

Gartner: Three actions to support governance as business gets social

by Julie Short, research director, Gartner

IT and business leaders must face the fact that social collaboration is already a reality. However, while social collaboration is increasing, several significant events (eg an increased regulatory environment, transparency focus, globalisation, stricter controls and the increasing accountability of corporate officers) have put the topic of governance (corporate, IT and others) in the spotlight. While businesses are seeing the value of becoming more open through social collaboration, there is a tightening of regulations impacting corporate governance and, subsequently, IT governance.

Traditional governance approaches of the past must be carefully reviewed and a new approach is required. Corporate and IT governance need to be modified to allow successful adoption of a social collaboration strategy and, subsequently, enable social collaboration technology.

Organisations defining a social media strategy must not simply react to current events involving tighter controls, but should consider the following elements when determining appropriate governance:

1. Consider the audience – different rules for different roles

Begin by identifying the roles in the organisation that will be affected by the adoption of a social collaboration strategy that includes the use of social-software-enabled collaboration and social media. Today's organisations are increasingly complex and less contained within the four walls of the traditional enterprise. The identification of roles may include:

- Shareholders;
- Employees and prospective employees;
- Customers or constituents;
- Potential customers;
- Suppliers;
- Strategic partners;
- Competitors.

It is no longer possible to apply the same controls and constraints to all roles in the organisation. Given the adoption of social collaboration, the roles are significantly different and, therefore, controls and constraints must be aligned to these new roles. In some cases, there will be fewer controls, especially with knowledge workers. Other types of controls will need to be implemented that enable the collaborative nature of the work.

2. Consider the engagement – understand the opportunities

After identifying roles, organisations must understand how these roles are engaged with social collaboration. Start by identifying:

- Which area of the business these roles are focused on; eg innovative product development, market research and CRM;
- The nature of the engagement for the defined roles;
- Which roles may work together to form groups. Is the engagement all the same or are there differences?;
- The deliverables the group will produce.



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Depending on the extent the organisation adopts a social collaboration strategy, these roles may perform a variety of tasks:

- Competitive analysis to track what competitors are doing;
- Business development to look for strategic partners;
- Recruiting to discover more about prospective candidates;
- Marketing to understand potential customer preferences.

The nature of engagement is important because it varies depending on many factors. It is easy to imagine that organisations want to capitalise on knowledge workers, process experts and others, while at the same time ensuring that the intellectual property of the organisation is protected. Use the five layers of social collaboration engagement to determine how the roles and groups will interact. Each of these layers is progressively more engaged:

- Monitor – the organisation listens to conversations happening around it;
- Discover – the organisation analyses conversations to gain insight and discover patterns;
- Share – the organisation begins to share its own perspective;
- Participate – the organisation begins to interact with the audience;
- Cocreate – the organisation is actively involved with the audience.

Keep in mind that organisations adopting social collaboration as a strategy may begin at various points on the continuum of this adoption. As organisations increase the adoption of a social collaboration strategy or move along the continuum of engagement, roles become more complex. Multiple roles may exist in a single workgroup with various levels of engagement. This requires more complex and diverse governance as well as frequent reviews to ensure that the approach and level of governance are appropriate. “The centrality of group effort to human life means that anything that changes the way groups function will have profound ramifications for everything from commerce and government to media and religion.”

3. Consider the risks – take the right road for effective governance

Understanding who is affected by the adoption of social collaboration and the level of engagement they work in as part of their day-to-day responsibilities will help organisations to identify potential risks and threats. Gartner sees a growing trend of organisations having an enterprise risk management function. Understanding the risks that confront organisations as well as the tolerance for risk is a key step in aligning governance. This is especially true in organisations adopting social collaboration strategy, using social media or using social software-enabled collaboration. Organisations may be willing to take on more risk if they agree that the benefits of the opportunity outweigh the risks.

Understanding the risks and the organisation’s tolerance for those risks together with an understanding of the roles and level of engagement is instrumental in determining the right level of effective governance.

However, many organisations overreact and implement a “lockdown” approach because they are not prepared to deal with the complexity that social collaboration brings. The worst possible scenario is to suppress social collaboration before it gets started due to concerns about risk. Taking the approach of “locking down” all employees or trying to build impermeable walls with the outside world can lead to loss of opportunity and innovative ideas, as well as frustration and mistrust.

In the socially collaborative world, CIOs and IT and social media programme

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leaders must have a greater understanding of enterprise risk management. They must understand the key roles in the organisation, how and to what extent they are engaged in social collaboration, and review the risks accordingly. They must weigh the benefits against the risks to guide them in determining the right level of governance.

In some cases, according to the role and the risk, governance may need to be even stricter than it was in the past when many of the social collaboration doors and entry points were closed or less accessible. Roles involving intellectual property or product management are examples of tightly controlled roles that are prevalent in organisations in selected industries. These roles require even more governance than before. This can be surprising and even contradictory to a more open and collaborative work environment.

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