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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two

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.

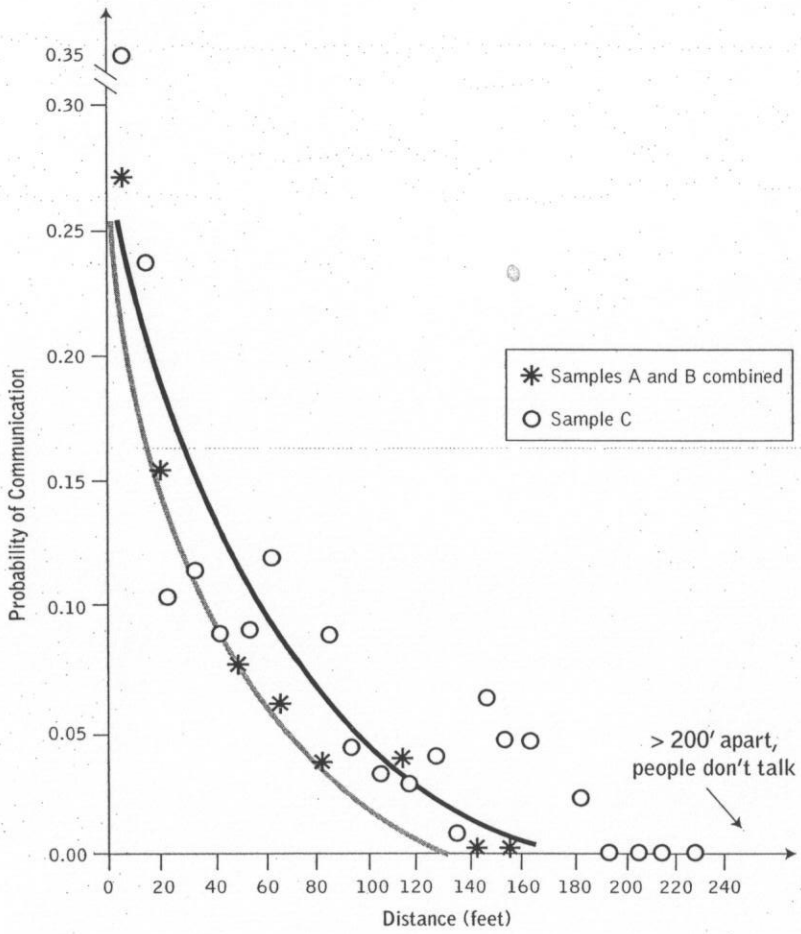

Figure 2.1 Probability of communication as a function of the distance separating pairs of people

Source: Professors John Carroll and Li Tao, *Managerial Psychology,* Massachusetts Institute of Technology: MIT OpenCouseWare, Fall 2006, http://ocw.mit.edu, accessed January 19, 2012. Used by permission of MIT OCW.

To understand this better, we need to look at strong and weak ties. Strong ties exist with people whom you know well and with whom you engage frequently, such as friends. Weak ties exist with people whom you don't know well and with whom you don't engage frequently; one might call them acquaintances.

In 1973 the sociologist Mark Granovetter published a paper titled "The Strength of Weak Ties" in which he asserts the value of weak ties as bridges that are valuable for the dissemination of information. In fact, Granovetter states, "all bridges are weak ties." Strong ties exist in limited numbers because they require effort to maintain; weak ties require far less effort, which means there can be many of these bridges.

Two people with strong ties to each other also typically know many of the same people, and so there is a strong overlap. Thus, if Tim and Erica have a strong tie and Tim needs to find or get access to information he can't find by asking people he knows, it's likely that Erica will not be able to help him since their friends overlap. But if Tim has a weak tie with Peter, Tim now has a bridge to Peter's network (whose members are most likely strangers to Tim) and gains access to a new group of people who are likely to be able to help.

Emergent collaboration solutions allow the creation of strong ties, but more important, they allow for the creation of weak ties, or bridges, within organizations. These bridges allow employees to get access to information and people within a larger network instead of simply relying on the people they know. LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, and blogs are great examples of consumer-grade applications that are extremely effective at allowing people to build weak ties. On a trip to Dubai a few years ago I was able to sit down with a senior-level manager at Nestlé because of a weak tie I had with him through LinkedIn. The first large client Chess Media Group worked with came as a result of a weak tie formed through my blog.

Examples of weak ties are easily seen in people's personal lives. How many times have you met acquaintances you have later been able to call on for favors? Perhaps you asked them for introductions in companies, invitations to exclusive events, or discount offers for products. We form weak ties regularly at conferences, by meeting friends of friends, by going to parties, or pretty much by doing anything social where there are people outside our network.

Internally, these weak ties are easy to build through rich profiles that allow employees to discover coworkers by posting status updates or sharing information, by blogging internally, by submitting ideas

publicly, or simply by asking and/or answering questions via an emergent collaboration platform.

As Andrew McAfee clearly wrote in one of his articles, which can be accessed at http://andrewmcafee.org/2007/10/the_ties_that_find/:

> Strong ties are unlikely to be bridges between networks, while weak ties are good bridges. Bridges help solve problems, gather information, and import unfamiliar ideas. They help get work done quicker and better. The ideal network for a knowledge worker probably consists of a core of strong ties and a large periphery of weak ones. Because weak ties by definition don't require a lot of effort to maintain, there's no reason not to form a lot of them (as long as they don't come at the expense of strong ties).

The key is that weak ties are important to build bridges to connect your organization, and emergent collaboration is the best way to do it.

The success of any enterprise collaboration initiative doesn't begin with technology or with the desire to find the coolest new shiny object; in fact, that's probably the shortest route to failure. Enterprise collaboration begins with a specific business driver or problem that the organization is looking to solve. Not every organization is going to invest in emergent collaboration for the same reasons, and that is as it should be. Specific and unique business problems occur behind the walls of each organization around the world. However, based on the research Chess Media Group has conducted, we can identify some of the common business drivers of these emergent collaboration initiatives within organizations regardless of company size, verticality, or geographic location.

Figure 2.2 breaks down all the Enterprise 2.0 business drivers for organizations.

Chess Media Group has a full report (which can be found on the Chess Media Group website under "resources") that discusses these findings in more detail, but in the figure one can see that the top five business drivers for organizations are (survey participants were able to select more than one response):

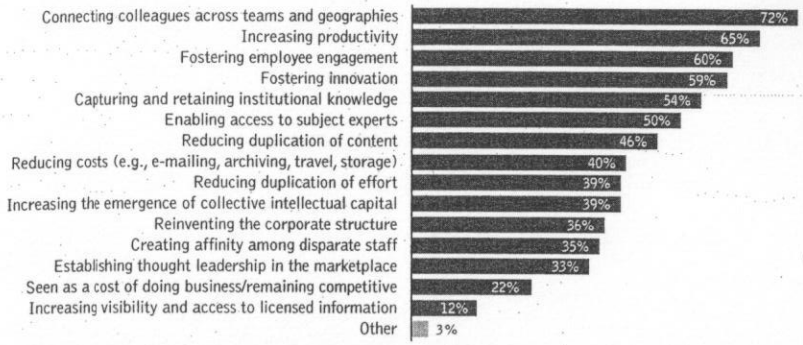

Figure 2.2 Enterprise 2.0 business drivers

- Connecting colleagues across teams and geographies
- Increasing productivity
- Fostering employee engagement
- Fostering innovation
- Capturing and retaining institutional knowledge

As competitive pressures increase and organizations continue to grow and expand while dealing with macroeconomic factors (e.g., a sluggish economy), it becomes increasingly apparent why this route toward a more collaborative organization becomes a focal point for many organizations. These emergent collaborative tools serve as the connective fibers that keep employees connected to one another. Employees today are working from multiple physical locations, on multiple devices, and often with other employees they have never met. It's also not uncommon for organizations to have "offices" with only one or two people in those locations. Organizations need a way to connect all those employees to allow them to collaborate and share information. The reality is that an organization is no longer limited to a physical structure or proximity; an organization is now limited only by its ability to connect employees and information together.

By far, the number one business driver for most organizations is being able to connect colleagues across teams and geographies, and this should come as no surprise. Companies of all shapes and sizes have

employees based in multiple physical locations and working remotely; this is now commonplace. The ability to keep employees connected is not something that legacy systems and e-mail platforms can do effectively or perhaps at all.

Almost all the organizations surveyed stated that their business drivers fell into one of the categories listed in Figure 2.2. However, if your business drivers are not listed there, that's not a problem. The important thing is not to match your business drivers with the figure but to identify what those drivers are. It's crucial to understand your business drivers so that you understand *why* this should be an area of investment, which will in turn lead to *how* these tools should be deployed and *how* the strategies are developed. Once the business problem is identified, use cases from those business problems can be developed and expounded on. We will take a look at the various categories of emergent collaborative technologies in Chapter 6, where we will also look at the specific business drivers for each type of solution.

As was mentioned earlier, collaboration isn't new. Employees have collaborated for many years via phone, e-mail, in-person discussions, letters, carrier pigeons, and other media. In fact, collaboration has been around since the first two humans grunted at each other while planning their next kill for sustenance.

If collaboration has already been enabled in other ways, why bother investing in collaboration via emergent collaborative software? Why do organizations need to connect their employees via internal social networks, wikis, or workspaces when they can just e-mail one another or call one another on the phone? Ed Coleman, the CEO of Unisys, put it best when he said, "Sharpening our organization's communications capabilities, creating greater transparency, and improving access to our intellectual assets [people] could only increase our flexibility and responsiveness."

There are several unique benefits that are not realized via other means of collaboration, including the following:

- Knowledge sharing and transfer
- Alignment

- Identifying subject matter experts
- Thinking out loud
- Listening
- Cross-department, cross-company, and cross-boundary communication
- Collective intelligence and memory
- Inspiring employees and building trust
- Identifying new opportunities and ideas

Knowledge Sharing and Transfer

There are two types of knowledge that need to be shared and transferred at organizations: new knowledge and old knowledge. The concepts are exactly what they sound like: Old knowledge refers to knowledge that already exists within the organization, and new knowledge refers to knowledge that is created within the organization, perhaps new ways of doing things.

At your company, if you want to share information or transfer knowledge, how do you do it? Most likely your organization is using a legacy intranet system that basically acts as a massive warehouse for information. Employees attempt to search for and find the information they need. If an employee wants to edit that information (assuming he or she has permission to do so) or update it, it is usually necessary to download it, make the edits, and re-upload it. Even then it becomes a bit tedious for multiple people to collaborate on a document or a piece of information. Chances are, your organization also uses e-mail as a way to share information. E-mail has become the de facto chat messaging program in many companies. Employees send an e-mail and then instantly get a response. That's not e-mail, that's instant messaging, and it needs to stop. Atos Origin, a global information technology (IT) services company with around 80,000 employees, pledged in 2011 that within three years it planned to be a zero e-mail company. The CEO, Thierry Breton, said: "The volume of e-mails we send and receive is unsustainable for business. Managers spend between 5 and

20 hours a week reading and writing e-mails . . . e-mail is on the way out as the best way to run a company and do business."

Does this mean that e-mail is evil or that a massive war should be waged against it? Although many would say yes, I say absolutely not.

E-mail was meant for asynchronous communication, and sometimes using it does make sense. However, e-mail shouldn't be used for everything and should be integrated into other existing flows of work. Even though e-mail was meant for asynchronous communication, what do we do? We stare at our inboxes and our phones, waiting for new messages. In fact, I can't tell you how many times I have watched people walk into poles, walls, and other people because they were checking and responding to e-mails. Technology is supposed to support us and do what we tell it to do. Instead we have the opposite: Technology tells us what to do and when to use it.

Sharing knowledge and information in this way is very inefficient. Using e-mail causes problems with versioning, content duplication, reaching the right people, and locating the proper information later, among a host of other annoying problems.

Emergent collaborative platforms not only allow employees to store and share information; more important, those platforms allow them to collaborate on that information without ever sending an e-mail. Institutional knowledge is something that exists within every organization yet is one of the hardest things to share.

The federal government predicts that there will be around 500,000 new employees joining its organizations over the next 10 years. The problem is that organizations such as the federal government don't have a way to transfer knowledge from more established employees (who may be on their way out of the organization) to new employees. If you have been at an organization for many years, chances are that you know quite well how things work. You know where to find the right people and the right information. But how do you transfer that knowledge and information to someone who just joined your organization, and how can you do it at scale? That is not something that e-mail and legacy intranet systems do. Legacy systems allow for virtually no communication or actual collaboration, and e-mail does a mediocre job of communication at best.

Vistaprint had a problem a few years ago when it started growing and needed to hire and onboard new employees quickly. Through the use of wikis they were able to decrease their onboarding time for new engineers by almost 50 percent. Wikis were used to store the more relevant and up-to-date information for training new employees, which was maintained and edited by a collective group, thus helping ensure the quality of the information. This is something e-mail and traditional legacy systems cannot do.

Alignment

One of the things many organizations have trouble with is alignment both from a cultural and from a business standpoint. This might be the result of a physically distributed organization or perhaps an enterprise that has acquired another company or several companies. The larger an organization grows and the more distributed it becomes, the harder it is to make sure that there is alignment across the organization. How can an organization make sure that the same processes are being applied in the United States as are being applied in Denmark? How does the marketing team in Sweden make sure it has the information that a team in Japan has? Making sure that the organization as a whole is on the same page is no doubt a challenge.

Emergent collaborative solutions allow companies to organize their teams, departments, and employees in a way that allows all the right people to see the relevant information. Employees then have the ability to provide feedback and collaborate on that information seamlessly.

I had a conversation with an executive at a midsize consulting firm who told me that his company had just gone through a series of acquisitions of smaller companies. Each company had its own processes, culture, resources, and way of doing things. Those acquired entities had little communication with one another. That meant that there was a lot of content duplication, misaligned services and processes, and confusion among employees, along with a general sense of chaos. Effectively deploying tools and strategies can help ensure that an organization can align itself in all the relevant and required

areas at scale. This is something that no other technology is capable of doing.

Subject Matter Expertise

Let's assume that you are working on an international marketing project. You are based in the United States but want to find someone at your company who is familiar with overseas rules and regulations. Or perhaps you want to get in touch with someone who is in charge of a particular product launch. How would you go about finding this person? Most employees would send out an e-mail asking for help; those employees would then send out their own e-mails and so on and so forth until the e-mail finally reached the right person. Elementary school kids used to play a similar game called telephone. We've grown up, and so should our businesses.

The tools and platforms available today make it much easier to find subject matter experts by letting employees develop rich profiles, thus allowing them to specify what it is their expertise is in. Employees are also often able to tag their colleagues with keywords and phrases, making it easier for other employees to find them when searching for a relevant person. Furthermore, many of these platforms also allow for companywide communication via status updates to the organization. These status updates can be used for a variety of things, including asking a community who is the best person to help out on a project or task. Basically, what all this means is that if an employee is looking for someone, he or she should have no problem finding that person and won't have to ask or e-mail anyone else about it.

Thinking Out Loud

This is not something I typically hear many people talk about, but I believe that is an oversight. I believe one of the ways people learn from themselves and from others is by thinking out loud. This allows coworkers and colleagues to see the thought process around how certain decisions are made within organizations. I know many of us have that

little internal voice we hear when working on something, especially if it's an exciting project. I'm sure many of you often talk to yourselves out loud. You are not the only one who can benefit from that little voice inside your head. I guarantee that you have several colleagues who could learn from you by tapping into your thought process, and you could learn from them. For example, let's say you want to develop a business model for something you are working on. You can share your thought processes publicly as you begin to crank out ideas. Other employees will then be able to provide you with feedback and their own ideas, which you may be able to incorporate into your model. This ability to think out loud was never possible before.

Listening

Pick up any social media book today, and chances are that you will read about how listening to customers is perhaps the single most important thing any company can do today. I believe the same thing is true within the enterprise. One of the complaints I have heard from executives at organizations is that they have trouble following what is going on at the ground floor of their companies. Deploying enterprise collaboration platforms helps solve that problem by allowing employees to understand what is happening within their departments and across the enterprise. Keeping an eye on the things that matter to you is crucial for making sure you are always able to contribute when needed while staying up to date on the things that matter to you.

Cross-Department, Cross-Company, and Cross-Boundary Communication

In most organizations today information doesn't flow organically; in fact, it often doesn't flow much at all. Employees in a particular department usually keep to themselves. This means that if you are in the marketing department or the product development department, you're probably not going to be speaking with or reaching out to anyone from the IT or sales department. This is unfortunate because often employees in

other departments have information that can benefit you in whatever you and your team are doing.

In a midsize medical association I wrote a case study on, I learned how one department was able to share its experience in developing and advertising mobile apps with another department. That other department applied similar ideas and thus far has generated over $50,000 in additional revenue that would not have been generated otherwise. This resulted from sharing some experiences for mobile apps.

This type of collaboration isn't crucial only between departments but also across dispersed geographic areas, for example, two marketing teams: one based in San Francisco and the other based in Dubai.

Collaboration tools ensure that communication flows throughout the organization, and that information can be shared between departments, across the organization as a whole, or through any type of organizational silos that exist within the enterprise.

This is a key benefit noticed by a 1,500-person department in Penn State University called Penn State Outreach. Through the use of collaborative tools supported by strategies, Penn State was able to improve collaboration across the organization and break down the silos it was plagued with (more on this is covered in Chapter 3).

Collective Intelligence and Memory

Lew Platt, the former CEO of Hewlett-Packard, once said, "If HP knew what HP knows, we would be three times more productive." Collective intelligence refers to the ability of an organization to use the wisdom of its employees to make business decisions. This premise means that better, more accurate decisions can be made. Let's say that an executive at your company says that she wants a new product developed in three months. Employees from different departments and business units can share their ideas and feedback on whether this is feasible. Perhaps the marketing team is not able to meet the deadline because of a conference it is planning, or perhaps the product team is already swamped with projects. The same idea can be applied for budget estimates for projects. Being able to leverage the knowledge of a collective is more

accurate and far more powerful than leveraging the knowledge of just a few.

Chances are that your employees can solve virtually any problem or answer any question you throw at them. This works on a collective basis, not on an individual basis.

The concept of collective memory is quite powerful. Being able to capture and access the information your employees have even when they are not there physically or perhaps no longer are working there is a very powerful thing. One employee can remember and know only so much.

Building Trust and Inspiring Employees

This is a unique benefit of emergent collaboration that I do not hear discussed often. So much of our attention is focused on productivity, integration, workflows, and technology that we forget to step back and take a look at the human side of all this. The way we build trust inside our organizations is not that dissimilar to the way organizations build trust with customers through social media channels. Often the easiest way to start trusting someone is by finding something you have in common with each other. In his presentations and his book *Start with Why*, Simon Sinek states that when we surround ourselves with people who believe what we believe, trust emerges. Emergent collaboration makes this possible by allowing employees to share basic profile information (for example, who else lives in my city or works in my department); this is deepened by interactions, shared content, and development of communities of interest (groups of people with similar interests and/or beliefs). Sure, trust is largely a cultural thing, but deploying an emergent collaboration solution should be a message to the employees and in fact an impetus to build a culture of trust and collaboration.

Inspiration is something we don't hear about nearly enough these days. I recently read an article in the *New York Times** written by Teresa Amabile, a professor at Harvard Business School, and Steven Kramer, an independent researcher, the authors of *The Progress Principle*, which cited some interesting statistics:

* http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/04/opinion/sunday/do-happier-people-work-harder.html.

- Americans feel worse about their jobs—and work environments—than ever before.
- Gallup estimates the cost of America's disengagement crisis at a staggering $300 billion in lost productivity annually.
- Inner work life has a profound impact on workers' creativity, productivity, commitment, and collegiality.
- Employees are far more likely to have new ideas on days when they feel happy.
- Of all the events that engage people at work, the single most important—by far—is simply making progress in meaningful work.
- Ninety-five percent of the surveyed managers failed to recognize that progress in meaningful work is the primary motivator, well ahead of traditional incentives such as raises and bonuses.

What does this mean? It means that organizations have an amazing opportunity to learn about and inspire their employees in ways that were never possible before. The same concept of listening to our customers on social channels can and should be applied to listening to our employees via our internal collaboration platforms. By using these new technologies we can find out what really makes our employees tick, what they care about, what they are passionate about, what they are unhappy about, and why they get up in the morning. I feel that this fundamental human aspect of collaboration inside organizations is being diminished, and that needs to stop. Employees should feel fulfilled and inspired with the work that they do and collaborative organizations can make that happen. A midlevel employee at a large company told me that when he goes to work, he is reminded of that scene from *The Matrix* in which humans are used as batteries to power the machine world. What a terrible way for anyone to feel!

New Opportunities and Ideation

How does your organization come up with new ideas or identify new opportunities? Chances are that specific teams within departments or

groups of executives get together to discuss these topics. However, every employee in your organization should be empowered to share his or her ideas and help discover opportunities. Why should this be limited?

Many organizations struggle to empower their employees to develop and create new ideas that they can share within the organization. In effect, the voice of the employee is lost inside many enterprises. Being able to empower the employees to share ideas and opinions in a public way allows an organization as a whole to develop new ideas while exploring potential new opportunities.

Océ, a 21,000-employee global printing company, is a classic example of this. After Océ deployed a series of collaborative tools, employees started to contribute ideas for how the company could improve and cut costs. One of those ideas involved encouraging truck drivers to fill up with gas at local stations instead of near the highways, where gas was more expensive. As a result of implementing this idea, Océ as an organization was able to save 800,000 euros annually (read the full case study in Chapter 3).

Now that we have looked at some of the business drivers and benefits of emergent collaboration, how do organizations map out their business problems and tie them to specific actions or outcomes? I believe that one effective way to do this is to follow a framework that was inspired by a friend and company advisor, Gil Yehuda (see Figure 2.3).

The framework works like this:

- Identify the overall business problem or problems you are looking to solve; there will most likely be several.
- Narrow down the business problem into specific use cases; each business problem will have multiple use cases.

Figure 2.3 Solution mapping process

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- Model the situation that needs to present itself for that use case to be applicable.
- Understand and clarify the action you would like to see take place.
- State the desired result.

Let's see what going through this framework actually looks like, starting with identifying the business problem.

Business Problem

There is a lack of collaboration among employees that causes employees to work in silos. As an organization, we want to empower our employees to communicate and share their ideas, work, and information with one another.

Use Case 1

An employee wishes to distribute a document among coworkers so that they can share, make changes to, or edit the document.

Situation

The employee has a document that he or she wishes to share with relevant coworkers to solicit feedback and get additional ideas. The document the employee seeks to share is either complete or not complete and requires additional editing from coworkers.

Expected Action of the Platform

An employee uploads a document and has the ability to tag that document so that it can be easily retrieved or searched for. The platform recommends additional tags that might be relevant for the document that is uploaded and allows the employee to accept or reject those additional recommended tags. Other employees are able to open the document directly from the same platform and make any edits or changes they would like. Those changes and additions are tracked, saved, and versioned. Employees are also able to leave comments,

thoughts, or ideas on the document for others to see. Once changes, comments, or edits are made, the relevant employees should receive a notification letting them know that a change has occurred. Employees are also able to search for this document by using tags, the title of the document, or keywords within the document.

Desired Result

The document can be developed in a collaborative way, and this will reduce duplication of content and the use of e-mail. The document is easily accessible and easily located by employees looking for it.

Use Case 2

An employee wishes to find a subject matter expert on a particular topic.

Situation

The employee is working on a project and realizes that he or she can use additional insight and ideas on a particular part of the project in which the employee is not proficient. For example, an employee working on a marketing project is seeking help with understanding international law and regulations.

Expected Action of the Platform

Employees within the organization have a rich profile with relevant and updated contact information. The profile also lists areas where the employee self-identifies as being a subject matter expert. Other employees can add additional tags and categories where they feel their colleagues have strong subject matter expertise. These rich profiles will pull information from an existing directory so that employees do not need to duplicate information that already exists. Employees will then be able to do a search within the organization, and a list of relevant suggested employees will be returned. The employee will be able to see the profiles of individuals who match the search query and will be able to send them a private message if necessary.

Desired Result

Employees in the organization will know who to go to for information or help with something or will be able to find the right person to go to.

This is one method, and I'm sure there are dozens of others. I have found that going down this road is effective not only for the key stakeholders in the organization but also for the vendors you are most likely going to be evaluating. Walking through this process clearly helps people understand what the business problem is, which use cases fall under that business problem, in what situation that use case applies, what the desired action that is required to help with that use case is, and what the desired end result is. How you go about this doesn't really matter as long as you are able to address these key questions (and perhaps others that you might have in mind as well).

Most organizations don't typically go through and define every single use case, but it's important to get together some of the major use cases for various business units or teams that are going to be using emergent collaboration solutions. Your organization may be surprised to find how many additional use cases emerge in the future that you didn't think about while strategizing.

Summary and Action Items

Emergent collaboration starts with being able to identify business drivers (or problems). This has nothing to do with going after the next cool thing. Emergent collaboration solutions provide benefits and value that other forms of collaboration do not. After understanding the business drivers, it's crucial to map them to specific desired states; this can be done by using the solution mapping process:

- Either in small groups or individually, make a list of your Enterprise 2.0 business drivers and prioritize them. Try to think of a few examples and real-life scenarios for each of these business drivers to add context. You may also want to conduct an employee survey to find out what the most important or desired initiative at your organization should be.

- Go through the unique benefits section and list what you believe the most relevant benefits are to you. Is there something missing that you wish to add? Again, try to come up with some real-life situations or scenarios in which you believe a particular benefit will be applicable and/or relevant.
- Walk through the solution mapping process either in teams or individually to understand how to move from a business problem to a desired result.

There are many business drivers and unique benefits of deploying emergent collaborative solutions in organizations. To explore some of these even further, I asked Oscar Berg to share some of his insights and ideas. Oscar is the future office evangelist at Tieto, an IT services and product engineering company with over 18,000 employees around the world.

More and more organizations turn their eyes to knowledge work as they experience diminishing returns from their efforts to optimize transformational and transactional processes. When they do, it is likely they will first look at how they can improve task efficiency as a means to improve knowledge worker productivity.

One global organization does this by trying to reduce the completion time for the tasks that are most frequently performed on their intranet, such as finding a person or a location. These are tasks that can quite easily be defined and measured. The organization has estimated that just the task of finding and opening a file shared on the intranet costs about 2 million euros per 1,000 employees a year and that this cost can be reduced by 1.2 million euros simply by improving the usability of the intranet. Such numbers catch the attention of most executives, and rightly so.

Although a lot can be gained by improving the efficiency of knowledge work, focusing too hard on optimizing existing tasks

and practices can make organizations miss out on opportunities to improve their responsiveness, decision making, and ability to innovate as an organization. Such opportunities can come from tasks and practices for which there is little or no support today simply because there haven't been any technologies that support them well enough. But things change, and new technologies emerge all the time. In today's highly competitive business environment organizations can't afford not to investigate and evaluate new technologies that could have the potential to solve problems or create opportunities they are not yet aware of.

The organization in this example chose only to consider tasks that were already supported by the existing intranet in its optimization effort. Tasks such as sharing information with anyone who might have a need for it were missing simply because they were not supported by the current intranet. Employees could share information in a file either by uploading it to a shared space or by e-mailing it as an attachment to a specified list of receivers, with the latter probably being the more common practice. But they could not share a file with anyone who might have use for it without knowing who it might be in advance. Now, what is the problem with not supporting such a task?

In a less connected and rapidly changing business environment in which each business unit or team could do well on its own and that was good enough to be successful, there was no problem. Today the problem is huge; an organization's responsiveness, decision making, and ability to innovate are seriously hampered when information cannot be rapidly shared across all structures with anyone who might need it. It is more than likely that the information shared in e-mail attachments or uploaded to shared spaces that only a few select users can access is of interest and useful to other people within the organization as well. It's not just that they can't find or access the information; they don't know that it exists in the first place.

It is easy to fall into the trap of trying to improve only tasks and practices that are already supported and can be easily

measured. Although the indirect costs resulting from information lock-in are easy to reason about and understand, they are hard to estimate and translate into monetary figures that would make an executive raise an eyebrow. To make it even harder, the remedy is also to be found in introducing new practices, not just improving those which already exist. That requires a significant dose of creativity and curiosity in addition to optimization skills. Curious and creative organizations are continuously exploring new technologies such as social software, hoping to become aware of—and address—problems and opportunities they were not aware of before. They are well on their way to unlocking their information silos by introducing new practices enabled by technologies such as microblogging, RSS [Rich Site Summary], social filtering, activity feeds, and other technologies that are emerging as this is being written.