



ARCHITECTING PROJECT MANAGEMENT

for Enterprise Agility...

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Enabling Enterprise Agility using Social Media for Knowledge Management

Enabling Workforce

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ABSTRACT

Large enterprises often find it difficult to keep pace with evolving technologies and market developments as the sheer size of the organization makes it difficult for it to quickly sense and respond to market changes. Enterprises can sustain and grow in their markets only if they keep pace with the latest trends and provide path-breaking innovation to its customers. For innovative ideas and implementation, enterprises need to rely on their employees to deliver their best ideas and convert them into innovative products. This would imply that the employees need to be aware of the latest trends, knowledge base regarding them and possible implementations of these trends. With the basic understanding of latest trends, employees will be able to think further on possible usage scenarios of these new technologies to their respective business scenarios and come up with solutions challenging the status quo.

Large enterprises face a lot of challenges in bringing out the best ideas from their huge employee base spread across the globe, specializing in various domains and work in various departments or divisions. There is a lot of tacit knowledge present within the large employee base which could be both on existing as well as emerging technologies. The tacit knowledge is often residing with either single or a group of employees and is not known to the larger employee base. The key challenge large enterprises will face will be to bring together many such knowledge areas and integrate or build on them to form a path-breaking idea or solution that will provide the necessary competitive edge. Breakthrough products or ideas require multiple domain experts to work together in coalition towards a common goal.

This paper proposes to address this concern of large enterprises by suggesting multiple knowledge management mechanisms using internal social media to bring together all the employees on a common platform where they could learn from each other, share ideas, improve on each other's ideas and also enhance their knowledge on the latest trends which will enable them to contribute better to the organization's growth. Social media avenues will enable employees to seamlessly connect with each other breaking all organization silos. This will empower employees with knowledge, suggestions and ideas that they might not have otherwise had at their disposal, enabling them to build on ideas quickly and respond fast to changes in the market.

INTRODUCTION

Large enterprises are complex by their sheer size of the employees and the various technologies or sectors that they operate in. Workforce in such organizations are from diverse backgrounds specializing in multiple domains or technologies. The diverse nature of the workforce enables the organization to succeed in various domains that may not have their core competence initially. Although workforce diversity helps in initial success, it brings with it its own challenge of employees with deep expertise working in silos and a lot of tacit knowledge across the

organization without much knowledge or interaction with employees who are experts in various other domains. (Figure 1)



Figure 1: Existing Knowledge silos in Large Organizations

For organizations to mature to the next level and obtain a sustainable competitive advantage, it is essential to break these knowledge silos within the organization and enable healthy interaction between various domains to be able to generate some path breaking innovation that will help the organization gain a significant competitive advantage. Large enterprises which earlier were not able to respond quickly to market changes due to the knowledge silos will be able to be more agile and change their strategy as per the market conditions by merely empowering their workforce backbone with more easier methods of sharing and enhancing their knowledge. (Figure 2)

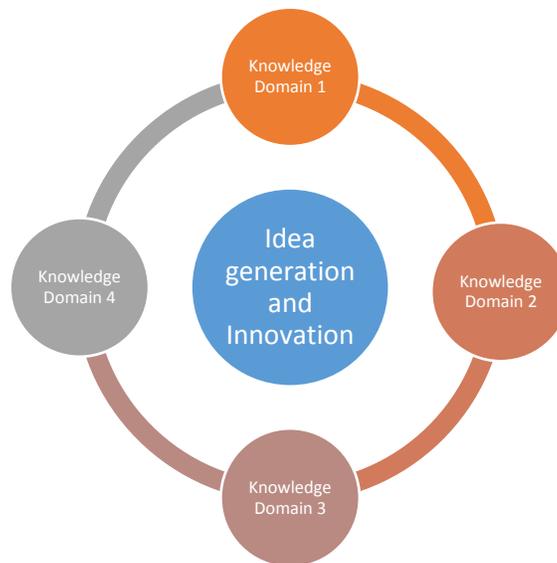


Figure 2: Desired state of Large Organizations

Enterprise wide social media avenues are a great way to enable knowledge management across diverse groups of workforce spread across multiple geographies with different expertise and knowledge levels. This paper tries to

explore the knowledge management needs of large organizations and how usage of social media can help in achieving enterprise agility.

DETAILS OF THE PAPER

KNOWLEDGE NEEDS IN LARGE ORGANIZATIONS

Large organizations have a large workforce base with varying levels of expertise and knowledge and each of them have their own knowledge requirements (Figure 3). Workforce in large organizations can be categorised as:

- 1) **Beginners:** These are either fresh college graduates or employees with less than 3 years of experience in a domain. These employees have the highest knowledge requirements. They generally possess basic understanding of the emerging technologies but lack deep knowledge regarding the implementation. They have a zeal to learn new skills and experiment with them to come up with new ideas and solutions.
- 2) **Intermediate:** These are employees who are in the range of 3 to 8 years of experience who possess reasonable understanding of the domain they specialize in. They will be able to respond to queries or provide solutions in the technology they have been working for so many years. They would either:
 - a) Want to enhance their knowledge in their existing technology or domain or
 - b) Start exploring other related or unrelated domains of their interest to enhance their knowledge
- 3) **Experts:** These employees are veterans in their respective technologies with long association with the organization. They would have part of the core team that invented the domain or technology and might have significantly contributed to making their technology mature. Their deep domain expertise and tacit knowledge normally remains in the domain/technology silos of the organizations. They could use their expertise to provide path breaking solutions to problems being encountered within their domain. They would either:
 - a) Want to remain in the same domain where they enjoy the pride of being a domain expert and help others in solving burning issues
 - b) Want to learn about other domains or technologies at an advanced level to be able to relate multiple domains and come up with innovative solutions that could be converted to flagship products for the organization.

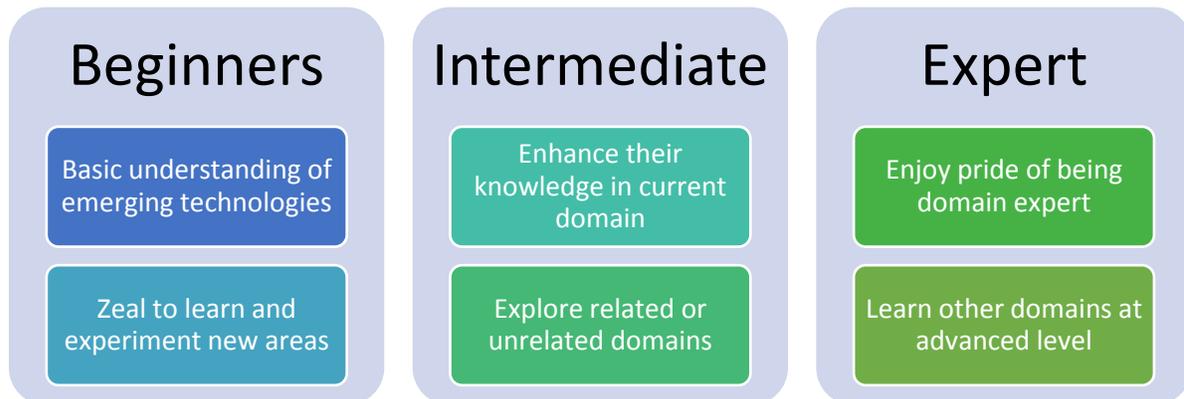


Figure 3: Knowledge requirements in large organizations

ENTERPRISE SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE NEED FOR MASS COLLABORATION

Breaking the silos within the organization while at the same time striving to meet the knowledge management goals for various groups within the workforce will be key to enable innovation within large organizations. Enterprise social media is a great tool and medium for achieving this as it can be accessed by the entire organization, where people should be able to access the information they need to enhance their knowledge, discuss and debate topics, raise and answer queries, contribute ideas and build upon each other's ideas and come up with path breaking solutions. This will enable mass collaboration and lead to co-invention of many successful ideas for the organization which will give it a significant competitive advantage [1] (Figure 4)

Enterprise social media will enable the workforce to share and enhance their interests, passion, knowledge and experience without any restriction of hierarchy or position. The collective wisdom of the entire workforce provides the organization with agility by increased innovation which leads to a new source of competitive advantage [2]. Conversations and ideas will evolve through enterprise social media, if used effectively [3]



Figure 4: Enterprise Social Media

ENTERPRISE SOCIAL MEDIA FOR KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

Enterprise Social Media can be implemented in various ways to enable knowledge management and achieve the objective of enterprise agility. Below are a few methods that can be considered [6]:

- 1) **Learning Libraries:** The online learning library can be a repository of learning documents, information guides and video recordings. The recordings would be created by the internal experts in the domain. This will help the beginners to learn quickly and making them productive more quickly. It enables to bridge the gap between the experts and the others in the organization.
- 2) **Online forums and technical groups:** For employees who would want to stay updated with the current trends in their domain or get answers to their queries, discussion forums are a great medium. Employees can also become part of forums of their interest, not really linked to their domain of work. Employees who are participating actively in the forums can be awarded points to encourage them to resolve more queries in the forum and also to motivate others. This enhances collaboration across the organization as everyone is enabling the success of another person.
- 3) **Technical Blogs:** It is important for organizations to tap into the tacit knowledge of its domain experts so that it spreads to all the employees interested in the domain and also for new idea generation based on the new knowledge. To enable this, organizations can ask their experts to write technical blogs on their

experiences with new technologies along with sharing their opinions, views and recommendations. The experts will get higher visibility of their deep domain expertise and their ability to help others succeed which will provide them with inherent satisfaction.

- 4) **Online workspaces:** To avoid increased dependency on few key team members, organizations should create online workspaces where all documents and artefacts related to a domain or project is stored for later use. This enables knowledge sharing within and across team between the experienced and the newer members.
- 5) **Online Wikis:** Retrospective data and ideas and sometimes useful in solving pressing problems that the organization faces currently. Organizations should ask every project and domain experts to maintain online wiki pages of earlier projects and ideas which will mention the approach, the issues seen, the resolution and the workarounds. This will enable employees to resolve any current issues by using solutions that may have been found much earlier for similar issues providing faster solutions or even build upon any old ideas.
- 6) **Online Trainings:** Training existing resources and on boarding new resources remains a main challenge for large organization but is very key to enabling enterprise agility. The workforce should be able to learn new technologies and allied domains as per their interest levels as it will enable them to look for ways to leverage the allied domains to their current domain. The expertise in the various domains might reside in multiple geographical locations, so getting them to conduct online trainings and recordings will enable in sharing the knowledge across the organization.
- 7) **Innovation and Idea portals:** In traditional hierarchical organization structure, ideas are either stuck with an employee or is not supported enough as it undergoes the approval process. People reviewing the idea and providing the approvals might sometimes not have sufficient expertise to make the judgement about the potential of an idea presented to them. Social media can be leveraged to create an innovation portal where employees can post their ideas for any domain, process or operation in an online portal without any hierarchy in the middle, which is then sent for review and selection to an innovation council consisting of experts from various domains. The council will be provided full liberty and freedom to pursue any idea with strong potential. Employees who suggest the selected ideas can be part of the implementation program where they will be given sufficient guidance and support by innovation council. This boosts employee morale and encourages idea contribution.
- 8) **Tags:** Even with the availability of wide number of experts across the organization, it is often difficult to get the right expert for the problem at hand. Having employees to add tags of their areas of expertise to their organization profile will enable other employees to search for them through internal directories based on tag names and benefit from their expertise.(Figure 5)

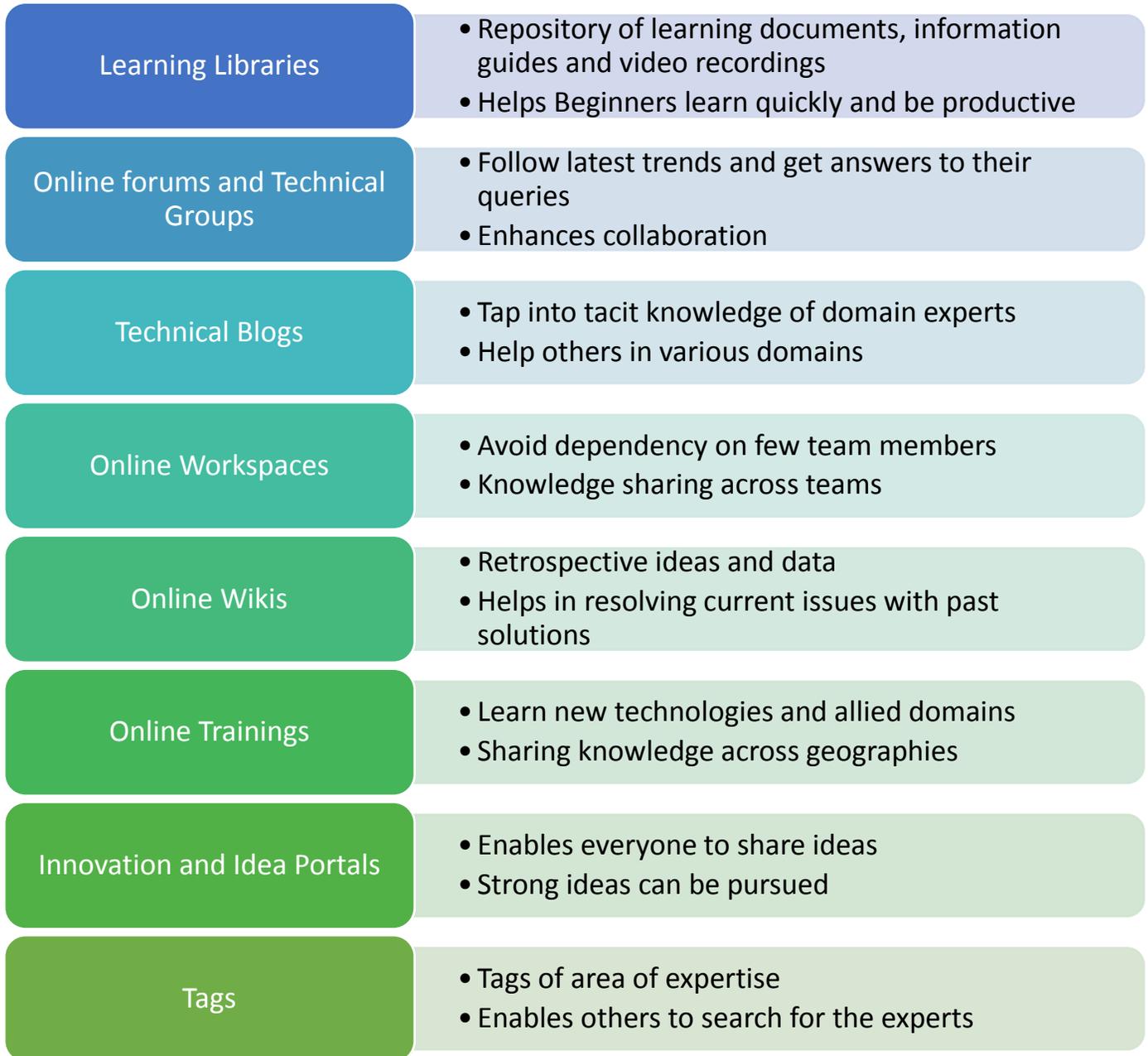
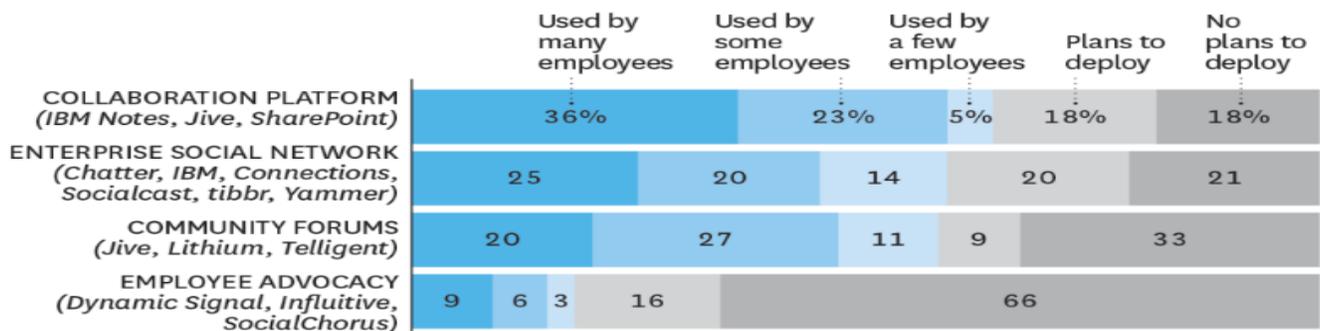


Figure 5: Enterprise Social Media avenues

MAKING ENTERPRISE SOCIAL MEDIA EFFECTIVE

The whole idea of using enterprise social media for knowledge management will be successful only if the employees use it effectively. Normally, the initial launch of the idea is well supported but over a period of time the idea dies down due to lack of contribution from the employees which also reduces the usage of the medium for knowledge management.(Figure 6) [5]

Corporate Social Networks Just Aren't That Popular



SOURCE: ALTIMETER GROUP SURVEY OF 55 COMPANIES WITH MORE THAN 250 EMPLOYEES (2014)

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Figure 6: Low usage of corporate social networks by employees (Source: [5])

It is therefore important to take the necessary steps to make it effective and ensure that all the employees use it effectively to enable enterprise agility. Few of the methods that can be explored are as below:

- 1) Enable employees to contribute to the enterprise social media. Few options can be providing reward points in the portal and encourage employees to participate and contribute to discussions in their areas of interest without any restriction. Making it part of their KRAs would be disastrous as it would restrict them to their domain and making it mandatory without solving the main purpose of introducing social media. Participation should be voluntary and free flowing.
- 2) Provide time to employees outside their regular work to explore the enterprise social media and learn new technologies, contribute back to the communities with their ideas and solutions
- 3) Leaders need to listen at scale, this would mean that they regularly find time to go through all the ideas and conversations that employees have on the social network and respond to them with their ideas and feedback. This would encourage employees to contribute more as they are aware that the management is also serious about the ideas that they are contributing [5]
- 4) Leaders need to share to shape, this would mean that leaders discuss their pressing problems and the problems the customers seem to be facing and encourage employees to contribute their ideas towards achieving the solution. This would make employees feel important as they are contributing directly to solving real world problems of both their organization and their customers [5]

- 5) Leaders need to engage to transform, this would mean that leaders need to engage in a dialogue with their employees on their ideas, be responsive and make meaningful discussions that would transform the organization. [5]

CONCLUSION

Enterprise social media is an effective tool that can be used for knowledge management enabling employees to share ideas, build on them and come up with innovative suggestions that provide organizations with significant competitive advantage. Using social media will enable employees to help each other solve their problems making them more agile and responsive. Knowledge sharing will happen across the organization making everyone aware of the latest in various domains making them come up with innovative solutions in response to changes in market conditions. Enterprise agility will be a key differentiator for enabling organizations to win in ever changing market conditions and using social media for knowledge management will be a key enabler for that.

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