

Why you need an enterprise strategy for social business initiatives

Carol Rozwell, vice-president and distinguished analyst at Gartner

IT leaders involved in social projects should explore the breadth of social business initiatives in their enterprise and what it means for their projects

Social initiatives pervade the enterprise; they are becoming part of every business and operational activity. However, enterprises usually treat social initiatives as isolated projects because the technology is relatively new and it can often be implemented within hours at little or no cost. This project-by-project approach may achieve narrow goals (for example, resolving problems for customers faster), but it risks failure for avoidable reasons and may miss opportunities to create more value. IT leaders involved in social projects should explore the breadth of social business initiatives within their enterprise and what it means for their own projects. In addition, they should help move their organisation toward an enterprise-wide strategy for social business.

Based on discussions with clients, we believe that IT leaders do not realise how pervasive social initiatives have become within the enterprise. Social media is filtering into almost every aspect of an enterprise's work, and it will take several different forms. In some cases, social software deployments will look like a stand-alone application; in other cases, other types of systems will acquire social functions. Sometimes social media will play the lead role in an initiative; other times it will facilitate work carried on elsewhere. Social business initiatives will affect almost every system, process and role within the enterprise, so IT leaders should help ensure that they are not implemented as though they are just another technology deployment.

Social initiatives pose an enterprise-wide challenge, but most enterprises treat them as discrete projects. Often the IT organisation does not even know when departments and business units undertake social initiatives. This approach can hurt individual projects and the enterprise in several ways:

- One project may conflict with others.
- IT and business leaders may miss opportunities.
- Some problems require an enterprise solution.
- Project leaders may needlessly duplicate work
- A project team may not learn best practices.

IT leaders should seek out peers across the organisation who lead social initiatives and start to build relationships. Those who lead individual projects should first educate themselves about what is going on with social initiatives within the enterprise, by reaching out to IT and business colleagues who are involved with other social media projects. These discussions will bring to light common problems and opportunities for working together.

By using social software they already have or consumer tools, IT leaders should build a community of business and IT people involved with social media projects. The community members can share best practices, discuss what works and what doesn't work, solicit advice, consult on measures of success.

The group can outline the common challenges that social projects face and show why these challenges require a response at the enterprise level. Such a response might take the form of a centre of excellence to formalise the sharing of best practices already occurring in the community. The centre of excellence would include IT and business users who have a representative set of skills needed for social media projects.

Finally, IT leaders should work with peers to describe the typical phases in the development of social media projects — for example, from small-scale experiment to departmental implementation to incorporation within a business process to enterprise-wide deployment. The model would describe what project teams must do to succeed at each phase. This model can then serve as a kind of template for social projects so that deployments become more consistent.



“Social media is filtering into almost every aspect of an enterprise’s work”

This report is based on independent technology advisory research from Gartner, Inc. Gartner delivers the technology-related insight necessary for IT leaders to make the right decisions every day.

Gartner