



# Jumpstarting the use of social technologies in your organization

Patricia J. Guinan<sup>a</sup>, Salvatore Parise<sup>a,\*</sup>, Keith Rollag<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Babson College, Babson Hall, Babson Park, MA 02457, U.S.A.

<sup>b</sup> Babson College, Olin Hall, Babson Park, MA 02457, U.S.A.

## KEYWORDS

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Leadership;  
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**Abstract** How do you get your organization to start using social technologies to become more innovative and productive? Where and with whom should you begin? We interviewed over 70 managers across 30 companies and found that the most successful firms employ one of three jumpstart strategies, depending on the organization's mission, work processes, culture, and industry. Some start at the bottom of the organization, finding and enabling 'young experimenters' to use social technologies to enhance their individual productivity. Others start in the middle, finding and helping 'corporate entrepreneurs' in middle management to use social technologies to improve collaboration on teams and projects. Others begin at the top, finding 'enlightened executives' who are open to new technology and the potential of social tools to strengthen their organizational culture. We combine our research with concepts from change management, technology adoption, and social networks to suggest ways managers can best introduce social collaboration tools into their organizations.

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## 1. Getting started with social technologies

Social technologies are heralded as emerging, innovative tools that can improve productivity and customer engagement (Bughin, Chui, & James, 2012; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Articles appear every day claiming that social platforms such as Jive,

Facebook, and Twitter and social tools such as blogs, wikis, and bookmarking/tagging systems will radically change the ways in which employees collaborate for organizational success (Fenwick, Leaver, Paderni, & Blackburn, 2011). These technologies include enterprise collaboration platforms, public platforms, mobile technologies, and other company-owned digital properties (see Table 1).

These emerging social technologies have the potential to transform how we work because the technology is built around improving relationships, not just heightening efficiencies. Researchers argue that organizations which can successfully employ

\* Corresponding author

E-mail addresses: [guinan@babson.edu](mailto:guinan@babson.edu) (P.J. Guinan), [sparise@babson.edu](mailto:sparise@babson.edu) (S. Parise), [krollag@babson.edu](mailto:krollag@babson.edu) (K. Rollag)

Table 1. Social technology classifications

Classification	Purpose	Examples
Enterprise Collaboration Platforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enable internal employees to communicate and collaborate on work projects</li> <li>• Locate subject-matter experts</li> <li>• Capture and share unstructured content (e.g., blogs, video) in addition to documents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jive</li> <li>• IBM Connections</li> <li>• Yammer</li> </ul>
Company-owned Digital Properties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide customer service through online communities</li> <li>• Build engagement with customers through games and contests</li> <li>• Acquire consumer ideas through crowdsourcing platforms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• My Starbucks Idea</li> <li>• EMC Community Network (ECN)</li> <li>• Amex OPEN forum</li> </ul>
Public Social Platforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enable external customers and consumers to connect with employees</li> <li>• Create spaces for product and company discussions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facebook</li> <li>• Twitter</li> <li>• LinkedIn</li> <li>• Pinterest</li> </ul>
Mobile Platforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build and leverage apps that run on tablets and smartphones</li> <li>• Allow 'check-ins' for mobile customers for marketing and customer service purposes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FourSquare</li> <li>• Apple App Store</li> <li>• Google Play App</li> </ul>
Individual Social Tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create and share unstructured content</li> <li>• Classify unstructured content</li> <li>• Co-author documents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blogs</li> <li>• Bookmarking/Tagging</li> <li>• Wikis</li> </ul>

these new technologies will find themselves more responsive, innovative, and competitive (Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011).

Business use of social technologies has increased steadily over the past few years, with approximately 87% of Fortune 100 companies employing at least one major social platform to communicate with stakeholders (Burson-Marsteller, 2012). However, despite the continued use of these technologies, significant challenges remain in terms of achieving value from 'being social.' According to recent Gartner (2013) research, social initiatives that use a 'provide and pray' approach achieve a mere 10% success rate. These initiatives often lack a sense of purpose and a clear strategy in terms of how to effectively integrate social technologies and processes into traditional work practices such as talent management, marketing, and research and development. Therefore, a more structured approach to introducing and incorporating these technologies into the workplace is needed.

What is the best way to introduce, evaluate, and build enthusiasm for these new platforms and tools? Where and with whom should organizations start in order to ensure the early successes they need to generate widespread acceptance and use? And how can organizations avoid early rejection from busy, skeptical managers and employees and give these promising technologies their best chance for adoption?

Change management and technology adoption research has shown that *how* and *where* managers

introduce new ideas and technologies into an organization are critical for ultimate success (Brown, Chervany, & Reinicke, 2007). Obviously, backing from top management is essential in securing the resources and support needed for broad implementation (Beer & Nohria, 2000; Kotter, 2007). But sometimes managers first need to build the business case before gaining executive buy-in, and that requires initial trial and support from either middle managers (Huy, 2002; Stoker, 2006; Wooldridge, Schmid, & Floyd, 2008) or front-line employees (Kaufman, 2001; Li & Bernoff, 2008).

Social, collaboration-oriented technologies pose some unique challenges in terms of jumpstarting use and acceptance. Unlike individual productivity tools such as word processors, spreadsheets, or online databases, the value of social technologies is only evident when the technology is used by a critical mass of people to collectively get work done (Lou, Luo, & Strong, 2000). Traditional strategies of technology introduction through individual early adopters, although valuable (Bagozzi, 2007; Kim & Malhotra, 2005; Venkatesh, Thong, & Xu, 2012), do not automatically demonstrate the potential of collaboration tools. Jumpstarting use of social technologies not only faces the usual challenge of getting technology-averse individuals to master new software tools and interfaces, but also requires individuals to renegotiate how they work with team members to use these technologies. Finally, traditional IT enterprise systems focus on transactional efficiency, and widespread adoption is usually

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