# Promoting Change in Business Information Management – Connecting Staff and Stakeholders Through Enterprise Social Networks as a Factor of Success

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*Abstract: The role of an information professional as change agent in the development of business information systems is being explained. This paper describes the abilities of change agents and shows the benefits of their commitment. Further, it is shown how they involve the employees in the change process to teach them that change will make things better for them and how they run the change.*
*The change illustrated is the implementation of an Enterprise Social Network to foster business information flow, communication and collaboration. The goal is to improve connection of both staff and stakeholders.*
*Keywords: business information management, collaboration, change agent, enterprise social network, information systems*

## Change Agents

Change is the only constant in business nowadays. Because everything else is changing constantly, change is the stable factor. It is needed to understand and accept that most other factors that are perceived as firm are only conditions.

The increasing speed of changes in business information management leads to a raising need of specialists, who are well informed about technology trends and business activities. These specialists have to be able to diagnose and solve problems and to be aware of the situation of change as the normal state. Necessary changes happen in any case, they can neither be prevented nor forced, so the specialists needed have to recognize change in an early state and accomplish it, they have to be able to turn strategy into reality – to sum it up, they have to be visionary. The response to this necessity are Change Agents: skilled managers who can figure out which changes are required and able to communicate the advantages in changing existing systems to the employees, "the goal of a change agent is obviously to make changes that stick. The result of change agent activity is to enable people to do more [...]." (Stevenson, 2008)

Change agents can be seen as a type of consultant who has a very close relationship to the employees by analyzing their work and needs and showing them ways to improve their workforce. "IT pros today need a new level of people skills as they work to guide and support the business in its use of social and other technology whose use is often driven first by the users themselves and changes far more quickly than in the past." (Donston-Miller, 2012) So the job of a change agent is not about resistance-breaking but about generating acceptance. It can be said that change agents do not only have to be excellent entrepreneurs and IT professionals, but also need good communication, psychological and empathy skills. They have to understand the employees. Hence, the most important thing for a change agent is gathering frequent feedback both from co-workers and stakeholders so they can react to others' concerns to improve the process of change. "The more sources that are used for feedback, the more accurate it is likely to be." (Gilley, 2001, p. 33)

Performing change means keeping business running and and if it is done by involving employees and stakeholders, the function of a change agent is also a very social one. However, it is to be noted that conventional aspects of leadership like strong visions and personal engagement are still very important. Especially persuasiveness is still an

essential ability in a leading position, with raising importance in big companies that tend to anonymous labour relations.

## Need for effective communication

Internal enterprise communication is very limited, it mainly happens in mail and phone correspondence and meetings. One disadvantage of these communication methods is that only persons addressed by the starter of the conversation are involved in the correspondence and a lot of employees for whom this information could be very important aren't even aware of the existence of this conversation. Another big limitation of common business communication is that answering a message is only possible with the options given by the media used.

This lack of effective ways to perform business communication without borders leads to employees not having relevant data and information and not knowing all the processes they belong. This isolation of the individuals lowers productivity! By implementing an Enterprise Social Network (ESN), employees will be able to communicate together no matter what department or process they belong to and they will be able to contact colleagues at different levels of the company hierarchy. According to McKinsey Global Institute (2012, p.120), the increase in efficiency and effectiveness of interaction work raises productivity by 20 to 25 percent.

An ESN supports communication that goes beyond the exchange of factual information along the process workflow, e.g. meta-communication about the existing structures or discussions about corporate culture in the company. So the ESN also contributes to the confidence of the employees in the structures and culture in the company.

Even though social networks are a big part of today's civilisation and very common and widely accepted in the private life of most people with Facebook just hitting 1 billion registered users, companies only begin to realize the value of their adaption for enterprise. The implementation of an ESN is often understood as a technical change and not as a change of social interaction and relationship of the staff. Excluding the social factor during the process of implementation is against the basic idea of social networking. Not only serving the platform but also stimulating vivid communication and networking among the employees is the key to the successful implementation of an ESN.

In addition, the feature of collaborative working is one of the main advantages of ESNs, employees can work simultaneous on a task. This delivers new dimensions and effectiveness to working groups. (cf. Solis, 2012) Collaboration is not limited to only working with colleagues within the company, it is even possible across companies. A big advantage of ESNs is their potential to integrate stakeholders into communication streams. They give the possibility to keep stakeholders informed about processes and thereby to increase acceptance of changes and new developments amongst them. It must be pointed out that "a culture of sharing ideas within the workgroup and also accepting ideas from outside the group is necessary for successful collaboration in a highly networked enterprise." (McKinsey Global Institute, 2012, p. 123)

There are a lot of ESNs available on the market, very popular are Yammer, Jive and Chatter. (cf. McKinsey Global Institute, 2012, p. 160) Despite their complexity, they are very user friendly and since many of the employees are already familiar with social networks because of using them in their private life, the expenses for training the staff may be kept low.

## Implementation of an Enterprise Social Network

One of the most important trends in business communication is to get rid of the divisional, vertical organisation structure where every department works on their own projects and to add a horizontal information flow to get an organisational matrix. The best way to let information flow beyond its traditional limits is to exchange information over an ESN. As a consequence, this leads to the implementation of an ESN to improve the connection of people over organisational boundaries.

The change agent includes the employees and stakeholders right from the start into this process, gaining trust from them is a very important task for a change agent. Without backing from the staff it is not possible to launch new business information management systems because the employees will refuse using them. This is done by letting

staff set up user profiles already in the process of implementation and give the possibility to interact together and get to know the ESN in a hands-on way. Employees will soon be accustomed to their new style of communication and begin to appreciate the comfort of being able to see the user profiles of the people they interact with.

The training of new forms of communication through an ESN is getting easier if the employees have already been using the network during the process of its implementation. For the change agent, the biggest advantage of this early use is to get feedback on the ESN. With the staff communicating and collaborating over it in their daily working environment, the change agent is able to receive a lot of reactions on the ESN's implementation. The key to a successful implementation is to listen to the feedback given and carefully evaluate the issues reported. It is the change agent's task to make the change a positive experience for everyone.

With the backing and thereby the acceptance of the staff, chances are very high that change succeeds.

## Benefits for the enterprise

In this case, the change agent had the task to enhance business information flow and communication and to enable improved collaboration based on a change of information systems. This has been realized by the implementation of an ESN, so the change agent connects employees not only to one another but to stakeholders as well.

Improvements in communication, collaboration and information flow pay off. Results are trust amongst stakeholders and effectiveness in working.

As has been shown, the employment of a change agent has a lot of benefits. There are very good prospects to achieve change successful because of the wide acceptance of the change amongst staff. A good change agent arouses the confidence of the employees and reciprocates their trust by running change in a way they support.

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