

# **Business Processes for the Facebook Generation**

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### **1. The Business of Collaboration**

Members of the older generations always told me that they could clearly remember where JFK was assassinated, or who they were with when they saw the moon landing. The Facebook generation remembers none of these, and instead September 11, 2001 is the date and memory most of them remember with equal clarity. It would be too simple to identify a single event as the cause of differences from their predecessors, and would be overlooking all of the other influences, which have shaped their childhood, teenage and now early adult years. However, it illustrates that what a generation is exposed to shapes them and symbolizes the passing times.

Technology has been readily available to the newest generation and is without a doubt another one of the formative factors in that culture. It is the same technology that has wrought an onslaught of changes in the business environment. As a computer science major, we early on in our academic career learned about Moore's law, which states that the speed of technological innovation will roughly double every year and a half. What does this mean? Simply that our computers can provide us with twice the information they were able to just a year and a half earlier. It is this rate of flow of information that has caused such a shift in the global business environment. Time and travel previously provided barriers which made global business prohibitively expensive for all

but the largest organizations that had the resources to absorb the fixed costs that were a basic ante for transnational partnerships. Today, access to cheap technology has allowed even small and medium size business to expand their markets and raise the level of competition, both in terms of price and product differentiation. Communication happens so fast global decisions are made nearly instantaneous and cheap. According to Bartlett, Ghoshal and Beamish developing multiple layers of strategic competitive advantages is the only way to stay ahead of the competition (Bartlette, 11-3). These advantages traditionally come from superior cost cutting measures, or products that beat the pants off their competitors, but now is much simpler than that, the true source of competitive advantage are your people and their ideas. They are the ones that come up with the next big product, brilliant marketing campaign, or figure out how to program the computer to redesign a complex supply chain. The responsibility of management and the IT department is to use the tools they have at their disposal to capture these ideas and facilitate a creative environment by playing on the strengths of all generations in the workforce.

Paradoxically, the same technologies which are causing an influx of information which we are struggling to manage, are the same ones that we must capitalize on to be able to capture the true value of our organization, the ideas. In 2009, the new

employees who entered the work force, did not have a college experience where telephones, or even instant messages were the primary medium for planning a nights outing, or scheduling a group meeting. Instead, Facebook and Twitter are their go-to tools, and their cell phones are their life lines. Their immersion in this technology has lead them to be able to process vast amounts of data, as well as shift the rules of communication to be tech-centric. From an evolutionary perspective, it is perhaps true that the youngest generation has evolved, out of necessity to be better fitted for this type of communication. This, does not mean however, it is outside the grasps of the more experienced members of the work force to adapt to use these communication mediums effectively as well.

To effectively implement Web 2.0 mechanisms for business communication, we must understand what causes these communication mechanisms to be effective and what sorts of business communications may, I fact be better over digital communications, then through traditional or even face to face means of communication. Several factors, ranging from the amount of information able to be understood through a message, to the speed of response, effect the clarity of a message. Some researches even believe that Darwinian evolution is responsible for our ability to understand the information that is communicated. Some of the most popular methods for communication today are Facebook style wall posts, tweets, message boards, memo's, emails, phone calls, videoconferences, webinars and old fashion face-to-face meetings. Each of these possesses different characteristic that can make it relevant to a particular style of business communication. Identifying new and creative uses for these technologies is a key factor for businesses that are seeking to achieve a competitive advantage.

How the messaging and communication systems are used is not only a factor of the actual information that is conveyed, but also organizational structure and culture. We can choose to allow our ideas to sit fallow and become stale, or we can find ways to present in an accessible fashion. Mangers who employ an open book style will gain the most value from the data collected from in Web 2.0 technologies because information is useless unless it is shared. If an organization is overly paranoid about keeping information restricted to only a few people then all the data will be unable to be mined, either by technology or hand to help further the organizational knowledge and innovation by sparking ideas and reducing duplicate work. If information is searchable and available then users will be able to find information instead of remaking what already exists and use the corporate knowledge base as a source for ideas and innovation.

Moreover, classic organizational structures and management techniques are not adequate. In a classic "chicken or the egg" scenario, it is difficult to say if the collaborative software shaped the Millennial Generation's preference for collaboration or if their preference for collaboration shaped collaborative software, but whatever the case may be, the ideas of solitary work is gone. Now it is all about being part of a team. A collaborative team effort ends up enhancing the ownership of the work that is created results and can even drive higher levels of motivation. Another consideration is that many members of the Millennial Generation are not seeking standard eight to five jobs. Critics have said that it appears that they don't want to work hard (Tapscott, 4). Quite the opposite is true. Many of these young individuals are incredibly driven and want to be involved with and have everything (yes, instant gratification syndrome is one of their downfalls), including a successful carrier, family, community involvement and fun

social activities. At the same time job descriptions are pushing requirements to require more and more time spent to deal with international teams, or tasks that simply require periods of “feast and famine” as far as the employees time is concerned. A flexible schedule and work environment facilitates rigorous work demands and gives the ability to accomplish all of their goals, both professional and personal. Luckily, technology supports and facilitates this communication.

In my pocket, I carry a telephone with twice the processing power and ram of the computer that I used to get me through high school, which weighed 50 lbs and a monitor that took up my whole desk. There is simply no reason that we can’t leverage our mobile phones and laptops with nearly ubiquitous Internet access to create virtual work places and flexible schedules and see higher levels of productivity than ever before. Managers and IT Professionals must identify the cultural preferences of its workers and leverage the Web 2.0 technology to create virtual offices. This not only gives companies the ability to leverage the best talent for the job but also allows the workers to achieve a true work-life balance. In essence, managers must seek ways to reinvent corporate communications to suite flexible schedules and capture more useful information

Once managers have an understanding of what type communication is best suited for a specific tool and then how other activities can be transformed the task is choosing how to Implement Web 2.0 Technology, and developing a strategy to manage a continually evolving piece of the infrastructure. Some companies may find that that applications that are available either for free, or a nominal fee, but hosted on external server may be preferable. Other may choose that leveraging in house enterprise content management platforms may allow them the control and level of customization to best suit their needs.

In either approach, two primary considerations must be given to the implementation. First a proper rollout must be given to assure user adoption. The proper roll out includes concerns around usability, training and gaining buy in from the individual employees. The second factor is defining flexible information architecture and auxiliary processes that assure accessibility and retention of the communications, and will also capabilities to use analytics to understand the information contained within their system. Flexibility ensure the system is natural can be understood and is usable. By formalizing the process through which these technologies are released to the workforce, corporations will be able to retain the most control over the systems while still gaining the benefits and restructuring the processes to fit the new working requirements of the Millennial generation.

## **2. Communication 2.0**

Many businessmen who have been a road warrior or worked remotely, know what it is like to sit hours on end on a conference call wondering “Why can’t this just be in an email!” More often than not, the voices are hard to hear, you don’t really have that much to contribute to the conversation, and what is relevant to you is difficult to understand both in terms of the actual words themselves, barking dogs in the background, and because the thoughts themselves aren’t clearly communicated. Think back to you preschool days, where you may have played “the telephone game.” In it a phrase is said to one person and whispered to the next person, then the next person whispers the phrase to the one next to him and 20 people later the last person say the phrase out loud and it is inevitably completely different than what was started. After about 5 hours on the phone and garbled business requirements for software I am trying to plan, that is exactly how I feel, and would be willing to wage everyone else on

the call does too. Given the level of flexibility in our communication mediums there is no reason that this uncertainty should ever be the case in our work places. Managers must be stretching outside of their comfort zone and seeking ways to solve these problems.

There are three different schools of interest when understanding how humans receive and process the communication. Each one of these presents different perspectives (and retorts the views of the other) about what really matters, and why. They all therefore, provide some insight into understanding why certain methods of corporate communication are more effective than others.

The first of these is the “Media Richness Theory” proposed by Deft and Lengels in 1986 (Kock, 327-8). In this school of thought, the ability to absorb and understand what is communicated is solely based on the “richness” of the information you get during a communication. In other words, exposing as many senses to the communication and gaining absolutely as much information as possible during that exchange should yield the clearest interpretation. The information includes facial expressions, how quickly feedback is received, tones of voice and other type of communication. The theory goes on to say that the more information we get, the more we remove ambiguity and uncertainty from what is being communicated. In a way this makes sense, we get as much information as possible and employ our logic to filter through it to come to the true meaning of what is being said. In the context of digital media, you can engage in instant messaging conversations and lose the ability to detect sarcasm unless the person on the other end bolds or italicizes their text, you just simply can’t tell. You don’t have enough information. Where as in person you can read their body language, hear their inflection as well as grasp what is being

said in the words. Thus, if Deft and Lengels are right, we probably can communicate on computers, but it would be far inferior to any other method of communication.

The second theory is called the Social Presence Theory and believes that the quality of communication, how much you understand, is directly correlated to your “awareness” of other person and their communication (Kock 327-8). The more “social distance” between the individuals communicating the more difficult it will be to understand what is being communicated. Thus, text is the most distant and therefore, least aware, and face-to-face is the most aware. They therefore, evaluate the presence by how much the communication represents face to face. Under this model, it makes sense that the more you work with an individual the more you begin to understand how they communicate to and therefore understand better what they are saying given that level of familiarity and presence.

Both of these approaches follow one assumption, which I believe is their critical flaw. That is the more information you get be it hard data, or soft social data, the better understanding your mind will be able to come too. However, as Malcolm Gladwell points out in his book *Blink*, that just because more information is available, doesn’t mean that it helps us make better decisions. He tells a story of how an army commander was able to with minimal technology and smoke signal quality communication defeat, in a war game simulation, the most technology because those making decisions were slowed down so because they had too much information to sort through and that actually cause decisions to take too long. The “enemy” however was only communicating through smoke signals and Morris code only essential messages and what absolutely was critical to his strategies success (Gladwell). If this is true, the amount of information we get through any moment of communication is not what determines how

well we are able to understand and use that information for our purposes, but rather what information we get, how it is communicated, and how we have developed our minds to be able to process this information.

One particular study in 2005 by Abbas Foroughi, William Parking and Leonard Jeasup sought to understand how information is conveyed through digital communications are interpreted when either text or in person communications were used for negotiations. They found that when communications were particularly intense and adversarial in nature, computer based negotiations actually helped the outcome. In more collaborative efforts, however, in person communication had a slightly more favorable outcome. The results are likely because in high intensity conversations, the individuals tend to speak without thinking and convey negative emotions through their tones of voice and body language, which cloud the purpose of the communication. A computer instant messaging conversation forces the communicators to take time to think, before committing to the finality of pressing "Send" as well as distill the emotion from the conversation. Thus, the difference in what information is conveyed while it is being communicated will effect quality of the decision based on what information is conveyed and in cases such as this, less information is actually better than more information. In collaboration a combination of mediums is probably the best. In a familiar business case, have you ever gotten an email that probably would have been a better read if it had been published as a book? I certainly have. In cases like this you either end up ignoring the information completely, or totally loosing the point. Email communications are simply not meant for long verbose communications, but when they are concise and to the point Emails are often times more effective than even hour-long conference calls. As managers, we must

look at our businesses and ask ourselves what habits have we developed that lead to way to much information being communicated and which areas aren't communicating enough. Then, we can begin to think, in our digital tool belt, what tools can be chosen to help shift our processes so the right information is being communicated and push to get our organizations to adopt changes.

Most attorney's and senior white-collar professionals seem to prefer email as a means of digital communication. My father is an attorney and just about everyone at his firm, in the last year or two (seriously) has learned to check their own emails and most don't even have their secretaries print the emails for them anymore either. This only took about twenty-five years.

On the other hand, my first job out of college was working for the national level of my fraternity (you can save the "oh did you teach them how to tap kegs" jokes, it was a real job). During my tenure there, I was having a discussion with the board president, who is now the president of a small university in Kansas. He was telling me that he began to send emails to college students congratulating them on their small successes and didn't get a single response. A few months later he signed up for Facebook and began doing the same thing but send Facebook messages instead. Every message he sent received a response. At that time Facebook had only been available to all colleges for about three years.

The Millennial Generation has shown that they can adopt technology at a much faster rate than their predecessors, most likely because they have been exposed too and forced to learn with technology from their very beginning and have developed their brains to process online information just as effectively as processing information offline.

This leads to the third model that other researches propose is the most effective way to evaluation digital communication. Ned

Kock proposes that looking at communication from an evolutionary approach helps us understand why, and how we are able to process information. He asserts that the primary downfall of the other theories is that they evaluate the success of communication from the information and features that facilitate communication and overlook how humans have evolved. Instead he suggests we cannot overlook our evolutionary history and what drives evolution and introduces what he calls the “Media Naturalness Theory” (Kock 332).

Kock suggests that other researchers have shown that the body and brain evolve in conjunction with each other. So as the human hands developed so did the capability to process special recognition and therefore manipulate objects with their hands and communicate with body language. Likewise, as the face and brain evolved, they both developed, together, the muscle structure and processing capabilities to process face to face communication. Thus, evolution has aimed humans at face-to-face communication, because for thousands of years that is all we have been exposed too.

This is not the complete picture however; Kock further suggests that a psychobiological component is also critical to understanding how these developments occur. Evolution is not limited to that which occurs over thousands of years, but is directly influenced by what we learn do to, through practice. In a talk at the TED conference in February 2004 cognitive psychologist, Michael Merzench, points out that that the baby brain is moldable and through years of learning are trained to be able to communicate. A startling point he makes is that it has been shown that babies who sleep next to a noisy air conditioner are very likely to develop auditory processing and linguistic difficulties, so severe that some can't even speak. This is not a result of some genetic issue but because as their brains developed to

process noise, it got so cluttered and messed up by learning to block out the droning sound of the air conditioner, they never developed the ability to process a clean background noise and speech. This is in perfect alignment with Kocks suggestion that humans develop the ability to process new types of information, and the limits of our capabilities to understand are directly related to how natural the task is to us, and that through practice tasks can become more and more natural.

Therefore, just as it took my dad and his associates 20 years to develop the naturalness to be able to communicate in email so to can all individuals develop the naturalness and comfort to be able to communicate over Web 2.0 technology. This does not mean, however, that the communication over web 2.0 will require less effort from anyone, millennial or baby boomer, but that is a good thing. Kock shows, in his studies, that text based communication, like email, requires high levels of cognitive effort and is said to be less natural. However, it generates higher quality communication because of that greater level of effort. It is like thinking before you speak. If I am in a very comfortable situation I am more likely to put my foot in my mouth when I have let down my guard, than when I am surrounded by clients or giving a presentation and am making an asserted effort to assure my comments are appropriate for that audience.

This is fantastic news for businesses adopting social technologies because we can look at our processes and consider the richness of the media that is communicating the information and adjust the amount of information we need to preserve, according to the complexity of the material being produced so an appropriate level of thought is being put into what is being produced and unnecessary communication is throttled down. If you only have 140 characters to send a message, you

will get your point across and let it get lost in a 10-page email. We then can evaluate our training needs and know that it is within our capabilities to bring all individuals to the same pace of technical competence given the proper amount of exposure and time, even though social networking will initially be more natural for the Millennial, because they have developed more practice with this method of communication.

Some of the more popular social media tools, which can be company specific or software as a service type of solutions are Wiki's, Blogs, Personal Profiles (like Facebook), Social Messaging (Twitter/Yammer), Message Boards, Instant Messaging, Email, Word Documents in content management systems, Screen Sharing with Audio, Video Conference, the dying printed memo and class face to face meeting. Each of these have differ levels of richness in content, speed of response, and as well as complexity of use.

Evaluations of the naturalness of shows these technologies will show that they vary widely based on the amount of information that can conveyed in each message, the length of designed response time, intended life duration of any one of the messages as well as the cognitive effort (and time) which is required to produce each message. Traditionally, most verbal communication has a short life cycle and conveys a burst of information in a very short period of time and is gone as soon as it is said. Instant messaging, message boards and social messaging all have relatively short useful life cycles and convey short information that is not much more refined and edited than verbal communication require relatively low cognitive effort. Wiki's, Blogs and word documents can have longer useful life cycles and take much more cognitive effort to produce causing them to be less natural for us to produce and grasp quickly. Email and other sorts of communication will

most likely fall in between these various categories.

As the medium becomes more permanent it makes sense that the benefit of putting more effort and time into the production will be more worthwhile and the "big ideas" contained within these documents will still be relevant for months and years to come. What about the brain storming and capturing the thoughts that leads up to building these big ideas? From a difficulty standpoint both in terms of naturalness and time effort of production, high dynamic message boards like Yammer, Twitter of the Facebook wall, and instant messages can be used to capture the small thoughts that lead up to the big ideas because it is fast and easy.

Managers must stop thinking that everything we do must be captured in a word document or some format that is designed for print or long term duration. So much of the data we produce just doesn't matter after a few weeks, days or even hours and should not be clutter our system with word documents. Instead, only capture big ideas in more formal and complex documents, and use the other tools at our disposal for those smaller thoughts. After all, if a greater level of cognitive effort ends up leading to generally better products, we ought to let our employees dedicate their cognitive resources to the big things instead of formalizing and employing high levels of efforts to the little ones.

A fantastic example of information that is suited for Wiki's is project documentation. The nature of documentation, at least until a project is released, is that it is continually changing as specifications and requirements change. It also needs to be available to all parties involved. When things are in word documents (not including Office 2010 "Live" editing features or Google Documents), are edited for the most part, offline and one user at a time. The habit is that these documents become highly structured, difficult to find the right

information in and numerous versions that are difficult to track. Wiki's are searchable, online and easy to be linked. What is more is they are versioned and updated and easy to "roll back."

Managers seeking to employ social networking have to acknowledge that the instruction "just go throw together a word document" or "Shoot me an email" have to be abandoned because that really is not the best place for many types of communication anymore and we must ask ourselves "Okay, where does this information really belong." This is really more exciting than scary. As we've acknowledged, the ideas of the employees are the primary source for corporate advantages in this rapidly changing world and with this technology we can fashion our business processes to allow for the absolute best communication of these ideas. We can structure our teams and processes to allow employees to fully develop innovative thoughts without wasting time. Such changes, perhaps not so coincidentally, will also lead to business processes that are much more appealing to the Facebook Generation's arguably short attention spans.

### **3. Creating a Culture Ready to Leverage Social Networking**

When looking at the communications that occur with email, phone calls (one on one) or even restricted memos, the nature of this communication is relatively private and directed for communication with only a small group. While many of the features of social networking can facilitate this sort of communication, the advances which create the core of social networking is derived from the ability to target communication not just at one individual, but make it so that it is globally available, even though the communication was generated for a specific group or individual. This openness is often uncomfortable for managers who are more used to a closed book, hierarchical

management style, but such a style is exactly what the millennial generation needs.

The generation which has grown up with technology at their fingertips was shaped by a combination of this technology and unique nurturing techniques by their parents and teachers, all of whom influenced their growth and reinforced a "go get it" mentality, preference for collaboration and an emphasis on public or community service. Additionally, at their current age, they are very open minded, but critical to new situations and experiences (How to Hire, 1). These are generalizations but represent a fairly accurate picture of the Facebook Generation. There are hundreds of articles and books written on the topic of why and how this generation developed that way and therefore not a focus in this discussion. If we assume that these authors are correct, we can focus on looking for ways to use these characteristics of the millennial generation with Web 2.0 technology while maintaining the work and communication environment that is productive for the previous generations.

Claire Rains, author of "Managing Millennials" suggests six principals for managing Millennial's. She suggests that the Facebook generation are craving leadership and mentors, want to work with friends and have fun doing it, want their ideas to be heard and respected and be flexible to promote the life outside of work. They are also seeking a challenge.

#### ***Flexibility At Work***

The traditional 9-5 job is essential for those in many manufacturing industries or assembly line jobs where production simply has to happen in shifts and scheduling becomes so much of a problem that variable schedules just aren't realistic. However in many other jobs, particularly for those charged with producing ideas and white-collar managers, a flexible work schedule and

environment is absolutely possible. Being present for a typical workday assures that the employee is available for meetings, collaboration and other types of tasks where short-lived communication needs to be exchanged quickly. As we discussed face-to-face communication is the best in many cases, but the amount of information and naturalness that is lost in video communication is relatively nominal. Because the millennial generation is 'wired' all the time, wireless Internet access is nearly ubiquitous and so is the technology that supports video conferencing. It is all also dirt-cheap. One distinct advantages of a videoconference is that they are recordable and can be referenced at a later date and the loss in understanding through video is nominal.

The point of a conference call is usually a status meeting, sharing brief information updates, collaborating and the occasional formal presentation. The first three of these usually don't require a meeting. Twitter or Yammer style technologies are designed for brief updates. Additionally, message board style technology can do the same thing. Many-To-Many, informal communication, live conferences and meetings are simply unnecessary. If an issue arises, deal with it, if not, allow everyone access to a central collaborative space and provide updates there. If a problem arises the appropriate manager can call the meeting. The elimination of the fixed time allows enhanced flexibility in scheduling as well as persisting information that would have otherwise been lost in a conference. The financial benefits are even more startling. A client I worked with not long ago had to have entire team status meetings that would run an hour, maybe two and had over 10 resources there. By moving this to an online posting format, they would have saved as much as \$2,000 per week of the project.

### ***Let The Information Be Heard***

Twitter has been so explosive lately because it has allowed millions of people to have voices, for better or worse. It took the millennial generation to make such brief, and open communication popular but has also gained support from senators to Iranian protestors; it has given everyone a voice. Twitter is natural and easy to convey a short brief thought. It is really hard to screw up 140 characters unintentionally! It is also very quick to receive relevant messages with some of the search and notification technologies available. Businesses can capitalize on this, when managing Millennials because this is an easy way to create small communities within the organization and with an occasional post from management or executives; it is a cheap way to show that the thoughts and ideas are being heard. As a side note of security, if you are uneasy about having this sort of communication on external servers there are plenty of internal resources that can be used for the same purpose.

In about 1996, I made my first web site on Geocities. It was an absolutely amazing concoction of personal information and a humble shrine to Star Wars. Luckily, I had the geek in me to know how to use HTML and even a bit of JavaScript to create this web site. What is important to notice about the early web sites was that many of them formed out of an individuals desire to express themselves and share some sort of information but the technology made it too difficult for the average Joe. In conversations I have been having recently, my colleagues noted that the features of blogs and wiki's, the ability to make links between different pages very easily are often thought of as new features, but really, its not. Blogs and Wiki's just made web publishing easier. The term World Wide Web was coined because we used to be able to make links the old fashion way in this "hypertext." To a

non-technical user, it was unrealistic to do this, but now blogs and wiki's simply this process. It is now as easy to write a document, as it is to publish to the web. Millennials and others who are seeking to be heard should be encouraged to blog on the internal web site because heated debates and discussions can come from information posted on these blogs which will help stimulate the ideas in your organizations. Writing a Blog tends to require more cognitive effort than posting a tweet or even making a phone call. As was have discussed, expending higher levels of cognitive effort, often results in a higher quality product and more mature ideas.

One of the downfalls of standard word documents are that it is easy to get tied up in formatting and focusing on the paged based publishing difficulties that are native part of standard documents. Blogs and Wiki's require higher levels of cognitive effort to be spent, and at the same time allow the user to forgo concerns about the formatting and layout indicative of standard print format documents. Therefore, when the important part of a process is the generation and capturing of ideas, a blog or a wiki might be a great option. Not only does it promote structured, well thought out ideas, but also the content is designed to be published online and preserved so others can find it and use it. Documents tend to become mini information silos but Wiki's and Blogs make it more likely that ideas will be found, used, commented on and used.

Traditional content management systems fall short of expectations because information tends to sit in word documents in email in boxes, loose network shares, or even worse just on the local "My Documents" folder. The mentality shift of authoring FOR web format rather than authoring for word format will help increase user adoption and reduce the amount of attachments in email inboxes.

Remember, a simple shift of saying, I don't really need documents not only promotes communication and allows employees to feel like they are being heard, but also reduces clutter and eliminates many of the adoption concerns that plagues classic enterprise content management.

### ***Mentor & Be Mentored***

Using wiki's and blogs help generate and capture ideas, and short life span twitter style communication can be used to help share and connect ideas. This means that mentors and mentees can communicate and interact effectively through these channels as well as phone and video conversations. Since Millennials are craving mentorship and characters to learn from all of these channels of communication should be taken advantage of. However, they are useless unless the right people are connected to each other, which is where social technology and personal profiles come into play.

In the classical organizational chart managers are connected to subordinates and they are also the ones that are responsible for the career development. In some organization where a matrix management infrastructure has been put into place, absolute chaos and lack of accountability has resulted (Bartlett, 335). Either of these methods assumes that a formal hierarchy is required to establish career development and management. If one of the Millennial's characteristic is that they are inherently self motivated by challenges, they should require less classical management, but seek leadership and mentorship from the other employees with relevant skill sets. Thus, the job of the career path manager is not to be the unilateral manager of further the growth, but to connect the growing employee to the right resources to grow on their own, which is outside of the formal reporting hierarchy or perhaps even division or country.

Social networking personal profiles allow individuals to post their own strong

suits and skill sets. Allowing resources to be sought out with social networking allows the benefit of learning from the best of the bread and the flexibility necessary for changing assignments. The challenging and flexible assignments that Millennials crave will likely cover a breadth of topics and not be strictly limited one single area of expertise. Therefore, social networks can be used to establish the temporary mentorship connections, allows “following” on short-term messaging and blogging technologies and relationships to form over conference calls or video. Culturally this means that resources need to be accessible and included in their job description the benefits however, is that managers don’t have to change as assignments change, and there is the flexibility of best of bread knowledge transfer.

In the Numerati by Steven Backer, he describes a system by which social networks and email chains were used to model groups and social structures within organizations. Researchers found that in the days before the ENRON collapse there were influxes of emails between core players in the scandal and were able to watch how information spread through the network of employees. Interestingly, this same method of information collection is not limited to corporate tragedies but also to mind areas of interests based on communications posted on blog and wikis. Thus, the system can “learn” what people’s areas of expertise and interests are. Staffing managers and mentorship program managers can all benefit from this knowledge and understanding of how the corporation works together. Understanding the information disseminates through the organization provides tremendous insight into the “water cooler” or “soft side” of communication, which happens in an organization. For a manager who is brought in to execute a major corporate change, this information could prove essential to gaining

buy-in and building teams to help promote the change as well as predicting how information will flow through the organization.

In more concrete terms the millennial generation will thrive in environments where information is freely available in shared. This means that connections between the right information and holders of that information must exist and information must be centralized and available. Because we have demonstrated that communication quality is not necessarily lost in online communication, online techniques can be used for establishing and meeting the goals of this communication just as effectively as other methods that were utilized by pervious generations, so long as the appropriate type of information is being communicated.

#### Implementing Web 2.0 In Your Organization

In most businesses small opportunities like using Web 2.0 to provide a new, more relevant way for documentation or using web discussion boards or yammer to avoid having to waste time on conference calls, are prolific in any organization. One of the useful, or from the records management perspective frustrating, characteristics of the millennial generation is their “go out and get it” perspective. (Technology Changed the Brain, 1), in his article for business week, writes of how college students these days are less focused on using text books and reading them cover to cover. Instead they go out to Google and research the topic themselves. This same behavior will likely lead them to saying “If I don’t have this technology that I want, I will go out and find it.”

Managers who put in place high levels of control will find that they are not only frustrating their younger employees, but also missing out on great opportunities for innovation. The value that comes from looking for new ways to approach problems is that more people are empowered to employ their creative problem solving and new results will exist. You must, therefore give

individuals enough power to experiment and come up with creative solutions, but have the policies and procedures in place to be able to identify valuable “skunkworks” innovations and bring them to the rest of the company while at the same time balancing the level of control so that data doesn’t get lost and regulation goes out the window.

What is required to assure regulation and control? You simply must provide this technology to the employees. Consider several organizations now that are restricting the use of social networking in their work place (Facebook and twitter specifically) and attempting to ratchet down the amount of information that escapes. Well, that is fine but is completely unenforceable and just pushes the information further outside of the control of the organization. Should you hire someone with an iPhone or even blackberry, even if you have policies that employees have to use corporate devices, there is a strong chance these will still be brought into work, and it is just too hard to attempt to police for them. In the spirit of what the Facebook Generation loves, sharing and being heard, corporate information is likely no longer confidential, unless you trust your employees. Therefore, it is simple, assume Web 2.0 technology exists, and is a liability, hire employees who you trust and provide them the internal outlet for social networking where you provide the constructive structure for collaboration and innovation.

According to Harvard Business School Professor and Web 2.0 researcher, Andrew McAfee, there are several characteristics of a strong Web 2.0 implementation including the mentality that everyone is a contributor, content is relevant, searchable and always fresh (Wylie, 59). If you want to simplify this down to the easiest level, it is about giving the users an experience where they find what they need, and have a reason to visit and really dig into the web experience. Simply put: If you user’s

don’t get something out of it your initiative they will either go out side of your bounds of control and you loose all the benefits of in house Web 2.0 and take on a lot of risk. Makes the social networking experience fit their needs with relevant content and more importantly the flexibility to empower them to solve their problems.

#### **4. The Rollout**

Rolling out any tool is a dangerous thing, particularly when social networking is involved because it will rapidly grow and bloat. Therefore I suggest a phased roll out for your organization. If you have already rolled out social networking and area dealing with a mess, that is okay, you can still apply these steps to a revamping of your capabilities.

1) *Identify a Pilot Group (or a group who wants to clean house)*

Identify a small group or department where you can energize young members of your staff to use this technology. These individuals will be the core group for championing your use of the technology and should be tracked to see what innovative ideas they come up with.

2) *Train the pilot group*

Since it is possible for all generations to learn to use social networking and other web 2.0 technologies training is paramount. The training can be both classroom based, and relationship based. In the initial classroom training session certain guidelines and standards should be agreed upon such as meta-data standards and an agreement of email links instead of files. After this consider creating “mentor/mentee” relationships between older and younger employees. This not only enhances relationship building within the company that can help foster new

ideas. Younger employees gain new insight into why the business did things the old way, and the older generations can learn the technology. Patience is essential, but if implemented properly new ideas will flow.

3) *Evaluate the Progress*

Unfortunately it is relatively easy to let social technology go without following up. I recently executed a project with a large pharmaceutical company where they had let this technology go without restraint. We completely redid their collaboration space and implemented a combination of a strict taxonomy with certain designated spaces for ad hoc collaboration and development. Could this redesign have been prevented from the beginning? Yes, of course, but the users would have missed the experience of learning what the tool can do and coming up with new and creative ways to use it. This is why regular contact with groups as you roll it out is necessary. You can help them avoid pain points and more importantly identify things they are doing well or ways they are using it that you hadn't previously thought of. When managers have these meetings they can go back to the IT team and either "productize" this creative use to distribute it to other parts of the company or simply plant a seed so that others may discover the same path.

4) *Roll out to the next group while revising the first.*

After the initial group becomes familiar with the product, pick a few individuals, one or two younger and another one or two from the older baby boomer generation to help champion a roll out to another division. If the first roll out went well,

then it is likely that the individuals you pick as champions will share the good news with their friends throughout their informal social structure and new parts of the organization will be screaming for either new deployment or restructuring of their collaborative spaces. The first group must still be a focus for revision and new product roll out but as time goes on they will become more and more self-sufficient.

This process is very "people" centric for a few reasons. Have people identify what information is relevant to them will create the most comfortable environment for that part of the organization. Certain issues with this approach are that "folksonomies" develop rather than formal taxonomies. Most IT managers cringe at this though but, they also often fall into the habit of thinking the world can be wrapped up neatly with one single classification that the entire organization can use. In reality, it is not natural for many users and hinders adoption. Through various search rules you can map between taxonomy and folksonomy as well as identify what users across the organization prefer to call things. Web Sites, like Del.icio.us, which provides social bookmarking, have become so popular because it assumes that the collective consciousness will result in a normal distribution of common naming. To make this information accessible, search and pre-defined, user friendly, filter queries can be used to configure a system so only relevant information in the right context is displayed. The result is a system that people want to use because it is relevant and useful.

People also drive the adoption of this technology. We have tried for years to enforce the usage of various content management systems, with only moderate success. Having peer champions drive trust in the technology and adoption. The initial group of baby boomers use this technology

will likely take longer to learn it, because they have less practice. They will learn differently and be better at training their peers. Again, it is the responsibility of peers and informal social groups to help with this adoption. Technology has gotten to the point where the IT guy shouldn't be the one teaching the knowledge worker. The knowledge workers should be teaching themselves. Simple, usable systems that are designed by the knowledge worker empower them and mean that a lot of the technical questions can be fielded by their peers rather than an overwhelmed IT help desk.

### **5. Focus on the People**

An understanding of how people communicate, what to be watching for and how people want to work leads to an implementation of collaborative software that is designed by the people, to capture their ideas. First, we identify how to look at communication through the organization and begin to look for ways to enhance our communication by avoiding things that waste time and effort, and only using more complex methods of communication when more thought will help produce better ideas and products. After understanding what to be looking for in our corporate communications an IT professional has to understand the context how this communication ties in with the desires and needs of a particular work force so that the business processes and collaborative software may be implemented in such a way that it will be natural to the users and prolific through the organization. The users MUST design it and managers must always be looking for new ways to apply this technology to old problems. The creative processes and desires of "having it all" will allow the millennial to help drive some of these efforts which can then be shared with the organization.

With all of the pieces in place it is completely possible to model all of the

individuals in the organization, track how they interact with each other and who are the top knowledge producers. We can completely run our business on numbers and the models of how we expect individuals to behave and directly monitor how productive they are. But remember, the only way to generate a competitive edge in today's global economy is through ideas. These ideas won't come to employees when they are forced or mandated. Modeling employee behavior or somehow pigeonholing them to fill specific roles because that's what the data says they should be good at must be kept in check. Allowing employees to do something that they want to try, and possibly fail, is how the bright ideas will keep flowing. Thus, this technology is about connecting humans and providing new ways to share ideas so that mentors and mentees may interact and generate the thoughts that will allow your business to succeed and be a truly innovative.

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