4,000 stores to fewer than 2,000 before declaring bankruptcy in 2010. In this case, technology and consumer behavior evolved more rapidly than did Blockbuster's corporate culture, resulting in a disastrous business outcome.

Technology, behavior, and corporate culture have never moved more quickly. Moore's law, which was described in 1965 and has proved remarkably accurate, states that computing power doubles every two years. The same could be said of ideas, with the half-life of ideas growing ever shorter. For more than 50 years, the big three U.S. automakers were able to hold on to their preeminent collective market share until oil crises and competitive imports fundamentally changed the domestic auto market in the 1970s. Compare that to MySpace, which went from being the most popular and innovative social site to being an also-ran behind Facebook in just two years.

With the pace of change increasing and the risks of moving too fast or too slow never greater, the ability to have employees collaborate effectively regardless of space, time, language, and other impediments is no longer just a competitive advantage—it is vital. Collaborating effectively inside and outside the organization is the only way to ensure that the enterprise and the employees are prepared for rapid changes in technology, human behavior, and business culture.

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The First Step to Recovery Is Admitting You Have a Problem

Have you ever thought about what collaboration actually means? Perhaps this sounds like a silly question, but I'm often surprised by the responses I get. Quite simply, collaboration is defined as working with someone (or multiple people) to create something or achieve a goal. That's the definition, but what does collaboration actually allow employees to do?

In 1977 T. J. Allen wrote *Managing the Flow of Technology*, and one of the things that he was able to show was that when people work more than 30 meters apart, the likelihood for collaboration and communication falls off dramatically (see Figure 2.1). In fact, if employees are more than 30 meters apart they might as well be across town!

So the most important thing collaboration enables employees to do is form bonds and connections with one another, in effect building relationships. These relationships and the engaged employees are what lead to ideas and discoveries within organizations. The more employees can share, communicate, collaborate, and engage with one another, the greater the flow of ideas is. These ideas can be new revenue-generating opportunities, cost-cutting strategies, recommendations for productivity enhancement, improvements in product development, and almost anything else.